Society: Rest in Peace?

Professor Anthony Elliott
Visiting Professor
School of Sociology
and Visiting Fellow
Social Science Research Centre
University College Dublin

9 November 2010
The Masterclass is scheduled for Tuesday 9 November at the Social Science Research Centre, University College Dublin. The programme consists of the following:

9:15   Masterclass Welcome - Robert van Krieken
9:30   Society: Rest in Peace? - Introduction
10:45  Morning Tea
11:15  Society as Structure
12:45  Lunch
1:45   Society as Solidarity
3:00   Afternoon Tea
3:30   Society as Creation
4:30   Conclusions
5:00   Masterclass concludes

INTRODUCTION

SOCIETY: REST IN PEACE?

‘Society’ is one of the most fundamental words in politics and public life; it is also a term foundational to the social sciences in general and sociology in particular. Yet, in our own time, ‘society’ has never been so much in dispute and so little understood. For some critics, the notion of ‘society’ appears too consensual and collective for a world of intensive individualism. For others, the idea of ‘society’ is oppressive - the very notion, so some argue, is dismissive of the infinite social differences that shape today’s global realities.

In this intensive Masterclass - organized by the UCD Social Science Research Centre - Visiting Professor Anthony Elliott will focus on unraveling the different meanings of society as a way of introducing students to contemporary debates about it in the social sciences and humanities. In an ambitious mapping of classical and contemporary theories of society, the Masterclass will appraise the strengths and weaknesses of different ways in which sociology has deployed analytical categories and concepts for analyzing the social. From conceptions of society as providing systems, structures and security to conceptions that privilege creativity, difference
and the aesthetic, participants in the Masterclass will demonstrate that the
social is always implicated in multiple, diverse transformations.

“Society: Rest in Peace?” will provide students with interactive
interpretations of key traditions in classical social theory, including the
writings of Durkheim, Freud, Marx and Simmel, as well as clarifying how the
idea of the social has been deconstructed by such thinkers as Bauman,
Castoriadis and Kristeva. The Masterclass also questions recent fashionable
viewpoints, drawing attention to the deficiencies of recent social theories
that equate the demise of society with forces such as globalization, the
communications revolution and multiculturalism.

AGENDA and READINGS

9:15 Welcome and Introduction - Robert van Krieken
9:30 “Society: Rest in Peace”.
10:45 Morning Tea

Readings:
Frisby, D. & Sayer, D. (1986) ch 3 ‘Society as Absent Concept’ in Society,
New York: Ellis Horwood/ Travistock Publications
Theory: 10 (2): 184-193

11:15 “Society as Structure”
12:45 Lunch

Readings:
Castoriadis, Cornelius (1987) The Imaginary Institution of Society, Polity
Durkheim, Emile (1964) The Division of Labor in Society, trans. George
Simpson, New York: Free Press
(ed.), London: Routledge
Durkheim Today, New York: Berghahn Books

1:45 “Society As Solidarity”
3:00 Afternoon Tea
Readings:

3:30  *Society as Creation*  
4:30  *Conclusions*  
5:00  *Masterclass concludes*

Readings: