BOOK REVIEWS


The growing salience of the study of the family within sociology has led to a welcome increase in textbooks in this field. This attractively produced text is the most recent contribution. It is distinctive both in its purpose and its coverage. Bernardes declares that his book 'has a clear mission: stating the case for the establishment of a postmodern Family Studies in the United Kingdom and laying down the essential components of this new discipline' (p. 62). The reasons why this is important are as much social and political as academic. Since most members of society regard family life as the most important thing in their lives this should be reflected both in our understanding of family processes and in public policy which must do more to support families. Society needs to 'put families first' and to this end Bernardes introduces the concept of 'family citizenship' because the conventional concept of citizenship, which revolves only around individuals, is inadequate to support families and the activities that individuals undertake as members of families.

Theoretically, Bernardes aligns himself with postmodernism and provides a sustained critique of modernist theorising and of the concept of 'the family' as giving insufficient recognition to family diversity. As more suitable conceptual tools he offers 'family practices' to analyse what families do and 'family pathways' to link families to wider social structures. There are tensions, however, between his theoretical and his practical objectives. While Bernardes is assiduous in asking for measures which do not privilege any particular family arrangement, his demands still seem to rest upon a consensus as to what is and what is not desirable which fits uneasily with the postmodernist stance, as does his frequent use of terms such as 'good' and 'bad', 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' to describe family practices and social arrangements.

Four substantive chapters deal with families in society, children in families, partnering and parenting. It is heartening to see the neglected topics of children and parenting given serious attention. However, covering these issues and arguing the case for family studies and for putting families first has a considerable cost. This is partly a matter of what has been left out. Reviewers of textbooks are, of course, notoriously difficult to satisfy in this regard, yet it is surprising that a book which places great emphasis upon policy issues lacks a discussion of the relation of the family to the state and that, despite tributes to the importance of feminist perspectives, there is no section on power relations within families. The larger criticism, however, relates to the treatment of the themes that are covered. The stress on family practices leads the reader to expect that issues discussed will be illustrated by examples of such practices drawn from empirical studies, but these are largely absent, or too condensed to be meaningful. For instance, the section on communication in partnerships refers neither to the major empirical sociological studies of, nor gender differences in, patterns of communication.

A further drawback to the substantive chapters is that little indication is given as to how sociologists have tried to explain particular family practices and changes (or lack of change) in these. Moreover, we are seldom presented with differing interpretations of issues and research findings (other than the generalised critique of modernist theorising), so that students reading the book will not get a flavour of the debates which give life to sociology.

The final chapter argues for systematic policies to support families. Bernardes suggests a wide range of measures, including the creation of Family
Associations on the Continental model, to help to empower families, but does not indicate why some proposals might be more controversial than others, nor examine potential sources of opposition. In particular, the complex of issues that surrounds the state/market/family nexus are not debated. The book is aimed at a wide audience – at decision-makers, professional groups and lay people as well as students. I suspect that the net has been cast too wide to satisfy any one of these. For undergraduate courses on the family, the text may be useful for raising issues but will probably be used by few lecturers since it provides too little for students to get their teeth into.

University of Hull  COLIN CREIGHTON


This is a collection of thirty specially commissioned chapters. The aim is to introduce students to contemporary issues in European media. Overall I think that this collection would make a good sourcebook, especially for media studies students. It is an extensive collection. The range of areas covered means that depth is often sacrificed, and so many of the chapters seem quite short. However, the majority of the chapters are accompanied by useful suggestions for further reading in the area. In addition, each chapter concludes with some questions for the reader; many of these are imaginative, stimulating and would work well as study aids.

The first section, ‘What Are the Media?’, examines a number of different media industries. The focus here is on how each of these industries ‘works’, for example, comics, public relations, radio and publishing, amongst others. These media tend to be overlooked in media studies, and it is useful to have a collection that goes beyond the ubiquitous analyses of newspapers, advertising, television and cinema.

The second section, “Outside” the Media’, looks at external factors that influence media production in Europe, including economics, media policy, media institutions and audience ratings and analyses. Corner’s chapter on media form and Cumberbach’s overview of the debate around the notion of ‘effects’ move the focus away from policy issues. Both these contributions deal with on-screen violence, and point to the unsubstantiated nature of much of common-sense thinking around this topic.

The final section, ‘In the Media’, examines the issue of representation and includes discussions of sexuality, gender, race, disability, nationality, sports, youth and so on. Despite the claim made in the first section about the diversity of the media, the discussion here tends to gravitate around (British) television representations, with some discussion of newspaper, cinematic and advertising representations! However, I did enjoy the majority of contributions here, and would recommend this final section as an introduction to this area. Several chapters contain up-to-date examples that should be familiar to students and I think that this makes them very useful. Van Zoonen and Costera Meijer take a recent Pamela Anderson advertisement for the Swedish fashion chain H & M as the starting point for their discussion of gender and representation. Palmer’s discussion of news values makes very good use of a prominent news story from 1995 involving the actor Hugh Grant to illustrate the eleven features of newsworthiness. Blain and Boyle’s discussion of sport draws on Euro ’96, and in particular on tabloid coverage of the England versus Germany match, which would bring their discussion to life for many readers. There are also several references to current characters in EastEnders as opposed to the more usual references to characters who have not been seen in Albert Square since the early 1990s, and have probably been long forgotten, especially by younger readers.
One major criticism would be that while the collection claims to deal with the European media, in practice this almost always means the British media. Some contributions deal with the European context, but most either give priority to the British situation or only deal with the British situation. For example Jäckel (in a discussion of European cinema) is the only contributor to make any reference to Ireland, and this is only a very brief reference. So I think that the editors go too far when they state in the introduction that this book ‘is concerned with European media’ (p. 3). I also found that the ‘pluralistic’ theoretical approach taken by the editors was largely unconvincing (p. 5). Although the introduction states that theories will be left to the reader to uncover, I am not sure how appropriate this approach is given the intended audience. Finally, it is puzzling that such an extensive collection gives almost no space to the audience, particularly given the strength of audience studies within the British cultural studies tradition.

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SARA O’SULLIVAN


Flexibility has become a catchword in many debates about the future of labour markets. This book investigates one particular aspect of flexibility which has been the focus of political recommendations but has not received widespread empirical attention, i.e. the willingness and ability of workers to move between industrial sectors. The study takes the form of a case study of a manufacturing organisation (a laminating factory) and a service sector firm (an insurance company). Both companies were located in Bristol, which is an area that has witnessed the massive expansion in the service sector and the decline in the manufacturing sector experienced throughout the United Kingdom.

The central question of the book is whether these two groups of workers represent ‘non-competing work groups’ of the type described by segmented labour market theorists. Callaghan addresses three potential barriers to occupational flexibility: differential recruitment channels, differences in skills and attitudinal barriers.

