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Beyond 'ethnic conflict': Another Language

Madeleine Reeves

In mid-June this year, for the second time in two months, the Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan jumped into the international headlines. In April, when Kyrgyzstan saw its second popular overthrow of the government in five years, the tenor of reporting in western media had been triumphant: here was a population standing up to tyrannical rule; seizing the government administration building in the face of sniper fire and forcing a corrupt president to flee. This was a story of heroism and bravery: of legitimate violence and of warrior-deaths.

In June the story was very different. As conflict gripped the southern Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Jalalabat, leaving hundreds dead and forcing hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee across the border to Uzbekistan, the account that crystallized in international media sidelined politics and the crisis of the previous three months to revert to an easier, familiar narrative of inter-ethnic hatred. This was an 'old-fashioned Central Asian pogrom' in the words of a *Guardian* editorial on June 14th; a spark set alight in a 'tinder-box' region. For Newsweek, southern Kyrgyzstan is an 'ethnic quagmire' that the Kremlin and the US would best avoid; for the *Economist*, the violence was 'Stalin's harvest' – the legacy of cynical gerrymandering that meant that ethnic and national borders were never properly to 'fit' in Central Asia's Ferghana Valley.

Such tropes, of course, are familiar in an age of quick reporting. We have seen them in the Balkans, in the Sudan, in post-election Kenya. Violence is much easier to fathom if it is felt to be inevitable, rooted in deep-seated antagonism or Stalinist border-drawing. And yet, for scholars of the Central Asia – and perhaps especially for those who have sought to research and write against the grain of essentialised identities and geographical determinism – the violence of the previous month raises challenging questions of comprehension, analysis and communication. Why didn't we see it coming? Were the doom-mongers who spoke of the Ferghana valley as 'heading towards a precipice' right all along? How do we discuss and make sense of the role of ethnicity in the June violence without treating it as empirically fixed or analytically causal? How do we accommodate the complexity and variety of responses without writing all action into a single narrative of antagonism? As my colleague, Maya, commented to me in Bishkek early in July, her eyes ringed with sleepless nights and days spent urging police officers not to

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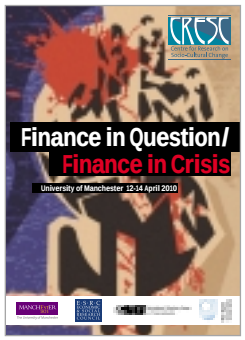
THEME 1: REMAKING CAPITALISM

Review CRESC Conference: Finance in Question/ Finance in Crisis



William Davies

Finance in Question/Finance in Crisis had a thread running through it, which focused on economic cognition. Why didn't financial elites know that a crisis of such magnitude was looming? What didn't they know? Did they definitely not know? Why didn't academic economists know? And what about sociologists, including sociologists of finance and Marxists?

Donald MacKenzie gave a great lecture on how the complexity of hybrid financial products straddled too many separate cultures of evaluation. Philip Mirowski gave a rabble-rousing tour through the various delusions of the American economics profession. Of course there are cognitive stances towards the economy that do not profess to know what's going on - those of Keynes and Hayek most notably. But there is a clear sense, following this crisis, that various parties claimed to, but did not. Mirowski believes that scarcely any of them have yet admitted this, let alone atoned for it.

Ironically, the rapidity and apparent totality of this intellectual collapse then potentially acts in the system's favour. As Bob Jessop argued, this crisis is in marked temporal contrast to the 1970s and the collapse of Keynesianism. The recent crisis struck with such rapidity, that it could be immediately re-framed as a policy emergency, to be dealt with by the very same elites that had overseen it arising. Alternative cognitive frameworks - or leftwing responses - were caught even more unawares than the regulators and bankers themselves, hence the surreal feeling that nothing much has changed.

Andrew Gamble even posed the question: can we even be sure that this was a crisis? We've heard a great deal about crises wrong-footing states spatially, including that of the 1970s; but maybe the 2008-09 crisis needs to be understood in terms of its surreal chronology, unfolding in days, rather than years, and thereby re-configuring core assumptions about the nature of capitalist crises.

So it is that the same people are in positions of power and authority, making even larger sums of money, doing many of the same things. The same cognitive tools are being used, bar the addition of some complexity thinking from Andrew Haldane - as Karel Williams and Melinda Cooper both explored - plus some psychological quirks from behavioural finance.

The problem with this crushing sense of normality is that it risks pervading sociology and critique also. Appealing for sociology to become 'more normative', as Doreen Massey and Andrew Sayer both did, seems to reiterate the efficiency/equity division, which ultimately leaves neo-classical economics alone to its efficiency calculations. Yet if sociology doesn't 'get political', then it risks simply repeating the same language of the expert actors it is following and de-constructing - a common critique of the sort of STS-inspired economic sociology of MacKenzie. Mirowski accused MacKenzie of being a little too credulous of the notion that warping financial rules is 'innovation', for example. Early on at the conference, Saskia Sassen made the important point that we need a way of explaining and criticising finance with reference to something outside of finance.

There are four things that the conference highlighted which problematise this analysis of an 'emergency' that 'just happened'. Firstly, it started in the heart of America. This makes it very unlike other neo-liberal crises, and while it may be a crisis that served finance capital quite well, it cannot be said to have served its waning global hegemony. This therefore has profound political implications.

Secondly, Gamble pointed out a political paradox of neo-liberalism, namely that it has depended on centre left politics (cosmopolitanism, globalism, rights discourses, as most obviously during the Clinton administration) for its efficacy, but that crises have historically aided the right. By this account, the crisis will likely lead to the fragmentation of international financial architecture, but produce no system or rationality in its place.

Thirdly, it may turn out to be a repetitive crisis. Many speakers seemed to take the view that another crisis may not be so far away. Crises are, in any case, fairly frequent affairs under neo-liberalism, but have been typically farmed out to other nations. But perhaps now we will witness Wall Street and The City remain in a critical condition of periodic near-death experiences, being repeatedly rescued, until the rescuers themselves lose all credit-worthiness. Then we'll know what sort of crisis we're looking at, and its impact on prosperity (especially public wealth) in the West will be very profound. Certainly it will be too profound to be framed as merely a policy dilemma.

And finally, there is fundamental uncertainty. Grahame Thompson's paper looked at the problem of volatility as an object of knowledge. Volatility, unlike risk, is something that cannot be predicted or priced, but only plotted retrospectively - Keynes understood this. So what to do? Thompson introduced various thought techniques, with which to view the present from positions of imagined futures.

