

Imagining the political/The politics of imagination

The Sociological Review 100th Anniversary Conference 1-3 June 2009

Call for Papers

The political and its relation to sociology is a source of profound debate, with ideas about politics setting up both possibilities and limits for sociological knowledge. If class has long counted, along with resistance and activism, writings on religion, the body and gender are already imagining the political in novel ways. And in opening up everyday life to issues of power and technology, the political comes centre stage.

The aim of this conference is to bring together sociologists from around the globe with high quality papers developing the sociological enterprise or questioning its boundaries. Over the last century our journal has opened up sociological debates and published papers on the widest range of topics. All submissions welcome.

Abstracts less than 450 words to c.m.baggaley@socrev.keele.ac.uk by **22 February 2009**.

Imagining the political

The conference asks how we imagine the political in our work and thought. The aim is to bring the political into 'the open', questioning what *divisions* does our work make us think? Or not think! What, for example, severs 'the cultural' from 'the economic'? Why do debates on 'the technical' and 'the social' rarely qualify *as* political? Why might the tempo of lives be as political as claims on territory? Or the visual matter as much as talk? Or money mean more than ethos?

What though *is* the political? How possible is it to answer this question today? Are theories about, say, power and domination outdone by the complexity of contemporary events? Are markets too global, too pervasive for democracy to work? Or again, what is left of Otherness when social actors become individuated and mobile? Have the gates of social sanctions, for example, been burst open by the violence of choice? If so, who is to be the fence, the 'stop' on others?

How then to think the political? And when? This is the challenge set by C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*, the 50th anniversary of which we also celebrate. It is a challenge that crosses the diaspora that is sociology today; in anthropology, criminology education, geography, law, medicine, management, nursing and psychology. Here questions are about how institutions are made political, yet seem rendered silent in the name of equality, transparency and relevance?

The politics of imagination

Is imagination something to be tamed? If so, then politics enters over what kind of thought is to be stimulated and which abandoned; about which vision is to count as real, and what is to be dismissed as dreams. And it is about arguing – sometimes with force – where we can live with difference and where we can't. Or about deciding – often for others – when we are to seek change; and when we succumb to the 'temptation of permanence'.

And so politics involves who, or what, is to do this thinking. For imagination is about boundaries of thought, about conditions of possibility and the very shaping of representation. Things have to be produced in particular ways to be named as 'imaginative'. Or they get thrown aside as *merely* imaginative. So that the politics of imagination runs with a division of labour in which discovery is the province of the entrepreneur more than the scientist; explication the field of market research more than the scholar; and 'vision' is appropriated by managers in the name of policy and strategy.

Yet isn't imagination more than thought? Is it not also the touchstone of life? Imagination implies a quickening of the lifeblood, a prospect of everything about to change. Affect. Empathy. Regard. The ability to pick up on someone else and immediately the world feels the same. *And* different. Laws of intellectual property insist on invention being original, but imagination is surely also a mimetic impulse? One that ensures a renewal first in its own powers of creation and re-circulation. If imagination is ever to be elicited, is it not also always in process of being formed?

Conference Organisation

Randall Collins will give the main address. Other plenary speakers are being drawn from panels to ensure a close integration of conference themes. **Proposals for panels** are welcome and should be submitted to one of the conference organisers by **22 January 2008**:

Nickie Charles Nickie.Charles@warwick.ac.uk

Rolland Munro r.munro@keele.ac.uk

Mike Savage mike.savage@manchester.ac.uk

Topics for panels may include:

- Activism, parties and mobilization
- The politics of the exception
- Ethics, identities and materiality
- Feminist thinking
- Knowledge & document networks
- Managing as politics
- Media, narrative and alternatives
- Ontological politics
- Political institutions
- Rethinking 'difference' (e.g. class, gender, race)
- Securities and government
- Theorising culture and economy with politics
- Unfencing 'the Open'
- Visual sociologies

Location and cost

The conference will take place at Billesley Manor, a premium country hotel located in the Shakespeare country near Stratford-upon-Avon. The nearest airports are Birmingham International and Heathrow, London. Details for rail and car will follow. Participation is limited to 100 delegates and cost is expected to be £335, including two nights in the hotel (£125 without dinner and accommodation; some subsidies available for doctoral students).

Publication

Since publication began 100 years ago *The Sociological Review* has sought to encourage interdisciplinary thought as well as stay at the forefront of sociological writing and research. Publication of two special issues of *The Sociological Review* from the conference is anticipated as well as two Sociological Review Monographs.

The politics of imagination/Imagining the political