The case studies reproduce the findings of larger-scale surveys on the importance of informal recruitment and the greater utilisation of these methods within blue-collar employment. More originally, the study highlights differences in the way networks are used by the two groups. Among the office workers networks are used to provide general information about vacancies and about the nature of the work and company. In the factory, by contrast, networks were used in a much more interventionist manner. Callaghan argues that the use of workplace communities for recruitment acts as a barrier to occupational restructuring because those displaced from the manufacturing sector are likely to have the wrong connections, use the wrong channels and use networks in an inappropriate way. However, more evidence on the composition of the networks of blue-collar workers would strengthen these claims about the implications of the research findings.

The investigation into employees’ views of skills, job requirements and worker characteristics in both sectors provides some rich evidence of the practical and more subtle obstacles to mobility across industrial sectors. Though the skills which the two groups of workers said they possessed differed sharply, both groups believed skill to be acquired through a long process of experience. Callaghan argues that this emphasis on gradual learning may impede attempts to remedy the skills mis-match through formal retraining. The possibility of sectoral mobility among manufacturing workers seemed further reduced because of their views of office work. The factory
workers were deterred from office work because of its sedentary nature (being ‘stuck’ behind a desk), the feeling that they would not fit in socially and the perception that they lacked the qualifications and literacy skills demanded. The opinions about factory workers expressed by some of the management staff in the insurance company suggest that former manufacturing workers may also have to overcome management prejudices if they are to make the transition into the service sector.

The discussion of the work attitudes and skill perceptions is somewhat marred by the tendency to conflate sectoral and occupational differences. The discussion is framed in terms of manufacturing sector versus service sector employment yet the occupational position of the respondents varies substantially within and between the two sectors. For example, two of the ten factory employees were managers as were nine of the eighteen insurance employees. The occupational position of the interviewees is only addressed explicitly in the discussion of their conceptions of the occupational hierarchy. The analysis of work attitudes would also have benefited from some discussion of the non-employment situations of the interviewees. The chapter on recruitment highlighted the importance of family and social networks in framing employment experiences but this theme is not extended to other chapters.

The discussion of skill raised interesting issues about the way this concept is gendered. The blue-collar workers placed great emphasis on the physical aspect of their jobs and the male camaraderie on the factory floor. They felt that this made their work unsuitable for women. The extent to which gendered views of work inhibited mobility into the white-collar sector could not be fully explored because all the factory floor workers interviewed were male. A slightly bigger sample might have allowed the author to separate out some of the competing influences. Nevertheless, Callaghan makes good use of his rich interview data, linking it to theoretical debates about flexibility, skill and segmented labour markets. The book provides evidence of the practical and cultural barriers to occupational flexibility which policy-makers tend to overlook when prescribing the ‘re-training’ panacea.


Ellis Cashmore’s new book is just as controversial as its predecessors in addressing the issue of racism and the Black experience. The question of insensitivity must accompany any treatment of the politics of racism that seeks controversy as its mode of entrée. The book’s thesis is that ‘Black culture’ has been commodified and sold to Whites and that this process has involved a legitimation of racist representations and stereotypes which Black performers have, for economic reasons, been only too happy to collude in producing. *The Black Culture Industry* tells a history of Black popular entertainers and entrepreneurs who have sought a mainstream market in White society through the production of a series of limiting images and representations of Black ‘nature’: from the cakewalk minstrels to Michael Jackson and Gangsta Rap. Cashmore’s secondline argument, derived from Pieterse (1992), is that, over the course of a century of Black popular cultural forms, the function of the Black culture industry has changed from one of legitimation to substitution: Blacks have been given a cultural freedom in the popular realm at the expense of real social and economic change. The mechanism promoting consumption without economic redress is White guilt.

The book is organised into twelve chapters, covering Minstrelsy, Blues and Jazz, Stax, Motown, Hendrix, Michael Jackson, (aafia) Prince and Gangsta Rap; as well as the White and Black
entrepreneurs who promoted and distributed them. The style is journalistic, which particularly suits the treatment of some chapters. The book is in a larger format than usual for Routledge and comes with embossed graphics on the cover. Its presumed audience is general rather than academic and theory is kept to a minimum.

Like Adorno's *The Culture Industry* (1991) which Cashmore's title appears to echo, the book's focus is upon the United States; but Cashmore's United States is racially 'separate and unequal'. Both authors view the mass production of popular culture commodities as an extension of capitalism's logic to culture. Curiously, the discussion of Adorno's thesis is thin (pp. 3, 42); this seems strange, given its contested application to popular musical forms, such as doowop.

There is throughout the *Black Culture Industry* an overwhelming sense of the lines between the music business and capitalism but no clue as to how the general case for a commodification thesis applies to the particular case of Black popular culture and the issue of racism. Racism is reduced to a possession and practice of a White power establishment; a sort of monolithic structure supported by an equally monolithic unconscious structure. What moves between these levels are stereotypes and images of Blacks that enclose and contain Black culture once it attempts commodification. The only kind of success is success in White terms. This means Jewish entrepreneurs, innovating within a racialised economic order, were merely part of the White power structure.

Cashmore's thesis is reductionist: Black popular culture should be expressive of Black oppression but its commodification means that any authenticity is lost between the cultural act of construction and the commercial act of distribution to a wider (White) audience. This cues Cashmore's sub-thesis: that the Black culture industry has required and equally reflects the contribution and influence of Whites. Thus the Blues is first a rural idiom, a form forged by both Black and White players, but given its stamp of authenticity by virtue of its apparently unmediated expressive relationship to Black experience. The rise and success of Atlantic and Motown soul is a similar story. When Black entrepreneurs succeed on the same terrain as Whites they do so by behaving as White, first by commodifying Black culture for White markets, and then by the super-exploitation of the artists who produce it.

Often Cashmore seems to suggest that such constructions of blackness succeed to the extent that they conform to a hidden unconscious reservoir of racism. It may be the case that such a racial hierarchy is held together by a symbolic universe of psycho-sexual fantasies but Cashmore's account is a-historical in the extreme: racism, in the form of Black stereotypes, is held constant, geographically, and across time (and across the Atlantic in the case of Jimmy Hendrix, whose dedication on *Band of Gypsys* (p. 122), incidentally, is misrepresented as conservative by Cashmore) which removes any sense of 'Black' autonomy and contestation of such ideologies.

There is no doubt that Cashmore is fascinated by the careers he documents and he extends considerable sympathy to the motives of exploitative entrepreneurs, like Berry Gordy (p. 112). However, it should be remembered that much of the material drawn on here arises from the writings and explorations of African American historians and musicologists. This means there is good coverage of historical material of nascent black consumption of popular culture. The treatment of more recent periods, such as the travails of the *Artist Formally Known As Prince*, while given a journalistic treatment by Cashmore, do provide fascinating detail. Inevitably, such accounts act as mere support for a thesis which, taken as a whole, is reductive and simplistic. There is no doubt that Cashmore's book is driven by a genuine enthusiasm and interest in the economics of the Black culture industry but this focus either ignores or distorts the substantive content of Black popular cultural forms. For the
general reader this book is likely to be both provocative and readable. But, taken in isolation, it presents the reader with a seriously misleading account of the role and significance of Black popular cultural forms in constructing and reconstructing the terrain of popular music and performance in capitalist modernity.

