



Newsletter

OCTOBER 2003

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Editorial: From the Secretary

The contents of this newsletter highlight the Marienthal Conference for which Christian Fleck has been developing an exciting infrastructure. Readers will be aware that the conference site is that of the classic urban ethnography of Lazarsfeld et al: Jahoda et al *Marienthal: the sociography of an Unemployed Community*. A short update on work on Weber is also included. Members are invited to offer further contributions in what it is hoped will become an ongoing series. The annual listing of members is included, along with two obituary notes. As usual, I need to draw attention to the need for some to renew their memberships,

although I have mailed or emailed those in arrears. Membership in ISA and the section is important as without we do not attract ISA subsidy, which allows us to run the section, and particularly to provide newsletters. Indeed without membership you will not receive further newsletters or be able to contribute to conferences or attend without a fee. ISA membership is what is necessary for ISA support. A membership (renewal) form is attached at the back.

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Marienthal Conference: final call for papers

Each proposed session is listed and under each are short notes on the papers already offered/accepted for that session. The final date for acceptance of papers is the end of January, 2004 (although some late papers might be included) and the final time to register is the 28th February. A further newsletter will be circulated in February with the program.

Registration instructions are provided at the end of the roster of sessions. People giving papers must be paid-up members already, or become such as soon as their paper is tentatively accepted.

Interim Conference 2004: Research Committee on the History of Sociology, International Sociological Association

Time: Thursday, May 20 to Sunday May 23, 2004

Conference Location: Gramatneusiedl - Marienthal (20 kilometers outside of Vienna)

Hotel: Seminarhotel Velm
http://www.eco-tour.org/company/cnr_at_189en.html

B&B per person EUR 36,80 per night and breakfast.
Please book as early as possible, and certainly at least by the end of April.
Fees for non-Members are Euro 50.

Schedule:

Thursday May 20 (Catholic holiday in Austria) arrival by plane, train or car. Bus service from Vienna International Airport by advanced reservation, or by local trains from Vienna's South Station

Opening meeting in the evening
Visit of the exhibition "Marienthal Social and historical contexts of the classical study"
Reception by the Mayor of Gramatneusiedl

Friday May 21 and Saturday May 22: scientific program: Plenary and parallel sessions morning and afternoon

Friday evening: Sightseeing of the remains of the community and factory of Marienthal

Sunday May 23, departure and sightseeing tour through Vienna "Places of Political and cultural historical significance"

Call for Papers

The following sessions have already been suggested and offers of papers for these should be sent to the proposer, who is listed at the end of the proposed session. (Note: Although two papers may be offered, the conference organisers have the right to ask that one be withheld if the second stops another scholar presenting.)

General Session:

Papers may be offered irrespective of any particular streams.

Charles.Crothers@aut.ac.nz

Session: History of Sociology in Austria

According to the tradition of RCHS one session should be devoted to papers dealing with the history of sociology in Austria

Christian Fleck

christian.fleck@uni-graz.at

Papers already offered in this session:

Local speakers and other commentators

Dirk Kaesler: Max Weber in Vienna.

Proposed Session: Community studies in historical perspective

"Mariantal" is just one example of a sociological investigation which took place at a particular community. Scholars who are doing research on similar sites like Boston's North End a.k.a. Whyte's Cornerville; Muncie, Ind. (a.k.a. Lynds' Middletown); Newburyport, Massachusetts (a.k.a. Warner's Yankee City), Vidich's Small Town in Mass Society etc. are invited to contribute papers dealing with the historical development of these communities after the sociologists left the field. In addition papers on concepts as community, community study, are welcomed too.

Christian Fleck

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Papers already offered in this session:

Hans Petter Sand: The Nord-Odal project in relation to the tradition of Norwegian community studies.

Maarten Mentzel: the influence/reception of the Mariantal study in the Netherlands.

