



Sociology

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK

Have We Ever Been “Post”? The Critiques of Sociological Knowledge

Call for Papers

British Sociological Association Theory Study Group
in collaboration with
Department of Sociology, University of Warwick
17th-18th September 2009

About the conference

2009 is an important year for sociology and social theory. It is 50 years after the publication of C. Wright Mills' 'The Sociological Imagination' (1959), 40 years since Michel Foucault's 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1969), and 30 years since Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'The Postmodern Condition' (1979). Although coming from distinctive positions, and with different aims, these books share the quality of bringing about strong critiques of knowledge production in the social sciences and, fundamentally, challenging major principles of Western social theory and sociology.

These books came to light in a period of increasing self-doubt concerning the sustainability of the project of Western modernity and capitalism. This was translated into substantive epistemological and conceptual reformulations across the social sciences and humanities, often taking the shape of a crisis and provoking the expectation of the coming of a new age. In this context, the pictures drawn by Mills, Foucault and Lyotard generated as much seduction as resistance, but never indifference, within social thought.

These critiques of the canonical imagination, knowledge and practice in the social sciences disclosed problems that still occupy us today regarding the ways in which we “understand”, “explain” and “represent” the social world: the validity of the categories of knowledge, claims of universalism, meta-narratives and grand-theory, disciplinary boundaries, the link between theory and practice, the public and critical role of knowledge, power discourses, the production of otherness and difference, and the redefinition of the relationship of social theory with modernity, amongst many others.

By now much of this debate has been framed under the rubric of a ‘post’ sociological imagination. Nevertheless, the times in which we raise these inquiries have become rapidly distant from the times of Mills, Foucault and Lyotard. Wider developments in society, such as a more radical process of technological and economic globalization, the post-ideological consensus, the war on terror, new geopolitical powers and global warming have left their traces in the academic world. The University has become a place of marketisation and assessment, which has challenged the ways in which sociologists and academics more generally practice their disciplines. The university is no longer simply a place of political discourse and contestation. It rather seems that an atmosphere of “post”-orientation has taken over, making the aim to act as a social scientist and as a person – as Mills phrased it – appear anachronistic.

Against this background, the coinciding anniversary of Mills', Foucault's, and Lyotard's books provides an opportune moment for revisiting and perhaps updating the legacy of these “critiques of knowledge”. Accordingly, the conference welcomes papers from across disciplines and countries, and from different theoretical and empirical backgrounds addressing some of the following issues:

- The coming of a “post” sociological imagination: When? Where? How? Why?
- Becoming canonical: the place, function and implications of Mills, Foucault and Lyotard in the (re)definition of sociology’s discourse, identity and practice.
- Global north and global south, encounters and varieties of the “post” sociological imagination: the reception, contestation and influence of the critique of sociological knowledge.
- Researching the social world after Mills, Foucault and Lyotard (and *many* others): the challenges and status of the theoretical, empirical and epistemological in social inquiry.
- Making things public: possibilities, forms, times and places of sociological knowledge in the age of post-critique.

Participants

Keynotes:

Professor Steven Seidman
State University of New York at Albany

Professor Liz Stanley
University of Edinburgh

Confirmed Speakers:

Professor Les Back
Goldsmiths

Professor Steve Fuller
University of Warwick

Professor Stevi Jackson,
University of York

Dr Gurminder K. Bhambra
University of Warwick

Professor John Holmwood
University of Birmingham

Professor Robert Fine,
University of Warwick

Professor Gregor McLennan
University of Bristol

Abstract submission

Abstracts of no more than 250 words will be accepted until **23rd March 2009**. To submit an abstract complete the official form and send it to theorygroup.conference@warwick.ac.uk. A decision will be communicated no later than 17th April 2009.

Accepted papers will have to be submitted by 17th August 2009 to be considered for publication in an edited volume after the conference. The conference welcomes traditional paper presentations as well as other formats, including visual or audio materials.

Registration

The conference fee is £50, which includes conference materials, lunch, coffee and refreshments. Participants giving papers must complete the registration form and send their payment no later than 17th August 2009.

Further details about accommodation and about the conference venue available on the conference website: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/bsatheorygroupconference>

If you have any queries, please feel free to email:

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Organization team

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