References

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If you are a social scientist wanting an overview of contemporary debates in cultural studies research on both sides of the Atlantic this commissioned collection of articles is an excellent place to start. Unlike reverent textbook overviews of the field, the writers here are either outsiders looking in on a discipline from which they have always felt excluded, like the political economists, or they are sceptical insiders who have become worried by the direction in which things are going. The charge against cultural studies in Part I of the book is that it has lost its way as a consequence of abandoning its original political project, defined in the beginning by Raymond Williams. The project is characterised here by Cary as a concern to establish a culture based on the values of community, democracy and equality, which in Britain had its roots in Marxism, but in the United States Dewey was the main influence. The essence of a cultural politics must be to find ways to think beyond individual desire, to enable people to act as citizens as well as consumers in a market economy. Communications and education must play a central part in this endeavour.

It is argued here that cultural studies have been fatally diverted from this task by its encounter with French literary and philosophical theory. It is in danger of becoming an ‘irrelevant outpost of the academy’ with no influence either on policy-makers or the wider public. Theory has become an end in itself oriented largely towards the interpretation of popular media texts so that the original interdisciplinary drive to overcome the divide between the humanities and the social sciences has been lost. Even in this narrowed sphere its relativist approach to questions of cultural value weakens its politics to a celebration of consumption as resistance, the fatuousness of which indicates how far cultural studies has become a substitute for politics rather than the radical endeavour claimed in its own rhetoric.

The arch demon of this version of cultural studies is John Fiske who, despite the accompanying evidence of the diversity of forms in which cultural studies has become institutionalised across several continents, appears to exert some totemic power in the imaginings of this group of writers. He is an easy target for criticism, offering as he does summaries of cultural theorists whom undergraduate students are disinclined to read in the original, applied to easily available popular texts. It is the perfect product for the global market in cultural studies. I found myself wanting to answer back with examples of other work in cultural studies which achieve much of what is being demanded her but which do not have the same global appeal.

The second part of the book offers ‘answers and alternatives’ to the critique mounted in the first part. McRobbie advocates a return to the three ‘e’s’ of ethnography, empirical research and experience, without abandoning the insights gained from poststructuralist theory about the instabilities of meaning and identity. Morley’s critique of postmodern ethnography recognises the importance of the ‘textual turn’ in
ethnography but argues the case for a material world which is not reducible to an entirely discursive phenomenon. Downing, in one of the most thought-provoking chapters, offers a model of what research in cultural studies should be like, using the political transformations in Eastern Europe as his example. He advocates forming teams of researchers able to approach issues from multiple perspectives in order to overcome the limitations of individualistic modes of research within highly specialised disciplinary groupings. Billig’s comments about the widespread ignorance shown in cultural studies of work on discourse analysis by social psychologists is also a convincing argument for widening the range of disciplinary input. The central problem remains, however, that of formulating a convincing theory which can express the relationship between these different modes and levels of analysis.

A political economy of the field would discover, I think, that the lack of resources for cultural studies researchers, located as they often are in cash-starved humanities departments, without the kind of legitimacy accorded to the more established disciplines, is an important reason why their research is weighted towards textual analyses that can be done by a skilled individual in their spare time. Morley argues that macro-economic and political processes can only be studied through the micro processes of everyday life. That kind of empirical research takes time and money. If we apply the political economists’ arguments to the likely influence of this book the funds made available in Britain by the newly established Research Assessment Exercise panel for the field, which Peter Golding chaired, may well have more impact on the nature of future research projects than the carefully argued exhortations found collected here, valuable as they are.

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JANE ARTHURS


Since his death in Amsterdam in 1990 the reputation of Norbert Elias as an original sociological thinker has been steadily growing amongst fellow academics and students. This reputation rests largely on The Civilization Process – his four volume study of the development of manners and society in Western Europe over several centuries. Like the great sociologists the range and scope of his material were immense. A seemingly innocuous discussion on the use of the fork leads into an examination of growing sophistication in court society and on into wider social and political change.

There is a lot in his writings reminiscent of Max Weber – and it is important to remember that Elias was an almost exact contemporary of Weber’s. Though he died only at the end of the twentieth century he was born in the nineteenth century and retained that turn-of-century outlook peculiar to German intellectuals of the period.

Elias maintained that we have to see the world, including the social world of which we form a part, as a process. His own work, while showing a striking continuity and consistency over the years, was also a process. In the writings several developments may be observed: first of all, and quite clearly, a move from philosophy to sociology; and then a gradual broadening of the scope of the sociological perspective, accompanied by an increasing facility in dealing with complicated subject matter at a high level of synthesis in relatively simple terms and phrases.

Elias came to sociology gradually from a natural science background. He retained a life-long – though increasingly critical – interest in psychiatry and practised gestalt group therapy and psychoanalysis. As part of this process he was able to develop a stunning critique of the
dominant model of individuals used in psychiatry, *Homo Psychiatrus*:

The individual person is seen essentially as a closed system whose own internal processes have a high degree of independence in relation to what appear as ‘external’ or social factors. In general, the latter are evaluated as peripheral when a person is considered psychiatrically. They can be ‘taken off’, as it were, like a patient’s clothes in a doctor’s surgery. The image evoked by these conventions of speaking and thinking is that of a high wall surrounding the single individual, from which mysterious little dwarfs – the ‘environmental influences’ – throw small rubber balls at the individual, which leave on him no imprints. (p. 79)

Overall the book is definitely not intended as a substitute for a full-scale biography (this does not exist). Rather this is a ‘taster’ volume of selections designed to ‘whet readers’ appetites for more’ – a purpose which it will certainly fulfil.

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MICHAEL MORGAN


These two timely publications arrive during a decade where the notion of ‘childhood’ has been granted high status and has been the focus of furious academic, social and political debate. Images of childhood are commonly presented from the perspective of the ‘abused’ or ‘innocent’ child ‘victim’ on the one hand, or the ‘delinquent’ child ‘hooligan’ threatening our safety, on the other. Both of these books keep this present dichotomous climate in mind and, interestingly, approach the whole notion of contemporary ‘childhood’ from differing perspectives.