Suzanne Keller (Princeton University): Issues arising from her recent book on community

Proposed Session: Public Understanding of the Social Sciences

The social sciences, sociology in particular, emerged historically as the result of three distinct bundles of influences: The demand for data, analysis, and expertise from the welfare state and other public agencies and as a by-product of social movements, including those from intellectuals as spokesperson for the underprivileged. Aside from a pure academic, scholarly interest in social and historical processes played a crucial role in developing the discourse of sociology. However, the tension between practical oriented applied sociology and theory driven autonomous discourses characterized the history of the social sciences during the last two centuries. Concurrently sociology became more and more methodological sophisticated, similar to any other scientific discipline, and lost therefore to a certain degree ability to speak to ordinary people and to be understood by citizens. At the outset sociology was the quintessential public discipline but according to some authors this relationship became weaker and weaker during the 20th century. Nowadays sociology speaks mainly to itself, which is still true in those cases where different camps of social scientists fight each other in public making use of more or less sociologically produced data. In doing so sociologists often use a language not understandable to non-members of their 'tribe.' One could speak about a kind of vulgarisation of sociology in the wider audiences and of strengthening 'scientificity' inside the walls of sociological departments.

Christian Fleck

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Papers already offered in this session:

Andreas Hess: "A French Intellectual in Emerald's Isle: Gustave de Beaumont's *L'Irlande: Sociale, Politique et Religieuse* (1839)".

Proposed Session: Authors meets the Critics

A Selection of recent writings in the History of Sociology will be chosen around which a debate will be staged between invited critics and the author, together with the conference participants.

Charles Crothers

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Proposed Session: Sociological teaching and textbooks

What are the traditions of curriculum and textbooks in different national settings, and what factors have influenced these? (Such factors could range from training policy for the labour market to colonial dependence, from the structure of international publishing to the boundaries of cross-national linguistic or religious communities.) In particular, to what extent have textbooks and curricula been national in coverage and style and, where they have not been

purely national, have they been international, or perhaps followed patterns of political hegemony?

If several people are interested in working on this topic, it is hoped that we might (as for national sociological associations at the Montreal World Congress) produce a set of papers which could develop into a book or journal joint publication.

Jennifer Platt

J.Platt@sussex.ac.uk

Papers already offered in this session:

Suzie Guth: Durkheimian Text Books

Ray Lee: Textbook Methods In The Chicago Tradition Of The 1920s

Diego Pereyra: Argentinian Textbooks

Jennifer Platt: British Introductory Textbooks Since 1945

Hans Petter Sand: The Tradition Of Textbooks In Norwegian

Cherry Schrecker: Comparison Of Selected French And English Textbooks

Proposed Session: Research Funding

How has sociological research historically been funded in different settings, with what balance of state and private sources? Has available funding favoured certain topics, or certain categories of researcher? Have block grants been given to universities or external research institutions, or single-project grants to individuals? Has access to funding been easy, or confined to an elite? What have the intellectual consequences of the patterns observed been? Such topics could be addressed from the point of view of the researcher, of the funding agency, or of other bodies or the general public.

J.Platt@sussex.ac.uk

Proposed Session: Sociology and government

What has the relationship been between sociology and government in different national settings, with what consequences for the development of sociology? Topics under this heading could be the role of sociology in state systems of education, the employment of sociologists in government departments and the production of sociological research (broadly defined to include e.g. some aspects of censuses) by government workers, the uses made by government of sociological work done outside government, general policies for the encouragement or discouragement of all or some kinds of sociological work, etc.

Irmela Gorges

Irmela.gorges@verwalt-berlin.de

Proposed Session: The conceptual history of “Civil Society”.

Social thought is a battlefield of concept formation, and concepts form our understanding of social realities.

Concepts in social science fulfill theoretical, classificatory as well as ideological functions. That goes in particular for “civil society”, an old opaque concept that became a “bat” in the debate, in particular following the realignment of the welfare states and the Soviet implosion. It seemingly today could refer to the Mafia, stamp collectors, as well as bowling clubs. “What is civil society?” is one of the more frequent titles for books and articles, in recent decades.

In modern usage civil society does refer to something intermediary, between state and individual market society. This session welcomes contributions on the conceptual history and proper interpretation of “civil society”, from Pufendorf, Early Scottish Enlightenment, to more recent interpretations, such as Edward Shils and communitarian scholars. Pufendorf does not use the very concept but creates its agenda, in the wake of the religious wars. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers speak of discussion of “commercial society” (Smith) or “polished society” (Ferguson). The rich supply of variations of the concept, some of the deliberately issued as “alternative concepts” calls for discursive clarification and contextualization.

Sven-Eliaeson

seliaes@ceu.edu.pl

Papers already offered in this session:

Rosalind Sydie: the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau in respect to their position on civility and good citizenship.

Sven Eliaeson: Conceptual History Of “Civil Society”: Swedish Exceptionalism.

Proposed Session: The impact of the classics on the discipline of sociology in non-western countries

Papers of this session should discuss the impact of the ‘classic’ sociologists from Europe and the US on the development of the discipline sociology in any other country with a native language that is not German, English or French. The papers may reach from Marx, Max Weber, Durkheim to Parsons or other ‘classics’. Preferably the impact of those sociologists should be discussed who have written their influential oeuvres up to the end of World War II. The papers can focus on the reception of sociological ideas in nations or regions like the eastern part of Europe but also Spain or Portugal, Asia, Africa or South America. They may deal with any aspect of the transfer of ideas, like the impact on the development of theories, methods, the interpretation of sociological terms or the application of sociological knowledge in a respective country

Gina Zabudovsky, Mexico City, Mexico, ginaza@servidor.unam.mx

Irmela Gorges, Berlin, Germany: Irmela.Gorges@verwalt-berlin.de

Papers already offered in this session:

Jeremy Smith: Western Sociology: Japanese social thought: intercivilizational encounters during the Meiji Era

REGISTRATION

Please send an email (or letter) to Christian Fleck, Institute of Sociology, University of Graz (with a copy to the Hotel) with the following information.

christian.fleck@uni-graz.at and
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Name:

Address:

Accommodation requirements:

Intended Travel arrangements after
arriving in Vienna:

Reflections on "recent" Weberology.

Sven Eliaeson

1904 was a momentous year in Max Weber's life. He wrote his most important methodological essay, on Objectivity. The reason I call it the most important one, is that it touches upon several of the paradigmatic divides which Weber had to react upon, all of them one way or another relating to the problems of (how to avoid) uncontrolled value intrusion. His comparative sociology of religion had its take off, with the work on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Both the methodological essay and PESC were published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, where he became co-editor 1904. During this year he also traveled the USA together with his wife and his neighbour Ernst Troeltsch. America has an energizing effect on visiting Europeans. Weber's works after 1904 are full of American allusions and examples. He also visited hillbilly relatives in Mount Airy, North Carolina, and the ensuing so called Sect-essay is a shortcut to his Calvinist thesis, how the original motive, religious "book keeping" with day of judgment in mind, is forgotten but the secular pattern routinized, with inner-worldly unintended consequences.

Rational time management, hard work, and an efficient legal system and law enforcement are all basic to dynamic capitalist development. As we all know Weber is interested in the unique character of Western civilization: how tiny Europe could trigger off an irreversible development into "Fordism" and the squirrel's wheel of rationality that went global in short time. I would like, however, to stress the "other side of the coin", Weber's relevance for related modern discourse on multiple Modernities and the axial age, which is pivotal also for the avoidance of teleology and ethnocentrism in modernization theorizing. This might bring neglected parts of Weber's sociology of religion into focus. Wolfgang Schluchter has done much basic work on Weber's comparative sociology of religion and S N Eisenstadt provided the very metaphor, of multiple Modernity. There are reasons for ambiguity. The general "take" is quite presentist, with the

traps of erroneous interpretation this implies, yet indeed very helpful, in for instance discussing developmental strategies in countries such as Kyrgyzstan, with the mixed legacy of communist secularization and pre-Enlightenment Islam. So there is an obvious relevance for current discussions about transitology vs transformation theory East of Elbe, in particular the question what parts of the Western legacy that applies. That's nice, but evidently this immediately invokes dangers in the proper pursuit of intellectual history, deforming the classics into what we want them to be.