This issue of uncertainty pervaded the conference. Elite actors under-estimated the inherent, 'Knightian' uncertainty of the future. But sociologists and critics are also hampered by uncertainty as to what has taken place empirically in the recent past. The conference was timed well to explore this enigma: far enough from the financial melt-down as to have some critical distance from it, but not so far as to yet have any established historical or empirical narrative with which to fix it.

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THEME 2: REFRAMING THE NATION

Social Media and the Sacred

John Zavos

On 28th-29th June 2010 CRESC's Mediating Religion International Research Network (MRIRN) held its fourth annual conference at the Open University in London. The network provides a forum for researchers working across disciplines to collaborate on issues related to the mediation of religion – that is, the dynamics through which religion and religion-related ideas, practices, objects are manifested and represented in multiple socio-cultural contexts.

The key questions addressed were:

- How do religious and spiritually-oriented groups use social media?
- What impact does this use have on their relationships with the sacred?
- How are religious and other discourses of the sacred (and the secular-sacred) positioned and mobilised in social media?

These questions were placed in appropriate perspective by a collaboration with a project run under the ESRC/AHRC Religion and Society programme, 'Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred', which explores representation in newspapers and television. The collaboration exemplifies the aspiration of the MRIRN to encourage and enable communication amongst researchers, and to build on current research initiatives by pointing up new agendas. The collaboration also provided the opportunity for engagement with non-academic participants, as day one concluded with a roundtable discussion in which Simon Barrow of *Ekklesia*, Martin Beckford of the *Daily Telegraph* and Michael Wakelin (former Head of Religious Programming at the BBC) debated the challenges of representing religious affairs in different media environments. The conference brought together researchers from universities across the UK and Europe.

The organisers were also very pleased to welcome Heidi Campbell from Texas A&M University. Dr Campbell has recently published a book on the issues of the conference, *When Religion Meets New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2010). In her keynote address, using the example of the kosher mobile phone developed through interactions between communications companies and specific orthodox communities in Israel, Dr Campbell demonstrated her innovative analytical approach. She showed how religious groups respond to new technologies based on their history, beliefs and practices, and how community values and priorities are constantly re-negotiated.

The second keynote address was delivered by Kim Knott of the University of Leeds and two associates on the Religion and Society 'Media Portrayals' project, Elizabeth Poole (Staffordshire University) and Teemu Taira (University of Turku). Professor Knott presented quantitative data from the project, which replicated the methodology of a similar study conducted at the University of Leeds in 1982-3. The project logged references to religion in print and television media over short periods, and initial findings demonstrate that, in comparison to 1982-3, these references have risen somewhat dramatically, particularly in terms of what the project describes as 'common' (or popular) religion. An additional factor in the present study is a logging of references to what the project team describes as the 'secular sacred': beliefs, objects, practices and places which may not be formally religious, but which are nevertheless recognised as 'sacred' in dominant social discourses. One striking initial conclusion of the research is that references to the secular sacred, and to religion develop together, suggesting a mutuality rather than an antagonism between these concepts. The project findings also suggest that entrenched Christo-centric and Islamophobic assumptions persist and are embedded in mainstream news media.

One question thrown up by the exploration of such issues was the extent to which such entrenched attitudes were replicated in new social media environments. Several papers highlighted ways in which social media platforms operate to reinforce existing hierarchies and dominant forms of representation. Chatrooms and discussion boards, for example, are sometimes subject to moderation and may reify religious groups in ways which marginalise boundary-crossing practices and less clearly recognisable beliefs and practices. The replication of power structures in social media was confirmed in the papers by Tim Hutchings on Lifechurch.tv, David Herbert on BBC World Service discussion boards and Arjen Nauta on Islamic martyrdom videos. Anita Greenhill, one of the main conference organisers, offered an intriguing account of the 'secular-sacred'

Pelephone advertisements for kosher cell phone in the ultra Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Sherim in Jerusalem (July 2006).

world of the memorial website gonetoosoon.org. She argued that Christian assumptions are implicit and frequently apparent in the interactions she analysed on this website, although not often acknowledged or made explicit. Other papers explored new religious formations emerging in social media environments. Nathan Abrams, for example, explored on-line constructions of a secularised Judaism among youth in the UK, and Erika Willander highlighted the increasing use of discourses of 'spirituality' by Swedish bloggers to describe approaches to what we might conventionally understand as religious themes. Tamlyn Ryan's paper challenged the assumption that online environments stimulate transformations in religious practices through her study of spiritualists' use of Facebook and discussion forums.

Finally, the methodological issues posed by studying social media and the sacred were aired in the papers and discussions. Stephen Pihlaja, Ruth Deller and Farida Vis explored the challenges presented by social media. In particular, it was argued that mixed and mobile methods are required to deal adequately with the fluidity and evanescence of social media, and the myriad ways in which the boundaries between the sacred and secular are continually being drawn.

Overall the conference stimulated debate about the significance of social media environments for the construction of ideas – and communities – of the sacred. Clearly, there are ways in which such media have created new possibilities for being religious and representing sacredness. At the same time, the papers demonstrated that we need to be alert to the different trajectories which can emerge from the dynamic correlation of varied social media with diverse groups and ideas.

For more details of the international network which will soon have its own dedicated website and social media contact: john.zavos@manchester.ac.uk

THEME 3: GOVERNING CULTURES: CITIES, POLICIES AND HERITAGE

Assembled Cities: Comparison, Learning and Mobility

Allan Cochrane and Kevin Ward

There is a growing acceptance that urban politics and urban policy-making is not simply a localized phenomenon, but draws on a much wider set of engagements with the experience of other cities and a range of policy actors apparently located elsewhere. While the bulk of the social science literature has rightly emphasized the territorial nature of 'urban' politics (Davies and Imbroscio 2009), more recent scholarship in geography and beyond has turned to emphasizing the relational geographies, histories and sociologies at work in the construction of the category 'urban'. Some work within this field has approached this issue through seeking to uncover the ways in which policies are made up, assembled through circuits, networks and webs (K. Ward 2006; McCann 2008; Peck and Theodore 2010). It is argued that in and through these relationships cities have become increasingly entangled, relationally proximate so to speak.