Underwriting Scraton’s account is a structuralist, political view of ‘childhood’. *‘Childhood’ in ‘Crisis’?* explores a wide range of institutional frameworks which control and shape the experiences of children. Proceeding from, yet going beyond, the more straightforward institutions, such as the family and school, this book threads outwards to embrace an analysis of the impact of the media, the criminal justice system and the discourse of sexuality available to children and young people. Conversely James *et al*. in *Theorizing Childhood* situate themselves clearly within an academic discourse and provide the reader with the current trends in sociological thinking. They are simultaneously sensitive to the structural influences on ‘childhood’ and the wider issues of time, space, body, work and culture. The result, then, is two companionable books. Scraton and colleagues start from external structures and work inwards towards individual children and young people, whilst James *et al*. begin with the child and his/her immediate locations and work outwards, exploring the relationships between the active child, the surrounding structures and existing sociological theory.

As a heuristic device for locating contemporary childhood, both books begin by documenting its historical context. They stress the changing perception of children and ‘childhood’ that has occurred since Aries (1962) first acknowledged that childhood was not always considered as ‘other’ to adulthood. James *et al*. chart this development by distinguishing between what they refer to as the ‘pre sociological’ and the ‘sociological child’. This offers the reader a helpful insight into how current sociological thinking has emerged from economic, political and religious discourse. They go further in that they identify four categories of ‘childhood’, which, they argue, are currently utilised in research and academic debate, (the ‘social structural child’, the ‘tribal child’, the ‘minority group child’ and the ‘socially constructed child’). In their favour these categories are referred to throughout the succeeding
chapters providing a useful framework for the book as a whole. To some extent, a framework is also used by Scraton: in this case the political and economic influence on ‘childhood’ discourses and individual children’s experiences.

After their initial similarity in locating current thinking on ‘childhood’ the books begin to diverge. *Theorizing Childhood* proceeds by situating childhood within various locales. It focuses on three spatial locations – the school, the city and the home. Within the early chapters the discussion highlights the control of children’s physical movements and the use of space to survey and monitor behaviour and the relationship of childhood with time. Going beyond childhood and its place in the life-course, the authors discuss the ways in which notions of appropriate ‘normal’ child behaviour is linked to biological development and ‘futurity’. This widely held discourse, they argue, also includes the notion of the child being the adult ‘in waiting’. James et al. touch on the interactive relationship between child and time and how each can impact on the other – suggesting the child as active rather than passive. This was a fascinating point, not only in terms of the acknowledgement of the child’s agency, but further with regard to the application of agency to the concept of time. Perhaps, because of its apparent originality, this is a point which could perhaps have been explored in more depth.

In the later chapters of the book the authors examine the culture of children and whether this can be regarded as a separate phenomenon. What emerges from this debate is a critical examination of the perceived ‘universality’ of childhood. The authors argue that childhood experiences are socially shaped by ethnicity, class and gender in much the same way as adult experiences are. Furthermore, their analysis is cognisant of the view that children are social agents. These points are expanded in Chapter 7 which highlights the danger of viewing childhood from a purely structuralist perspective, thereby neglecting the experiences of children themselves.

The authors continue to demonstrate an awareness of locating children within their social, cultural and economic context and the adult-dominated nature of children’s relationship with society during their discussion of working children. In so doing they again employ global examples and consider the ways in which Western research has disregarded the localised view of children. In providing the example of working children the authors are able to highlight the marginalised status of children, not simply within society at large, but also within current academic thinking. Children are rarely considered in mainstream academic research on work, economy or poverty and are instead considered as appendages to adult experiences.

To continue their attempt at locating childhood within wider sociological theory James et al. consider the issue of the body and childhood. Within this chapter they map the historical relationship between the childhood body and the growth of specialist professions (for example, paediatrics or social work). More pertinently, they illustrate the importance of the ‘normal’ child body to children themselves and how this is disregarded by adults in favour of their own construction of appropriate child bodies and behaviour. Again, this is an issue which could perhaps have been expanded upon. In common with the discussion on children and time, the relationship between sociological discourses and the child body is a relatively new area of debate.

Finally, the authors discuss the current wave of child research and the way that this has been structured; little work has been undertaken employing the perspective of the child as social agent. They are also critical of the manner in which the existing research relates to dominant research themes within mainstream social science. James et al. argue that ‘childhood’ is central to sociological theory and in their attempt to illustrate this they construct relationships between current academic debate (i.e. identity and difference) and ‘childhood’. In many ways this
detracted rather than added to an interesting consolidative text.

‘Childhood’ in ‘Crisis’? presents quite a different approach to childhood. The focus is predominantly on the relationship between ‘structure’ and childhood, although, like James et al., they highlight the marginalised position of children in terms of their lack of power and control over their own lives. One of the strengths of this book is the way in which current influences, both legal and cultural, are discussed.

In Chapter 2 Davis and Bourhill provide an interesting insight into the impact of recent media images of childhood. They describe the ways in which newsworthy stories are chosen and how information can be selectively highlighted to illustrate and support the causes which the media choose to reflect. The debate focuses on the familiar dichotomy of ‘child as victim’ or ‘child as perpetrator’. Extracts from newspapers are used to highlight the ways in which reporting can fuel ‘moral panic’ reactions to events and behaviours.

Vicki Coppock provides two chapters in this edited collection – the first of which concentrates on the family. Coppock presents a historical picture of demographic changes and the ways in which they have been hijacked to explain what is politically perceived as the breakdown of society in terms of moral and law-abiding behaviour. Coppock writes from what appears to be a highly politicised perspective which, although useful, limits a discussion of the impact on and by children to the changes in the family and how these have been perceived. By contrast, her discussion of children and mental health (Chapter 7) appears more focused on the relationship between the medical and social services structures and their collective impact on the construction of ‘normal’ childhood and the treatment of ‘the abnormal’.

The chapter by Corteen and Scraton provides a discussion of childhood sexuality. Again the structural influences (i.e. the school and family) take precedence over individual agency. What results is a chapter which considers the impact of ‘acceptable’ gender behaviour and heterosexuality championing of the sexual knowledge which is shared with children and young people. Once more the restriction of the child’s wishes is highlighted, as is the predominance of adult notions of the limited capacity of children to understand or have cause to know about sexual matters.

The political influence on education is a theme continued in the chapter by Haydon. In the course of her discussion she notes the control that central government and political thinking has on what is taught in schools, when it is taught and to whom. She refers to the way in which children have been presented as lawless within the school setting and to the public and political pressure to expect schools to be the site of moral and behavioural socialisation. By so doing, blame can be politically attributed to these educational centres for the current production of ‘wayward’ children.

The theme of ‘waywardness’ is developed further in Goldson’s chapter on juvenile crime. He provides the reader with a background to social work and legal practices which have, until recently, dealt with young offenders. He moves on to describe how a previously protective and nurturing approach was replaced by a range of punitive policies. Goldson is at pains to demonstrate that these changes occurred against empirical research findings and professional conclusion from practice, and that we have now moved into an age where punishment is expected to be exacted upon children who offend. He suggests that this is a frightening development which may impact on future legislation and treatment of children as a whole.

