

BSA Theory Study Group

Annual Report

1 February 2011

1. New Website

The BSA theory group now has a new website featuring relevant events, calls for papers, links to podcasts and publications, teaching resources and more.

The address is: <http://bsatheory.org.uk/>

The steering group also welcomes Mark Carrigan from the University of Warwick, who has special responsibility for the webpage. For other sociology resources online see:

<http://sociologicalimagination.org/>

2. BSA Annual Conference 2011

This year's annual conference addresses **60 Years of Sociology**, and is running 6-8 April 2011, at the London School of Economics. As in the previous two conferences, our study group will hold a stream-plenary as well as run a theory stream. The stream-plenary is entitled '**Sociological Theory before and after the "Practice" Turn**'. It addresses the interpretive/practice (Giddens, Bourdieu) turn in sociology that has taken place over the last couple of decades. It does so by considering two radically different criticisms, each seeking to rehabilitate arguments from an earlier period, to make them relevant to contemporary concerns. In this way, the session will address debates that have been central to developments in sociological theory over the last 60 years, while looking forward to the future of sociology by also looking at parallel issues in other sciences (such as cognitive science).

The session will be organised around contributions from **Professor Stephen Turner** and **Dr David Elder-Vass** drawing upon books published in 2010 (S. P. Turner *Explaining the Normative, Polity*; D. Elder-Vass *The Causal Power of Social Structures*, CUP), which address problems of norms as explanations of social practices, one from a 'reductionist' perspective, the other from an 'emergentist' perspective. Discussants include, **Mark Carrigan**, and **Steve Fuller**, both from the University of Warwick and the stream will be chaired by **John Holmwood**, University of Nottingham.

3. The University in Times of Crisis: Prospects for the Social Sciences

The University in Times of Crisis is a joint conference organised by the Theory Study Group and the Weber Study Group to be held on 27th May 2011, at the Birmingham Midland Institute. This conference seeks to *think* about the current state and prospects of both the university and the social sciences and humanities. After years of having allowed themselves to be defined in terms of usefulness to the 'economy', social scientists and academics in general have to face up to the harsh reality and consider whether they have not simply surrendered their mission and responsibility. This conference seeks to explain how we have arrived here, to analyse the consequences of these developments and the possibilities for a

free social science praxis (both in teaching and scholarship), and to set out the choices that may lie ahead and the responsibilities attached to them.

Organizers include:

Carlos Frade (University of Salford): C.Frade@salford.ac.uk

Sam Whimster (Editor of Max Weber Studies): s.whimster@londonmet.ac.uk

Gurminder K. Bhambra (University of Warwick) G.K.Bhambra@warwick.ac.uk

Austin Harrington (University of Erfurt, Germany) austin.harrington@uni-erfurt.de

4. Rethinking the Modern: Colonialism, Empire, and Slavery

Rethinking the Modern is a BSA Theory Study Group Conference to be held at the Birmingham Midland Institute, 11-12 July 2011 together with the ESRC funded research network on Rethinking the Global: Connected Histories, Connected Sociologies. The conference responds to those academics and commentators who have sought to offer a revisionist history of colonialism that sees it as something that wasn't as bad as some others make out, that actually made the modern world as we now know it and so was essentially a good thing, or was something to be understood simply in terms of networks of circulation and distribution. It seems that the sense of colonialism as a wretched episode of human history that continues to distort the life chances of those unfortunate enough to live under its legacies is slowly being eroded. Similar revisions are underway to our understandings of modern transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies. The conference organizers believe that the historical processes of imperialism, colonialism and slavery shaped, and continue to shape, our common world in ways which have been and continue to be problematic. This conference seeks to confront head-on these new revisionist histories and provide the space for a more adequate understanding of these processes and their legacies as they continue into today.

Keynote Speakers include:

- **Patricia Hill Collins**, Distinguished University Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland
- **Priyamvada Gopal**, Lecturer in the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge
- **Catherine Hall**, Professor of Modern British Social and Cultural History, UCL
- **Walter Dignolo**, William H. Wannamaker Professor of Literature, Duke University
- **Nikhil Pal Singh**, Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, History Department, NYU

For more details, including the Call for Papers, see:

<http://bsatheory.org.uk/category/rethinking-the-modern/>

5. Events in the Past Year

The events run or supported by the BSA Theory Group in the year up to February include:

- ❖ **Early Career Workshop on Global Historical Sociology**, University of Warwick, January 2011. This workshop discussed the specific issues associated with doing research within the field of historical sociology and addressed key methodological problems that are raised in the process.

- ❖ **Symposium on Understanding Diaspora: The Case of Kurds in London, May 2010.**
This symposium also got support from, and ran in association with, the Department of Sociology, University of Leicester. The symposium provided a forum for reflecting on and discussing 'diaspora' by focusing on the case of Kurds from Turkey. Even though Kurds from Turkey make up a significant proportion of London's ethnic minority population, they constitute an 'invisible' diasporic community, both in terms of the current debates surrounding ethnicity and Muslim minority in the UK, and in diaspora studies. The presentations considered theoretical and political dimensions and also heard from those who undertook empirical work.

- ❖ **Foucault, the Family & Politics, CRASSH, University of Cambridge, November 2010**
This one day conference explored Foucault's analysis of the family, with a particular focus on the ideas expressed in his College de France lectures. The conference examined the theme of the family in Foucault's life and texts and used his ideas to explore the politics of the family more generally in the contemporary world. The papers were full and lively, and related well to each other with a growing recognition of the benefit of comparative study and the development and limits of Foucault's ideas in disciplinary discourses ranging from sociology through history, film, literature and psychology to politics.

- ❖ **Re-Imagining our Sociological Contemporaneity: What is the Age of Re-Embodiments? London, July 2010.** This one day symposium considered how problems of environmental damage and imbalance might be addressed within the context of wider theoretical debates and issues. These included: the question of whether postmodernity offers a genuine challenge to modernity or simply represents its crowning; the issue of how to understand embodiment and re-embodiment; the question of how to understand and capitalize upon struggles within and against Western/ized societies and their destruction of cultural and biological diversity.

Convenor and Steering Group:

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Theory Study Group website: <http://bsatheory.org.uk/>

Theory Study Group Membership: 192 members on the Jiscmail list