For some cities this has meant them becoming constructed as a 'model', something to which other cities should aspire. Baltimore and its emergence as a model for waterfront development or Barcelona and its emergence of a model for regeneration are examples of how some cities have been constructed as places from which others should learn and whose approaches should, where possible, be replicated (S. Ward 2003; Gonzalez forthcoming) . On the other hand, some cities in some areas of the world have been structurally disadvantaged by this phenomenon. Cities off the map of the national and international consultants, planners, practitioners and think tanks: those who lubricate the channels in and through which policies are made into models and made mobile, whether by comparing their performance with other cities, through visiting other cities in the form of policy tourism, or participating in capacity building trans-urban networks (Robinson 2005).

Despite this growing interest, we still know very little about how, where, and with what consequences urban policy-making and urban politics operate in and through individual cities. While recent work on comparative urbanism, trans-local urban learning, and inter-urban policy transfer, policies-in-motion, or policy mobilities has begun to right this intellectual wrong, deepening our understanding of how urban political and policy actors (broadly defined to include those working in state institutions, in business, and in grassroots activist organizations, among others) engage with places elsewhere as they seek to shape the future fate of their cities, there remains much still to learn.

It was in this intellectual context that a CRESC workshop took place this year on the 17 and 18 June at the Open University. Organized by Allan Cochrane (Open University) and Kevin Ward (University of Manchester) and financially supported by CRESC, Open Space at the Open University and a Philip Leverhulme award at the University of Manchester. This workshop brought together the following scholars: Nick Clarke (University of Southampton), Nina Glick-Schiller (University of Manchester), Sara Gonzalez (University of Leeds), Andrew Harris (University College London), Jane M. Jacobs (Edinburgh University), Colin McFarlane (Durham University), Eugene McCann (Simon Fraser University), Jamie Peck (University of British Columbia), Russell Prince (Massey University), Jennifer Robinson (University College London), Nik Theodore (University of Illinois at Chicago) and Stephen Ward (Oxford Brookes University).

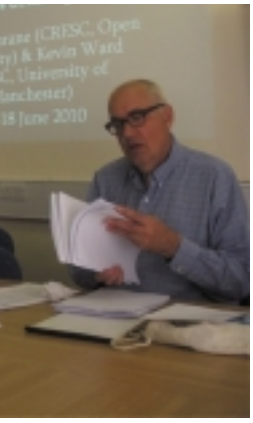
Organized over two days, and into four two paper sessions, the workshop, perhaps unsurprisingly, revealed both a series similarities and differences in how scholars were approaching issues in this field. Leaving aside the empirical specificities, first, conceptually, there were four approaches that were discussed as having some intellectual purchase:

- Political economy-derived comparative state restructuring-inspired analyses of urban connections, pathways, trajectories, tracks and webs;
- Post-structural understandings of governmentality and subjectivity around circulations, movements and translations;
- Mobilities-informed analyses of the movement and the stickiness in urban policy and politics;
- 'Assemblage'-informed analyses as it might be applied to urban policy and politics.

Second, methodologically, a number of techniques were discussed as being useful in rising to the challenges posed by researching this multi-sited and multi-scaled set of policy processes. These included:

- Archival (comparison with the past) analysis on the life-course of policies and programs;
- Content and discourse analysis of documents/websites etc.;
- Ethnographies on the movement and the sticking of policies – on the 'atmosphere' in which embodied practices shape how policies move;
- Semi structured interviews with all those involved (or not) in the industries and economies around the moving and fixing of policies;
- Questionnaires with those participating in networks.

This workshop followed on from sessions at the last couple of *Association of American Geographers* and *Royal Geographical Society-Institute of British Geographers* annual conferences. Thus it marked a further chance to make some progress in this evolving inter-disciplinary field. All who attended are



involved in on-going research. This will emerge in urban studies journals over the next couple of years. In terms of the different theoretical positions, no consensus was reached over which one – if any – was most useful. There was some agreement that each had something to say about the means by which we can best understand the process of policy movement. A next step would be to take this theoretical dialogue further, and to ask some hard questions of all the different perspectives that were advocated. In terms of the different method and methodologies that presenters outlined, there was a general sense that this emergent field really did ask some serious questions of existing ways of doing urban political research. Presenters grappled for a methodological vocabulary that would do justice to the issues raised by doing fieldwork in this area. Should researchers follow the policy, so to speak? Or, should they perform multi-site ethnographies? What about what gets left out of verbal accounts? Does this work suggest participant observation techniques as a means of seeing policy movement in action? These and other questions were asked and not answered over the two days. There was agreement that the methodological issues raised by doing this sort of fieldwork demand further discussion and thought in the future, whether in the form of conferences, workshops or publications.

Overall, there was a general consensus that the dialogue that took place over the two days had not led to any 'answers' but rather to the posing of a different set of questions.

Allan Cochrane (Open University) and Kevin Ward (University of Manchester) are affiliated members of Theme 3 'Governing Cultures: Cities, Policies and Heritage'.

Beyond 'ethnic conflict': Another Language

[continued from front cover]

reproduce the logic of violence in their interrogations: 'we need to find another language to talk about this; a language that doesn't suck us all in as 'victim' and 'perpetrator''.

Finding 'another language' in the midst of conflict is at once urgent and challenging, for ethnic difference seems over-determined from the start. The challenge, I suggest, is not to 'write out' the role of ethnicity in the mobilization of violence, or to claim that perceived ethnic difference is irrelevant to the current conflict. In Osh at the moment it matters profoundly whether you identify and are identified as 'Kyrgyz' or 'Uzbek'; what language you speak at home; in which neighbourhood you live. In this respect, the Kyrgyz Provisional strong-men politicians who are able to take advantage of it by forming militias amongst young men barely out of school. Perhaps most importantly, it demands asking about how violence has come to be normalized as a way of doing politics, and that means connecting up the story of what happened in June 2010 with events in early April, which – not for the first time – celebrated violent seizure as political modality.

The conflict that erupted in June was not 'routine' violence; it was not inevitable; and it was not pre-determined by the fact of ethnic diversity or by the Ferghana valley's complex political geography. It is rooted in deepening political crisis to which, in the name of 'strategic interests' and dubious assumptions of stability, western states

Government's embargo upon mentioning the ethnicity of victims fuels the tendency for rumour to solidify as 'fact'. Such silencing doesn't help to move towards an understanding of what happened and why. Nor does it help to imagine political solutions that are not premised upon a perception of difference as 'threat' – as much of the initial reconstruction efforts seem to do.