Both books provide a series of conclusions that review existing research and thinking on childhood. Scraton makes clear his wish that children be accorded similar status to adults and he describes the attempts that have been made to this end by the United Nations. He is critical of current political thinking and practice in relation to children and cleverly sums
up his philosophy by suggesting that the crisis of which the book speaks is not in childhood but in fact in ‘adultism’. Similar points are made by James et al. although their emphasis is in terms of placing childhood firmly within existing sociological theory. They achieve their aim of consolidating ‘the now burgeoning array of childhood studies’ and are able to identify areas which require further academic attention. Both books provide an excellent account of historical and current thinking on ‘childhood’ and the ways in which these discourses are influenced by adult-centric perspectives. Ultimately, however, like others involved in the field, both sets of writers appear unclear as to the ‘way forward’ both in a practical and theoretical sense.

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This volume was first published in 1995, but was printed in paperback in 1997, no doubt because it proved to have an extremely wide market. Not only does the book tackle a subject on which little attention has been given to date in the literature on gender and development, but the thirteen articles in the collection cover a broad range of themes relating to women and information technology (IT) in an impressive sweep of different sectors and different geographical areas. More specifically, the case study chapters comprise an analysis of women’s work in the wake of increasing automation in the textile industry in Brazil and Argentina (Liliana Acero), and Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia (Pavla Jezkova); information technology and manufacturing in Slovenia (Maja Bucar), the Canadian garment industry, in which there is considerable involvement of ethnic minority workers (Charlene Gannagé), the banking sector in India (Sujata Gothiskar), telecommunications in Malaysia (Cecilia Ng and Carol Yong), software programming in Brazil (Fatima Janine Gaio), the electronics industry in Calcutta (Nirmala Banerjee), women and information technology in sub-Saharan Africa (Mayuri Odedra-Straub), and information technology as a mobilising force for women in Tanzanian media (Fatma Alloo). There is also a chapter by Ruth Pearson which considers gender perspectives on health and safety in information processing in an international framework.

As the above suggests, the field of women’s employment and information technology is an extremely broad one, eluding glib generalisations about the gendered consequences of the information revolution in different sectors, in different countries, and among different groups of women. In some cases computer-aided production forecloses opportunities for women, and in others opens up new (and more skilled) possibilities, notwithstanding that problems of women’s ‘dual burden’, employer discrimination and gender differences in human capital and training are never far away.

Diversities in experiences and vantage points are competently summarised in the three introductory chapters by the editors, which not only do an excellent job of highlighting difference, but which also (and refreshingly) remind us that scope for collective action in a variety of arenas is not beyond the realms of probability as we approach the twenty-first century.

The first of the introductory chapters, by Swasti Mitter, is a lively and accessible discussion of the rationale behind the text, together with brief introductions to the individual contributions. In addition to a user-friendly overview of what
information technology is and what it means (in general terms) for the shifting nature of employment and the international division of labour, Mitter also taps into debates in postmodernism and ecofeminism to suggest why ‘Despite the ever-increasing relevance of IT, both to women and to their countries, there has been a conspicuous silence about it in the academic literature’ (p. 14). More specifically, Mitter feels that postmodernist discourses have made women from the developed world more reluctant to broach questions of women’s work and economic empowerment from an internationalist academic (and activist) perspective. As far as ecofeminism is concerned, the emphasis by its protagonists on the need for replacing modern Western technologies driven by global capitalism, with community-based subsistence technologies motivated by goals of reciprocity, caring and sharing, has resulted in a resistance to engage even in discussion of colonising modern knowledge systems. Yet, as Mitter argues, not all Third World women (and men) are likely to want to turn their backs on technological developments, especially those from less privileged groups whose daily lives stand to benefit from being incorporated in, rather than marginalised from, the information revolution. Moreover, even if computerised production may rob some workers of their livelihood, new jobs are created by information technology which may help to forge greater economic and personal power for women, especially if the means are found by which they can obtain a say in the way in which technology affects the ‘quality of their working and family lives’ (p. 17).

In chapter 2, Mitter takes this discussion further by considering working women’s demands in relation to information technology. Within this she notes that female employment is declining as industries such as electronics become progressively automated, but that a variety of possibilities are opened up for Third World women as a result of new technologies. Although small-scale and/or home-based industries do not necessarily offer superior earnings and working conditions, for example, the decentralisation and flexibilisation of production facilitated by computer technology may increase female employment, at least in the short term. Moreover, given the ageing of populations in developed nations, companies are likely to seek to fill information-intensive jobs either with immigrant workers or to relocate these jobs to countries where there is an ample, and increasing supply, of educated young workers.

The third introductory chapter, by Sheila Rowbotham, comprises a series of historical reflections on the relations of feminist thought to technology, noting that ‘feminist enquiry has shifted during the last decade to what is wrong with the tradition of modern western science’ (p. 45). Since there is profound scepticism about Western science and technology, along with the notion of reason as a basis for social progress, the idea that women need to gain greater control in this domain, is clearly ‘somewhat problematic’. Rowbotham breaks through this impasse by showing how through the ages women have never been completely excluded from science and technology, and instead have been actively involved in a number of ways. She also deconstructs the notion of a monolithic set of ‘female values’ about science, and suggests that a new relationship between technology and gender should be created, by users and workers internationally, from the experiences of daily life’ (p. 66).

The final chapter in the volume, by Ursula Huws, entitled ‘The fading of the collective dream’, charts a personal history of twenty years research on information technology and women’s employment in Britain. This is an eminently readable, if sobering account of the de-politicisation and individualisation of women’s and workers’ struggles in the 1980s and 1990s. If nothing else, however, the fact that this appears within a text which allows us to see commonalities as well as difference in the conditions and aspirations of working women worldwide in the late twentieth
century is inspiring in its own right. With or without information technology, and regardless of the intersection of gender with other aspects of ‘difference’, the problems of disadvantage in the workforce are unlikely to be redressed in the absence of mobilisation. This book reminds us that politics is not dead, and that academic research and analysis have a crucial place in the struggle for social equity.

London School of Economics SYLVIA CHANT


Most edited collections risk the fate of being seen as uneven, with some contributions standing out much more than others, and this is no exception. This collection, to quote the blurb on the back, aims to introduce ‘new understandings of resistance, questioning received notions and presenting radical reinterpretations of the relationships between political identities, political spaces and radical politics . . . to show that resistance involves not only heroic struggles or grand gestures of opposition, but often everyday battles for survival and commonplace struggles for empowerment.’ These claims run through many of the contributions to the volume, but are not really justified by the contents. ‘Everyday’ and ‘commonplace’ struggles that do not take the more or less organised forms of explicit political protest are especially familiar to students of the labour process and the informal patterns of resistance that develop among workers, so examining them is not that new or radical. Despite the ‘blurb’, several of the chapters concern ‘grand gesture’ politics, whilst many of the others are too concerned with attempting their own theoretical ‘grand gestures’ on the back of thinly researched empirical material.