Asking about how ethnicity 'happened' in this conflict demands asking some tough and potentially uncomfortable questions: about how ethnicity has come to be socially organized and politically institutionalised in Kyrgyzstan over the last two decades; about how grievances at economic inequality have come to be articulated along ethnic lines; about the generative fear at loss of territory, population, language, identity and the political fantasies these foster. It demands asking about economic collapse and the have been complicit for years. The task of an engaged social science in the face of such conflict, I would suggest, is less to formulate a singular story than to try to find spaces for other, messier languages than those that work their way into news reports and policy briefings: languages that unfix ethnicity as a single, determinate category; languages that acknowledge simultaneously different realities of conflict; languages that point out connections between 'state' and 'popular' violence; languages, above all, which attend to the complex political contingencies that belie a simple story of simmering ethnic antagonism.

Madeleine Reeves is a CRESC RCUK Fellow affiliated to Theme 4. Between 2006 and 2009 she co-directed with Nina Bagdasarova the OSI-HESP Seminar on Nationhood and Narrative in Central Asia: History, Context, Critique.

THEME 4: TOPOLOGIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The Airport: An Ethnographic Study

Damian O'Doherty

Airports once stood as triumphant icons of modernity and science. Gateways to a new world of international travel and global citizenship, airports seemed to transcend the all-too-human limitations of space and time and promised to emancipate mankind from what was deemed the shackles of the local, domestic and parochial. Saarinen's futuristic TWA terminal at New York's Idlewild completed in 1962 perhaps most fully embodies this confidence and optimism. With its beak-like canopy and recessed entrance hall, flanked on either side by the upward soaring flight of two wings, the building assumes the form of an eagle in that moment just before take-off. An orb of incandescent light, the terminal is all swooping concrete and scooped-out passageways radiating transparency and suspense whilst offering a seamless transition from the terrestrial to airborne flight. This was a jet-set age, of supersonic and intercontinental travel, cocktails, sex and glamour. Pascoe has written how the airport promises a 'reversal of gravity' and 'a death defied'. Such optimism returns in Castells' more recent formulation of a network society in which airports are deemed to provide the critical nodes that facilitate a new spatial form he calls 'the space of flows'.

So, what went wrong with the airport? There always a 'crisis' to report at the airport: angry crowds and lengthening queues at check-in service counters, flight cancellations, incidents of air rage, strikes by baggage handlers and cabin crew, drunkenness and excess, deep vein thrombosis, X-ray scanners, health pandemics, viruses and global epidemics; the glamour and excitement of air travel seems to have all but disappeared. The recent ash cloud and periodic reports of airlines going bust seems to stoke up fears that we might all be becoming international passengers trapped in a new kind of limbo which seems to transform the terminal into something resembling a refugee camp. In one popular reading, airports remain 'non-places', characterised by emptiness and vacuity, generating inauthenticity and the alienation of individuals from anything recognisable as a human community. The post 9/11 climate of global terror allied with the ongoing threat of terrorist attack such as the Glasgow attacks in June 2007 and the liquids scare in August 2006 have helped foster a climate of fear and trepidation that adds a sinister twist to the experience of airports as 'non-places'. Despite this many people are using airports more than ever. Like Mehran Karimi Nasseri, trapped inside Paris Charles de Gaulle for the past 25 years, we might all sense that our collective destiny is one of permanent airside citizenship within the global network of 'airport community'.

Airports seem particularly compelling as contemporary sites of management and organization and perhaps act something like those 'strange attractors' familiar to theorists of chaos and complexity. For some writers we must learn to think of airports not as sterile transitory zones but as 'vessels of conception for the societies passing through them'. The airport might usefully be thought as a city in itself, but out on the borders of our more familiar cities that have grown up in the industrial period or over longer periods of time, they are very different spaces. Betwixt and between they delineate a border-post or space of frontier that erects and transgress all kinds of boundaries separating and classifying the 'domestic' and 'foreign' and more broadly an 'inside' from an 'outside'. The construction and deconstruction of these boundaries is likely to manifest in all kinds of ways: personal, psychological, social, and political. If the airport offers a microcosm of wider society, it also presents us with opportunities to study an experimental test base for a possible future sociality.

It was questions such as these that prompted me to set out on an urban ethnographic adventure and to try and secure access to Manchester airport from where I might study the organizational practices of employees and other members of the airport that help produce these remarkable spaces. Early days spent cycling to the airport, wandering about the site, and circumnavigating the perimeter fence (complete with sleeping bag, food provisions, torch and an OS map) in an effort to take preliminary measurements and samples have led to further encroachments - sleeping inside the terminals, sampling life in the complex of airport hotels, meetings with the chaplains and sharing insider information with the full time crowd of plane spotters and other airport enthusiasts. I was becoming a familiar site to many working at the airport and after a while I began to volunteer for work. In October 2009 I was fortunate to be taken in by a young executive working in the corporate head quarters at the Manchester Airport Group who has been kind enough to furnish me with a desk, a computer, and shared secretarial support, in an effort to assist me in my researches. With these resources I have begun to discover the ways in which the airport concentrates and amplifies a whole series of wider social and economic anxieties that accompany the way we live together today.

I have been at the airport almost a year now and have spent a great deal of time with a whole host of characters: the 'terminal manager', the 'dispatcher', the chaplain, the 'baggage handler', and 'ramp supervisor'. They live organization in ways that are only somewhat familiar to us in the university and this leaves me with the challenge of thinking of the ways in which we might recover their lives from the temptations of academic theory and the enormous condescension of disciplinary specialisation and conceptual abstraction. The study is beginning to discover how these spaces construct and amplify difficult emotions and anxieties, whether it's the excitement of a trip to the sun, a 2 week holiday in Disneyland, meeting a distant relative in the arrivals hall, or broader societal concerns with immigration, the environmental consequences of air-travel and global warming, security and terrorism.

The ethnography specifically focuses on how the management of such a complex organization caters to these political, social and psychological pressures – whilst itself being caught up in some of the same dynamics. The findings of this study provide important lessons for students of management and organization that also advances our understanding of globalization, the consumer society, new technologies, identity politics, migration, race and ethnicity.

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THEME 5: TRAJECTORIES OF PARTICIPATION AND INEQUALITY

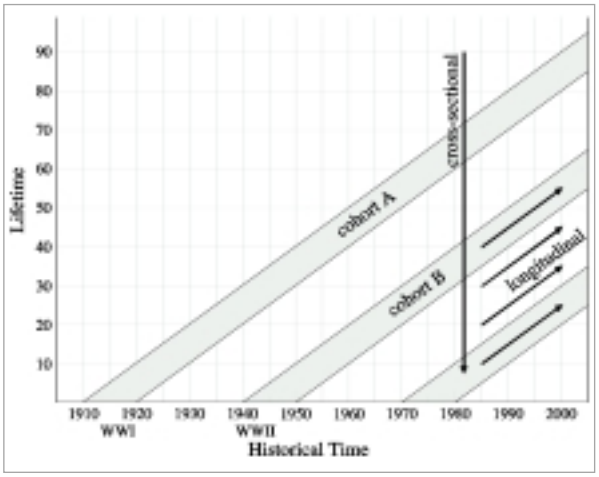
Trajectories of Participation and Inequality

Mike Savage

In our first phase of funding, influential CRESC research (for instance, Tony Bennett et al's 'landmark' *Culture, Class, Distinction*) demonstrated the importance of age for affecting people's involvement in numerous kinds of cultural activity. In particular, they showed that younger age groups are much less involved in traditional forms of cultural participation such as a liking for classical music or 'highbrow' fiction. Yet we still don't know much about how age works in practice. Do our cultural tastes change as we grow older? Or do our activities which we learn in early life persist, which might mean that cultural change occurs as one generation – with its own distinctive preferences - replaces another?

CRESC researchers Simone Scherger, Andrew Miles and Mike Savage are now embarking on a series of research projects to explore these issues, and we held a workshop on *Ageing, generation and participation* on June 24th 2010 with leading experts to map out our work. Louis Chauvel, from Sciences-Po, Paris, gave an outstanding presentation on the scarring effects of generation. Arguing that formative experiences in teenage years have a long term impacts, he showed how French society has been marked in recent decades by an increasing generational divide, as new generations are disadvantaged in numerous areas compared to older groups. He provided fascinating vignettes of how this crisis was evident, for instance in the increasing likelihood of young people committing suicide compared to older people, and the difficulty of young people being elected to the National Assembly.

CRESC Research Fellow Simone Scherger gave a lucid account of theoretical issues in the study of age and generation, paying attention in particular to the complexity of unravelling the objective and discursive dimensions of these processes. She showed how it was vital not to see generation as an alternative to social class and gender, but as intimately intertwined with these categories. Paul Higgs, Professor of the Sociology of Aging at University College London explored the emergence of the 'Third Age' and the formation of related 'generational habitus'. He argued for the role of the baby boomer generation in developing new kinds of consumerist orientations from the 1960s which they are now exhibiting in their retirement, so making the field of leisure a battleground for this grouping.



Between them, these three keynote speakers demonstrated different ways in which we could understand the role of generation in shaping cultural life. They showed the value of international comparisons in unravelling how cultural and economic aspects of generations relate to each other and to processes of ageing and the life course. In the French case, there seem particularly marked generational divisions, evident for instance in the ageing of political representatives. Afternoon papers explored these themes using recent research findings. Julia Twigg and Shinobu Majima used data from the Family Expenditure Survey since 1961 to contest the extent to which the baby boomer generation was distinctive in their cultural tastes. They showed that most changes over the past fifty years, in things such as their frequency of purchasing clothes, were linked to supply side factors, which affected most people, regardless of their generation.

Andrew Miles and Mike Savage used the qualitative life accounts of 50 year old men drawn from the National Child Development Study to emphasise the hesitancy of generational identity amongst this group. They showed, however, that this needed to be put in the broader context of a reluctance to identify with any social group. Noting how this group were a 'missing generation', who missed the heady counter cultural moments of the 1960s and joined the labour market in the depression of the later 1970s and early 1980s, they suggested that the scarring effects of these experiences was one factor why they found it difficult to talk about generation openly.

Finally, Lucy Gibson gave a fascinating account of how older musical enthusiasts identified long term threads of connection to musical enthusiasms. Even though their lives were marked by phases of lesser, or even non-involvement, these thread like connections allowed them an enduring sense of identity and belonging. The examples point to the significance and momentum of generational self identification (or its absence) which forms part of the complexity of generational processes. They underline the historical contingency of these processes which can only be unpacked by empirical research and rich case studies as the ones that were presented.

This successful workshop provided important theoretical benchmarks, and a series of fascinating case studies to reflect on the importance of generational processes in shaping cultural activity.

Anyone interested in finding out more about CRESC's programme of research in this area is invited to contact Theme 5 researchers Andrew Miles (Andrew.miles@manchester.ac.uk) or Simone Scherger (Simone.scherger@manchester.ac.uk).

SOCIAL LIFE OF METHODS

The Challenge of Digital Data: New Knowledge Spaces

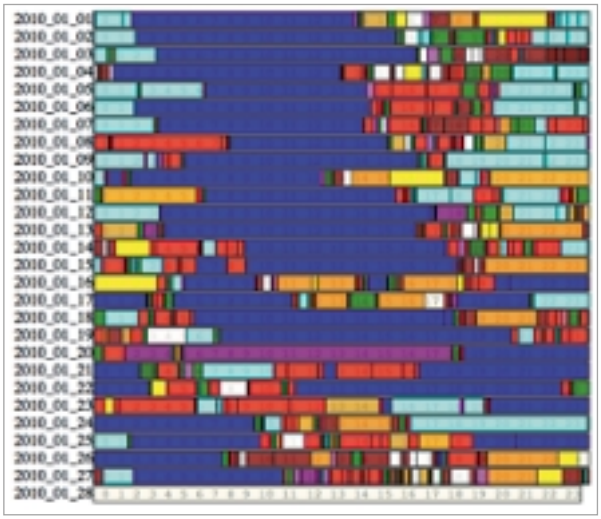
Evelyn Ruppert

How do data appear in contemporary times? How can they best be analysed? What effects do they have? These are the questions we posed as part of a research consortium that several of us at CRESC joined this past year along with colleagues from Durham, York, and the OU Business School to explore 'the public life of data'. Our discussions grew out of our work on the Social Life of Methods (SLOM) and in particular the topic that we focused on this year, that of digital data. While digitisation and digital technologies are becoming ubiquitous and part of the everyday (and research) our interests centred on how data travels and no longer resides in static archives of databases but have a lively and public life. From the data generated by online browsing and social networking sites to that of administrative and transactional activities, data travel and mediate sociality in complex and recursive patterns.