Let me begin with the good contributions. Watts’s analysis of locally based movements of resistance in Nigeria in his chapter ‘Black Gold, White Heat’ is simply excellent and the real gem in the collection. It is the most thoroughly researched and theorised piece in the book and, most importantly, is written with real empathy for those involved in the events considered. Watts examines both the Islamic movements of northern Nigeria and the better known (in the West at least) protests in Ogoniland. In analysing these movements Watts manages to examine the role of capitalist development, the changing geographical forms of the State, as well as commenting upon the cultural and religious dimensions.

A second excellent piece is by Shlomo Hassan, who considers urban movements among immigrants in Jerusalem. These movements have been formed among Sephardic Jews (often originating from Muslim countries), who faced extensive institutionalised discrimination from the economically, socially and politically dominant (European origin) Ashkenaric Jews. The point of Hassan’s analysis is not so much to analyse these movements generally, but to examine the relationship between the process of the movement’s identity formation, the underlying structural conditions and the directions that the movements took. He shows how the development of the movements reflected the identities and frames of interpretation rather than their common structural conditions.

The one chapter that really does grapple with ‘everyday and commonplace struggle’ is Lisa Laws’s analysis of women workers in the Philippine sex tourism industry. However, it is overlaid by a rather awkward post-structuralist framework that did not really convince this reader as an interpretative frame for her ethnography. Paul Routledge’s chapter on the revolution in Nepal in 1990 is another fascinating empirical account marred by an odd theoretical interpretation. At the end I was left wondering what the Communist and democratic
revolutionaries of Nepal would think about their activities being described as ‘rhizomic practices’? Stripped of its theoretical pretensions this chapter is quite a good empirical analysis of the various strategies and tactics and their spatial articulations. There are several more largely forgettable chapters that are purely theoretical in nature or use rather weak empirical material to attempt grandiose theoretical claims.

The overall organisation of the book is poor. It is difficult to identify a common theme as not all of the authors are hostile to those modes of inquiry vilified by the editors and some contributors. There is no real attempt to locate each chapter in relation to an overall theme. None of the authors refer to each other’s contributions, and Pile’s introductory chapter is no such thing, as it is just a set of theoretical speculations. However, his co-editor Michael Keith tries to invoke some post hoc coherence in the conclusion.

For a book supposedly concerned with developing modes of analysis that are anti-essentialist, anti-reductionist and sensitive to the diverse and shifting dimensions of difference there is a surprising amount of essentialist, reductionist and insensitive thinking in evidence. I was so appalled by the psychoanalytic reductionism in Pile’s introduction that it bears extensive quotation (p. 25):

> it could be psychic resistance that compels the most injurious and barbaric of ‘political’ acts, such as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City or of the Olympic Games in Atlanta . . . or the horrific systematic rape of Muslim women by Serb soldiers in the former Yugoslavia . . . or the summary executions carried out by the (seemingly paranoid and unashamedly violent) Irish Republican Army or the seemingly non-violent spiking of trees with nails by eco-terrorists that nevertheless endanger the lives of lumberjacks or the (at least emotionally damaging) ‘outing’ of supposedly hypocritical people by gay activists.

So, White supremacists in the United States, Serb soldiers using rape as a weapon of war, the IRA, environmentalists and gay activists are all essentially driven by psychic resistance. In Pile’s world all resistance is reduced to this singular psychological mechanism. No evidence is presented to support this. No attempt is made to understand the reasoning of the participants (however much one may criticise their actions), and the complex contexts within which their actions are developed. All we have are the abstractions of the theorist.

University of Leeds  
PAUL BAGGULEY


Sayyid, with this dense and seminal work, has made a welcome attempt to reframe the uses of the term ‘Islam’ within intellectual discourses without resort to populist terminology. The book is a broad treatment of the state of Islam and its relationship with the West and the West’s relationship with the East. He goes to some lengths to show that this is not a symmetrical interaction; for Sayyid, there are winners and losers, and Islam and Muslims fall squarely in the latter category. This forms the central theme of the book. Sayyid focuses upon how what is popularly called ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ has become a possibility in the contemporary world and why Islam has taken such a political guise among some of its sects. Indeed, he takes a fresh look at how Islam has reached its much-maligned status without resorting to clichés within an ethnocentric Western viewpoint. However, the back is not without shortcomings.

It is divided into five chapters which develop a consistent analytical thread. The first chapter examines the nature of what we popularly know as ‘fundamentalism’, and engages with theorists as to the usage and utility of the word in academia. Indeed, this is an important
feature of the book in that it engages in an intellectual dialogue with members of the academy rather than in a popular or journalistic debate. He starts by engaging feminist critiques and their use of the concept ‘fundamentalism’ after which he discusses the ‘framing’ of fundamentalism with issues of politics and governance which he combines with the politics of religion and the role of various nationalisms. These he argues are inadequate to examine ‘fundamentalism’, and he then offers the term ‘Islamism’ (not his own neologism), which he constructs in a particular way throughout the rest of the book.

In Chapter 2 he starts making his re-conceptualisation of the problem concrete. Sayyid engages with Edward Said (to whom he acknowledges his debt), and postmodernists such as Derrida. Indeed, his main motivation, it seems, is to move beyond ‘orientalist’ and postmodernist debates and to locate his thesis somewhere within the post-structuralist tradition. This position is not without its problems and he tends to ignore the important issues of Muslim consciousness and interaction at a micro level.

In Chapters 3 and 4 he centres Islamism within a political and historical context and particularly locates the rise and fall of the Kemalist movements, and the associated fortunes of Islam, as a political force, not only within itself but also in relationship with the ‘West’. The reasons for this he argues are twofold: firstly, the separation of state and religion; secondly, the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate. This sets up his argument quite well for the next chapter where he locates Islam and also Islamism within the modern Western world. In the two final chapters he arguably produces the most engaging arguments and sets himself up as a foil with which debate would be bloody but fruitful. Here he begins by putting more established discourses such as (somewhat dismissively) those of Neo-Weberians and Neo-Marxists to one side by arguing that current discourses are tinged by their legacy, in a telling passage saying that trying to locate Islam and Islamism within modernity is to locate them within the confines of a Eurocentric Western identity. For Sayyid, the rise of Islamism indicates a decline in the dominance of the West; the West is no longer the centre but Islam is that which the West cannot, it seems, even grudgingly accept.

Sayyid has a somewhat unusual style, not only is he polemical, incisive and engaging, but at times poetical. His use of metaphor and analogy serves to illustrate the complexity of the issues that he is putting across. The book is at times quite dense, but considering the complexity of the material this is a small criticism to make. However, the reader does need a reasonable understanding of the issues involved to appreciate what the book has to offer.