There are many challenges that these characteristics of digital data pose for social science research methods. Mike Savage and Roger Burrows in their article, 'The coming crisis of empirical sociology,' published in the journal *Sociology* (2007), claim that the widespread deployment of transactional data in business, government and administration is displacing forms of data produced by the sample survey and qualitative interview. Indeed, new data capturing devices have begun to exceed the practices of collection, surveying, coding and sampling of which social scientists are familiar. It is in this context that we have started to explore the transformative and critical potential of these data and devices for both social science research methods and the social.

To that end we have undertaken a number of activities this past year such as a reading group, workshops, journal articles, blogs and working papers. A lot of questions and issues have arisen from these activities that will be pertinent to our on-going work in SLOM especially as we shift our attention to devices, visualisation, and the transformative potential of methods. I will comment on one that we hope to explore in the coming year: what kinds of knowledge spaces are being opened up and invented?

> *"While much data is also contained, proprietary and highly regulated, at the same time online data from both corporations and governments is proliferating in ever more unexpected ways."*



Visualistion of a person's activities for one month; see http://fennetic.net/sleep/css_2010_01.html

Digital data is generated in multiple locations, and a lot of it is mobile and dynamic and freely available on the Internet. While much data is also contained, proprietary and highly regulated, at the same time online data from both corporations and governments is proliferating in ever more unexpected ways. Devices such as Google Apps and open source software are also being developed enabling people to do social science-types of analysis of this data (networks, correlations, graphs, maps). Devices for analysing this data generally model and visualise aggregate patterns, flows and configurations of connections, associations, ideas, innovations, and controversies.

Through the mediation of visualisation devices the social appears as a dynamic and living thing. If Wikipedia has challenged the authoritative knowledge of the traditional encyclopaedia, then so too are digital data and various devices challenging the expertise and data of social science research. To what extent does this involve a re-ordering of knowledge spaces and the reconceptualisation of expertise, of what counts as knowledge, and its institutional locations? Is data being liberated from the strongholds of institutions and being democratised? These are the kinds of questions we intend to pursue as we continue to investigate how methods shape and are shaped by the social worlds of which they are a part.

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SOCIAL LIFE OF METHODS

The Social Life of Method Poll Blog

John Law

The Social Life of Method (SLOM) theme explores how social research methods shape the social world – and how they're shaped by it. But what counts as a 'research method'?

The answer is: it depends. We can discuss and debate. But SLOM researchers John Law, Evelyn Ruppert and Mike Savage ran a blog during the recent 2010 UK general election in which they treated public opinion polls as social research methods.

Why? Because public opinion polls describe political realities. And, or so the three SLOM researchers argued, they also shape it and mediate it. That is, they're politically performative. It's often said that history is written by the victors. Perhaps this isn't quite right, but it is surely true that history becomes solid only after the event. So now, after the election, the UK has a coalition government, and the stories proliferate about how this (unexpected) result wasn't really entirely unexpected after all.

Here's one after-the-fact story. The UK was fed up with the incumbent Labour administration. But then again, it didn't really trust the Conservatives either. As a result it wisely chose to avoid giving any party an overall majority. And here's another after-the-event story. This says that in the UK the old class-related tribalisms have broken down. In a consumer age, the era in which over 90% of the electorate identified with the two big parties has evaporated. Footloose and fancy-free, many electors choose a party for mobile, even ephemeral, reasons. This story tells us that a coalition wasn't inevitable, but it wasn't very surprising either.

Stories like this are fine. After the event they make the election result solid, explicable, perhaps even in some sense 'predictable'. But, here's one of the core points of the CRESC election blog: it didn't look that way at the time. As the campaign unfolded day by day what was going to happen wasn't clear at all. There were lots of competing stories.

But what gave those stories credibility? One answer is: the public opinion polls. They mediated it. They told us what we 'really thought'. They told stories about what was happening, even if they did this provisionally. For (the blog also argues) any given poll was also a stop gap. It called for another poll. And another. And another.

Here's an example of how this worked: the issue as to who 'won' the first debate.

Those who listened to it on the radio thought that Labour's Gordon Brown didn't do badly. Those who watched the debate concluded that he was nowhere, that David Cameron only did moderately well, and that it was a triumph for the Lib-Dem's Nick Clegg. But how do we know this? The answer is: through the opinion polls.

So In what sense did Clegg win the debate? One answer is that he really won it, so to speak 'objectively', and that the polls were neither here nor there. Another is that in practice he won it only because the polls reported that he did. At this point his triumph became a factual story circulating through the media. It became a story that all the other political stories had to deal with if they were to be taken seriously at all. In short, Clegg won it because the polls said that he did. It became a fact.

This is an example of the 'social life of method', or so the blog argues. If you're interested you can visit it at http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/cresc/?p=71.

John Law is a CRESC director at the Open University. He can be contacted at J.Law@open.ac.uk

Working Papers

Latest Working Papers

All CRESC working papers can be downloaded from http://www.cresc.ac.uk/publications/papers.html

Working Paper No.81

The Archive in Question

Till Geiger, Niamh Moore, Mike Savage
April 2010

Working Paper No.80

Moral Outrage and Questionable Polarities: The Attack on Public Sector Pensions

Tony Cutler & Barbara Waine
April 2010

Working Paper No.79

Home is Where The Hardship is. Gender and Wealth (Dis) Accumulation in the Subprime Boom

Johnna Montgomerie & Brigitte Young
February 2010

Unveiling the Characteristics and Ideology of Turkish Business Elites

Sibel Yamak

Drawing an extensive empirical study which generated 60 interviews with business elites in Turkey, three scholars; Sibel Yamak, Ali Ergur and Artun Unsal from Galatasaray University have been investigating business elites in Turkey. One of those scholars; Sibel Yamak spent June at CRESC as invited researcher to further develop this large project.

The first part of the study is exploring different elite subgroups in terms of economic, social, cultural symbolic capital using Bourdieu's notion of 'the field'. In particular it is exploring how individual members of the management elite in Turkey mobilise their varied resources or forms of capital in order to realise elite's ambitions to hold and attain certain positions in society in Turkey and internationally. Reflecting on the interplay between individual chances and choices, the analyses also provides an authoritative assessment of the composition of business elites in Turkey in terms of their key demographic attributes, individual choices and lived experiences that account for their current standing in business and management in Turkey.

The second part of the research is studying the role of ideology, which has long been neglected in the elite literatures. In particular it is investigating shifts in ideology among Turkish entrepreneurs and top managers, following the increasing degree of internationalization in Turkey. The process of globalization has shaped a series of new modalities of economical exchange, around the wholly interconnected world market, while introducing an over-all ideology of integrated human interaction. In this socio-economic context, corporate actors have adapted their conception of trade and profit-making over the last three decades, to develop a pluralistic and comprehensive image of exchange. The recent history of Turkey has perfectly witnessed this relatively rapid transformation in capitalist activity and its ideologies. Turkish business elites reveal a nearly palpable change in their ways of thinking.


Sibel Yamak

It is now clear that Turkish business elites are evolving in a double momentum. On the one hand this is gradually separating them from the well established political elites. There is a deep commitment to the importance of global integration not simply in international firms, but even those that are most local. This is revealed in visible changes in the ideas and commitments of managers. The project reveals that a previous emphasis on patriotic prosperity (Bu_ra, 1994) has been undermined in a reconceptualised sense of individual entrepreneurship. Globalization has become an ultraliberal ideology, encouraging downsizing, increased capital flows, and communication, all of which implies an erosion of national sovereignty. Profit is no more perceived as a nationally fixed asset in a deregulated and fluctuating capitalism. An ideological commitment to market economy is also observed among Turkish business elites.

In a market where competition and performance are nearly the only criteria for survival, success is constantly glorified. Stories of personal success prioritise individual entrepreneurial abilities, which results in significant decrease of the reference to concepts such as nation, country, or feelings of patriotism among business elites. Success constitutes a meta-discourse whose sole preoccupation is individual intelligence. The concern with individual success is revealed by the tendency to avoid encounters with colleagues.

As work comes to occupy the space for thinking about economic production, it increasingly becomes a self-referential activity. It seeks to improve itself in a manner that is almost religious, with the aim of constantly generating economic activity at global scale. This new form of religious sensibility mark the basic texture of the thinking of business elites in Turkey, where neo-liberalism seems to have transformed the once very common reference to patriotism as a motive for working. Some aspects of this transformation also signal the rise of a Protestant ethic in which work becomes the equivalent of prayer.

However, though the rise of work as a new religious motivation is deep, much of the business elite is remarkably conservative in life conception, values and self-identity. At first glance, this seems to represent an overt contradiction. Nevertheless, this may also be interpreted as a form of articulation, a pragmatic solution for handling excessively rapid structural and ideological change.

Turkey is a society that is transforming at a dizzying pace. Desire for integration with the global economy energizes this dynamism, according to the interviews conducted with the business elites. Indeed, most of the business elites in Turkey take the very concept of work to be the axis of economic activity, with no altruism - for instance the idea of serving the country or nation. Thus, a direct ideological link to a liberal conception of work is observed. In spite of this devotion to neo liberal policies it is also observed that Turkish corporate elites emphasize the relations with the state. This appears to be a paradoxical finding of the study. The interviewees even claim that it is important to have favourable relations with the state to successfully run a large business. This may be an outcome of the Turkish business system which is defined as state-dependent despite the adoption of neo liberal policies over the last three decades.

Sibel Yamak is from Galatasaray University and was a Visiting Research Fellow at CRESC Manchester in June 2010

Q&A

Question and Answer: Visiting Professor Simon Parker

Mike Savage

Simon, you have been Hallsworth Visiting Professor at CRESC Manchester recently. Can you say a few words about what you have been doing during your visit and your plans for the rest of your visit?

I was very fortunate to spend a term as Hallsworth Visiting Professor in Political Economy at the University of Manchester where colleagues in both CRESC and the Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG) were kind enough to sponsor my visit. The University's outstanding reputation for urban and regional research was a strong motive for spending my sabbatical leave from the University of York in Manchester, and CRESC proved to be an ideal base from which to work. As well as delivering a paper on city rankings and the creative cities industry at the CRESC workshop on The Creative City after the Crash in June, I also gave a talk on the legacy of Henri Lefebvre and 'the right to the city' to the CRESC research seminar at the beginning of July. Along with Alan Harding at IPEG and colleagues in CRESC and the School of Environment and Development I have been involved in planning an interdisciplinary symposium that will examine the governance of cities in the wake of the 2008-9 financial crisis. A particular focus of the workshop will be the challenges facing Greater Manchester and the North West and on studies of similar 'second tier' cities in other parts of the world that can help to inform the policy and academic research agenda.

You are known as a leading international scholar of urbanism. What do you think are the most important features of urban change at the moment?

Because urban geographies continue to be characterised by uneven development, the changes that are affecting the world's cities are far from uniform. In many western urban regions, and especially in North America's so-called 'rust belt', we can observe the phenomenon of 'shrinking cities' and an ever increasing trend towards ex-urban settlements peopled by a wealthy, 'gated' elite, while the inner cities and suburbs contain only those with no possibility of escape. Similar developments can be found in Brazil, Russia, India and China (the so-called BRICs) and in highly economically polarized countries such as South Africa. This retreat into privatised, privileged, high security enclaves while more than a billion people are forced to live in slum conditions, where the little employment that is available is often not enough to feed a family, is a problem that the world's governments ignore at their peril.

Although there have been some modest advances towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the pace of urbanisation in the Global South and the newly industrialising economies is such that governments at every scale are proving powerless to cope with the enormity of the infrastructural, health, educational, welfare and security challenges. There are already many urban settlements in the world that could be described as 'stateless' and where disorganised non-legitimate violence is the only form of order on the ground. Add to this the very real and growing impact of climate change and environmental degradation, which contributes to the scarcity of drinking water and affordable food, and it is not hard to imagine that large-scale social unrest and conflict will become a regular feature of the impoverished megalopolis in years to come.

Nevertheless, where the contradictions of global capitalism are at their most intense, in regions such as Central and Latin America, South Asia and in mainland China—urban workers and migrants are beginning to organise themselves and to build an effective resistance. I believe those concerned with 'the right to the city' and social justice in the more developed countries could learn much from those on the front line of globalising neoliberalism, especially when it comes to re-empowering local communities and creating practical alternatives to the monotheism of the free market state.

You have just finished a book on the city. Do you want to say a few words about what your main arguments are?