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NADEEM HAI


This book traces the historical roots of critical criminology, surveys the uneven development of critical criminology across Europe both as a distinct perspective and as a ‘crisis-prone project’, and assesses its potential as a ‘replacement discourse’ in creating an open space for alternative visions of social order and justice. The author sees critical criminology, with its materialist and interactionist heritage, as a ‘product of “the sixties”’. Critical criminologists focused on processes of criminalisation, law formation and social regulation, rather than crime and criminal behaviour, as a result, whole new areas of research and empathies were opened up. But this critical paradigm is undergoing an analytical and ideological crisis, struggling to remain politically relevant and to retain its place within new
discourses and theoretical dilemmas. As van Swaaningen puts it, ‘Having been a symbol of progressiveness for some years, critical criminology is now merely depicted as academic dilettantism, with fuzzy morals and flaky politics’ (p. 6). Hence, ‘reassessing critical criminology’s restructuring and constitutive role is the ultimate goal of the book’ (p. 13).

Part 1 of the book surveys European critical criminology – as it has been. The chapters on the early criminological critique of penal reform, precursors of critical criminology, and the patchwork of European critical criminology depict the overall shape that theoretical debates about crime and penal reform have assumed from the nineteenth century. Clearly, this task carries the risk of overgeneralization. But by distilling from numerous publications, conferences, common study sessions, debates, activities of institutional centres and disputes between key figures within the discipline, van Swaaningen has successfully mapped out the histories and present contexts in which criminological knowledge is produced and diffused. Part 2 is a thematic exploration into what might be. It argues for a reconceptualisation of critical criminology and outlines how an integration if its different strands – for instance, left realism and neo-abolitionism, legal guaranteeist and feminist perspectives – can lead to alternative scenarios of criminal politics.

One of the strengths of this richly detailed study of European criminologies is the reflexive frame of understanding. Van Swaaningen reviews the state of the art in Britain, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands within the context of their specific historical, cultural and social grounding. Comparable criminological problems received different responses as scholars reflected upon different sociopolitical realities. Despite the theoretical complementarity established among critical criminologists through their critique of positivism and functionalism in the 1960s, continental European intellectual traditions, as well as the legal rationale and cultures of social control, differ significantly from the Anglo-Saxon situation. Key differences are also apparent in the development of radical penal reform movements across Europe.

The book does not directly address the current developments within the European Union and how they might affect the future agenda of critical criminology. But the civic desire for safety and the new meaning of citizenship in the emerging European legal order are clearly pressing issues. One can see a parallel between the dangers of ‘urban third worlds’ versus super-protected residential areas in the local politics of community safety, on the one hand, and realities of social exclusion and migration politics in ‘Fortress Europe’, on the other. It is within the context of an ever-changing social order that van Swaaningen argues social justice and a culture of human rights remain powerful concepts for critical criminology.

Critical Criminology reveals discourses often hidden from orthodox debates about crime and largely unknown to the textbooks of Anglo-American criminology. It is highly informative and is to be commended for strengthening our abilities to ‘think European’ in our engagement with criminology.


This book has its origins in the work on computer speech simulation undertaken by the University of Surrey’s contingent of the European Commission’s SUNDIAL project on speech understanding. Readers who are already familiar with this work may be forgiven if they think ‘here we go again’. Wooffitt et al. provide a sustained consideration of a topic that several of the authors have
examined in previous articles: the use of conversation analysis (CA) in the development of 'machines that speak and hear when we talk to them'. The readers' lament may not, however, be uttered because they are being treated to a book-length consideration of the issues, but because, once again, a very interesting issue for both sociology and the 'design sciences' is being undermined by unnecessary claims about what is being achieved.

The overall ambition has three parts to it. First, to learn about human behaviour through the analysis of human interaction with machines. Second, to suggest how the results of the first could be used to design so called speech-understanding machines, and third, to sociologically correct the cognitive theme in the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI). In prosecuting all three goals the authors attempt to break what they call a vicious circle in the development of speech-based machines: 'How can system designers know how people will react to computers prior to the development of an experimental system, and how can an experimental system be developed prior to an understanding of users' behaviour and requirements?' The resolution we are offered is a simulation experiment that employs a 'Wizard of Oz' (WOZ) technique in which people are set tasks to accomplish using a computer, but unknown to them, the computer is really another person. Drawing off CA, Wooffitt et al. analyse the dialogue between 'users' and a person pretending to be a speech machine supplying British Airway's flight information. They then compare this with the analysis of conversation that occurred between 'real' people, BA flight information agents and callers.

A question which comes to mind, however, is that since it is a person pretending to be a computer, is not the real comparison between human–human and human–human interaction? For, even when pretending to be a machine, or for that matter anything, human beings are human beings, not machines or whatever else they pretend to be. No matter, at least not for the authors, for they go on to claim that their comparison accomplishes their stated goals. First, it overhauls simulation studies, though arguably this might be of little interest to sociologists, and the insights claimed for understanding human behaviour from examining human–machine interaction, which would be of interest to sociologists, have to be questioned since there were no machines involved here. Indeed, the achievement of the third objective of the book, which is to sociologically re-orient HCI, may equally be questioned on this basis. Analysing how people use machines and also comparing this with what they do when there is no machine involved may have merit. But just how analysing the dialogue between some people and some other people who are pretending to be computers advances our understanding of how people use computers is puzzling. There is a need to provide a sociological corrective to the cognitive dominance of HCI; the problem is that the demonstrations provided may fall short of the claim to do so.

The main objective, to show the value of conversation analysis in the design of computer systems, is also considered in the light of the comparative studies. Given the centrality of this objective it is disappointing that no practical demonstrations are provided of how systems designers are to benefit from the study, and that the authors merely rely on in-principle arguments to shore up their claim. I say 'in-principle' knowing that the authors will retort that they have furnished empirical analysis. Despite this, however, it is difficult to see how, stripped of the vague assertions that they have clear relevance for designers, the analyses are indeed of practical utility in design. Again, there is a gap between claim and demonstration. In the final analysis, although I fully endorse two of the objectives, sociologically overhauling HCI and the importance of understanding interactional practices in the development of speech simulation systems, I am left with a general concern:
would those who practice CA and those concerned with the practical problems of design feel that, in their own terms, this book does justice to both objectives?

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Graham Button


Gender and Nation provides a comprehensive overview of the literature in a much neglected area, and a contribution to thinking about cultural and political pluralism. Yuval-Davis argues that gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identities and conflicts. Ethnic and national projects then rely heavily on gender discourses as the means of achieving their objectives, particularly through constructions of ‘home’. Thus, importantly, women are bearers of the collectivity’s honour, and are constituted as citizens in those terms. This clearly affects women’s access to reproductive rights.