Yes. The book is called *Cities, Politics and Power* and it tries to achieve that difficult task of surveying what is a large and varied field of urban enquiry and explaining it to the uninitiated, while attempting to offer something of interest and novelty to the more informed scholar and practitioner. I guess, in so far as the book has 'an argument' it can be found in the contents page because I deliberately set out not to write another 'who gets what, when and how' account of City Hall politics. These studies have their place, and in fact I dedicate an entire section of the book to the study of urban governance—including the role and function of political parties, interest groups, social movements, elected and non-elected officials and so forth—but what I try to show is how the 'mechanics of the urban polity' cannot be appreciated fully without an adequate understanding of the historical development of urban civil society and its antinomies—such as war, violence, and criminality. Unusually for a book of this type, I also have a significant section that is dedicated to the role of information and communication in the circuits of urban power, the importance of identity and belonging to what we might call the limits and potential of politics, and the ways in which power is configured within the urban landscape and built environment. Perhaps another of its distinctions is that the book seeks to shift attention away from an exclusive focus on the European and North American experience—while recognising that the majority of the readership will almost certainly be studying and researching these regions. So in among discussion of 'growth machines' and 'creative cities' in New York, London and Toronto, readers will find accounts of urbanisation and popular movements in China, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines.

However, if you were to ask me what the book is trying to contribute to the social theory of urban power, I would say that I try to make sense of urban power as an ensemble of 'material discourses'. These extend beyond the institutions of formal political power—such as urban governments—to include a whole range of what Foucault called *dispositifs*, or power/knowledge apparatuses, that include all the aspects of the political that I have just mentioned. I argue that only by virtue of the

[continued overleaf]

strong narrative memory of what archaeologists call synekism, the combination of surplus wealth, human ingenuity and synergy which was present in the first cities over 10,000 years ago, can these multiple power ensembles assume the spatial and systemic form that is still recognisable in the urban settlements in which we live and work today.

What have been your main impressions of CRESC during your visit? What in your view has been its most important contributions to urban research?

From day one, the staff and researchers at CRESC have been wonderfully friendly and welcoming, despite me turning up empty handed for the pot luck lunch! During any visit to CRESC one has a strong sense of it being a dynamic and supportive research community, and I am constantly impressed by the seemingly endless stream of international conferences and workshops that CRESC is involved in organising. The centre is fortunate to have such energetic and internationally renowned research staff, and a talented group of doctoral students from all over the world—not to mention CRESC's legendary administrative team. Without Josine and Bussie I would have been without a desk or even a library card, so I am particularly indebted to them for making my stay at CRESC such a smooth and rewarding experience.

Savage and Warde's *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity* has long been a key reference for me because of the authors' ability to explore wider historical and structural trends, such as inequality and uneven development, through the subject of the city. In many ways, although not explicitly urban-focused, studies such as Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst.'s *Globalization and Belonging* (which I draw on extensively in my forthcoming book) and the more recent *Class, Culture, Distinction* edited by Bennett et al. continue that tradition by relating some of these broader agendas in social change to the particularities of environment and place. In this vein, CRESC researchers have been instrumental in demonstrating the range and relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's work to a wider audience and in popularising methods such as Multiple Correspondence Analysis, which have added considerably to the repertoire of urban and regional research in recent years.

I am also excited by the prospect of CRESC's third research theme on *Governing Cultures: Cities, Policies and Heritage*, because it addresses research questions close to my own interests, including how subjects are constructed through the action of government and self-government at the level of cities and cultural policies. Work on financialisation, on national culture and inequality, and on participation all have applications in the regional and urban context and offer the potential for ongoing cooperation and the sharing of knowledge and research findings. I hope therefore that this brief sojourn at 178 Waterloo Place will prove to be the beginning of a long-running collaboration with the Centre for Research in Economic and Social Change, and I look forward to many more visits in the future.

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CRESC Annual Conference: The Social Life of Methods

31 August - 3 September 2010, Oxford

During the past century and longer, social scientific methods have come to be extensively deployed in government, administration and business, as well as in academic research. Maps, enumerations, surveys, interviews, indicators, software and visualizations proliferate. The aim of this conference is to consider how we can best understand the agency of social science methods in both shaping, and themselves being affected, by economic, social and cultural change, both historically and in the current context when digitalization poses specific challenges to established repertoires of social science methods.

Mindful of the ideas developed within Science and Technology Studies, which show how objects in the natural and medical sciences can be social agents, we seek to broaden this agenda to focus more particularly on methods within the social sciences and humanities. Papers are invited from interdisciplinary audiences addressing the following issues:

• Is it useful to explore how agency can be located in certain kinds of social scientific methodological repertoires?

• What kinds of methods succeed and which fail? What are the respective powers of different sorts of qualitative and quantitative forms of analysis? How can we explain why certain sorts of methods become hegemonic in certain domains, and what consequences follow from this?

• What is the role of the visual in social science methods? How is this changing?

• With the proliferation of digital data, are we currently seeing a crisis of standard social science methods based around the sample survey and the interview, and what does this portend for our understanding of socio-cultural change? Does the idea of a descriptive turn offer a useful way of grasping the role of these new methods?

• What is the transformative and critical potential of social science research methods, both historically and today?

The sessions in the programme have been scheduled into thematic streams enabling delegates to follow their particular interest throughout the programme. These four streams are:

1: The device: what kinds of device have come to play an important historical role, and which have failed? How can we better understand the histories of nations, social groups, individuals and organizations through a focus on devices?

2: The challenge of digital data: what is the implication of the proliferation of digital information for the ordering of economic, social, political and cultural knowledge?

3: Envisaging the visual: how have visual methods historically competed with textual and numerical methods, and how far is their role changing in the current context?

4: Transformative practice: history, discipline and movements: how can methods be mobilized to critique and challenge dominant methodological repertoires, focusing especially on the role of historical analysis, ethnographic, feminist, and subaltern methods?

Plenary speakers include: **Andrew Abbott** (University of Chicago); **Engin Isin** (Open University); **Katie King** (University of Maryland); **Patti Lather** (Ohio State University); **John Law** (CRESC, The Open University); **Ceila Lury** (Goldsmiths, University of London); **Donald Mackenzie** (University of Edinburgh); **Mark Peel** (University of Liverpool)

For more information and the full programme please go to **http://www.cresc.ac.uk/events/conference2010/index.html**