Yuval-Davis is opposed to multiculturalist discourse, contending that it naturalises the position of the dominant culture, while at the same time reifying and objectifying ‘other’ cultures. This obscures power relations within subordinate cultures, as well as between those ‘other’ cultures. Western feminism’s engagement with multiculturalism, as a strategy for taking account of differences between women has, then, in effect reproduced essentialist notions of difference and homogeneity within and between groups.

The book examines the ways that citizenship has operated as a multi-tier construct, differentiating between different sections of the population in ways which rank membership of the community hierarchically. She argues that the public/private distinction, on which citizenship is founded, is fictional, since there is no wholly public or private sphere. She particularly discusses how power relations are reproduced and citizenship is ranked through militaries and wars.

In place of multiculturalism, Yuval-Davis advocates ‘transversal politics’. The term is borrowed from the left-wing ‘Transversalists’ of Bologna. This is the author’s version of the increasingly popular idea of dialogic politics, the aim being to overcome the opposition between universalism and particularism through dialogue, framed not in terms of who the participants are but of what the political objective is. It is an attempt to construct a theory of ‘unity in diversity’, which abandons the conception of political actors as representatives, in favour of conceiving of such actors as advocates for particular positions. Transversal activists engage in a process of ‘rooting and shifting’, involving bringing to the dialogue the values which root identity in a particular group, and engaging in an exchange (‘shifting’) with those who have different memberships and identities. She insists this does not entail decentring the self. Rather, the centred self is ‘pivoted’ through or across other identities. In addition, she argues that transversal politics should not homogenise the ‘other’. The encounter should be with members of other cultures, not with another culture as such. This form of politics depends on solidarity, as the values and goals of participants must be compatible. As such, it seems to favour particularism over universalism. The question this inevitably raises is how political dialogue can be possible between those who hold diametrically opposing values.

Yuval-Davis is centrally concerned not to abandon all categories of identity as always and everywhere unstable and shifting. This leads her to deny that her analysis is invested in postmodern theory, despite the fact that it relies on deconstruction. However, in insisting that this is a modernist problematic, she locates ‘transversal politics’ as a version of feminist standpoint epistemology. It would appear that this relies on a version
of the self which is precisely closed to the ‘pivoting’ that the process of ‘shifting’ demands. The epistemological view of the self is abstract, ahistorical and objectified. This seems to run counter to what appears to be Yuval-Davis’s hermeneutic project of social critique, based not on the abstract epistemological self, but rather on a historicised subjectivity, whose horizons (whether near, far or distant) shift through encounters with other ‘life worlds’. The key hermeneutic assumption is that it is only possible to speak from our position in particular traditions, for instance a tradition of critique, since there is no transcendental subject position from which to overcome the limited horizons provided by our histories. Understanding (or empowered knowledge, in Yuval-Davis’s terms) does not depend on the idea of a punctual self (as epistemology does), but rather on a narratively constituted self, whose coherence is historically located and so is open to the possibility of change.

That said, Yuval-Davis provides a valuable and substantial account of the interconnecting discourses of gender and nation, and contributes to conceptions of politics outside the rigid boundaries of essentialist identity.

University of Warwick  
LISA SMYTH


Despite the blurring of disciplinary boundaries, there are several features which continue to distinguish sociology from economics. Among these is the general rule that while the assumptions of economists simplify the world in order to understand it, those of sociologists tend to make the world appear more complicated. It is perhaps comforting to think that this may be one reason why economists have been more prominent than sociologists among the expert advisers of governments.

Viviana Zelizer’s The Social Meaning of Money is a good example of how sociology can make the everyday and straightforward seemingly complex and difficult. This is by no means a criticism, however, as this book is a good example of the distinctive and enriched understanding which the sociological orientation can offer, and serves also as a useful corrective to some of the more questionable claims which economists habitually makes about the nature of human conduct and social exchange. It is not only economics which comes in for some criticism, Zelizer also targets and challenges the work of numerous classical-sociological accounts of the meaning and effects of money (including those of Marx and Simmel) emphasising how its uniformity, neutrality, ‘greyness’ and essentially utilitarian character has led to the ‘inevitable commodification of society’ (p. 12).

In opposition to such views, Zelizer makes a number of points which highlight what she describes as the social differentiation of money. Firstly, as a medium of social interaction, money is in part the embodiment of cultural values. Consequently, money is not uniform, but acquires varied meanings when it is employed for different purposes or acquired by different means. Zelizer illustrates, for example, how alimony, tips, loans, bequests, blackmail and various other sources or uses of money are reflected in its classification and the forms of conduct associated with these various acts. It is her contention that these very different actions are, in a sense, visible in money itself, in how it is ‘earmarked’ and treated. It is implausible to suggest, she concludes, that there is likely to be any unadulterated monetisation of social life; if anything, the opposite has occurred: money is a social fact (p. 25), and this text is testimony to the inescapable penetration of values and subjective meanings into even the most functional and ostensibly ‘dry’ areas of life.
The ‘values’ of money, in a non-utilitarian sense, its ‘cultural and social significance’ are examined by an analysis of ‘the transformation in the earmarking of money’ in America between the 1870s and the 1930s (p. 30). The different forms and complexions of money are discussed in five main chapters in relation to ‘domestic money’ and household finance; ‘gifted money’ in terms of tips, benefactions, bonuses and courtship rituals; ‘poor people’s money’ and what were claimed to be the potential moral hazards of poor relief; ‘charitable cash’ and the steps taken to ensure that donations came ‘with strings attached’; and finally ‘contested monies’ and the political struggle over the ordering of the domestic economy of the poor.

Nevertheless, it remains clear throughout these analyses that the most fundamental social meaning of money is how much one possesses rather than what kind of money constitutes an income: the various meanings which might be attached to money are therefore still subsidiary to the more pressing question of quantity. The issue of American ‘exceptionalism’ might also be raised in this context, with the particular experiences of what was a distinctively ‘immigrant’ society throughout the period covered in this text limiting the applicability of some of Zelizer’s specific points. Nevertheless, Zelizer has provided a useful guide to neglected issues in one particular period of American history, and a method of exploring important questions about culture, exchange and the manifestation of power in defining norms.

As such, this book could serve as a curious but nevertheless interesting means of introducing the sociological orientation to new students. Despite its seemingly specialist nature and potentially difficult subject matter, it reveals the tremendous richness which the understanding of social life assumes when enquiry goes beyond surface appearances and into the question of the social construction of everyday normality. Zelizer not only brings a number of interesting and presumably little-known facts to light (such as the apparent practice of brothels in America of issuing exchange tokens and effectively creating their own sub-currencies, which itself raises several intriguing questions about the circulation of such ‘money’, p. 15), but more fundamentally she requires a reappraisal and a new set of questions concerning this most all-encompassing of modern social artefacts.

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