Returning to 1904: When Weber delivered his lecture at Münsterberg's conference in St Louis it was the first time in seven years he faced an audience. His topic was agrarian political economy East of Elbe, so he continued where he had stopped in the late 90s.

There are a few upcoming centennial conferences. In Munich Dr Ay at the Bavarian academy is organizing a conference on Weber's methodology and its reception, a bridge building theme, since most of the methodological reception history brings us to the USA. In London the Max Weber Study Group (Sam Whimster knows more) prepares a conference on Weber's sociology of religion. (www.maxweberstudies.org). It is noteworthy that we all of a sudden have two new translations of PESC, by Stephen Kalberg and Peter Baehr & Gordon Wells replacing Parsons's old and flawed one. A third translation by Peter Ghosh (Oxford UP, 2004) is also under way, expected to appear "within shortly". Ghosh's ambition is to track down Weber's sources. So maybe we find the answer to who the mysterious Murray is, to whom Weber refers in PESC.

There is a certain deficit in Weberology, in so far as the American experience has not yet really been evaluated. There is a rich source material, some 150 letters, many of them to Mother Helene. They are kept in the original in Berlin (the *Nachlass* collections in *Preussische Staatsarchiv* that used to be in Merseburg, now in Archivstrasse in Berlin-Dahlem) and in machine typed copies in STABI (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) in Munich. Hans Rollmann and Wolfgang Mommsen have written recent accounts. Lawrence Scaff has written on Max and Marianne in America and is likely to take up the theme again.

Schütz, Parsons and Lazarsfeld are all intellectual migrants bringing Weber over the ocean and building their respective paradigm upon what they conceive of as Weberian methodological foundations. The Icarian attempts at a *Gesamtdeutung* - Hennis's is probably the last one - are now increasingly replaced by more modest and solid works on various aspects of Weber. Richard Swedberg and Zenonas Norkus don't claim that Weber is a rational choice theoretician. They are "vacuum cleaning" Weber's production for what is relevant for "economic sociology" and for balancing the account between *Homo Oeconomicus* and *Homo Sociologicus*. Certainly this line of interpretation is highly intriguing for the understanding of Weber as an anti-sociologist within sociology. Sociology is born in Scottish Enlightenment but Weber belongs to a much older tradition of secularization and anti-natural law, with the rational economic actor as basic metaphor, that goes back to Machiavelli's instrumental manual for stabilizing state power, elaborated by Hobbes's rational self-interest

as source of legitimacy, philosophically further underpinned by Hume and Bentham, later followed up by Gunnar Myrdal's social engineering, rationalizing value-hierarchies with incommensurable top-values. The basic Hobbesian theme is also imminent in Parsons and Habermas. One might even say, perhaps violating the methodological commandments of Quentin Skinner, that Hobbes's views on nominalism anticipate the relativism inherent in neo-Kantian concept formation and relativism.

The notion of an essential Weber might perhaps reflect an erroneous ambition. The search for the key to Weber certainly nevertheless produces a whole lot of knowledge over neglected connections, only to mention Weber and various anarchists and *literateurs* in Schwabing (Erich Mühsam, Ernst Toller) and Weber and his women, Helene, Marianne, Mina and Else.⁰ Weber had no high thoughts of *literateurs* and café revolutionaries, but he nevertheless had serious and probably formative contacts with them. He explicitly regarded Toller as a serious person, clear from Weber's interventions, to help him make his voice heard in the public sphere, and also to save his life, witnessing in his favour in court after the Bavarian soviet (Räterepublik).

Guenter Roth's fat volume on Weber's family history and Weber as a cosmopolitan and Would-be-Englishman is both very impressive and indeed very intriguing. It supplements what we know about Weber's national and patriotic allegiances. It further indicates that there is no necessary contradiction between a contextualist and presentist approach, rather an inter-dependence is implied. It is hard to conceive of a more contextualist endeavour - Quentin Skinner's call for ever more idiographical details is here well satisfied. Yet Roth's ambition is imprinted by today's debate and normative concerns, stressing the cosmopolitan and multi-cultural aspect of dynamic capitalism. This falls *gleich ins Thema* in the post 1989 debates.

Sam Whimster is just about to publish a reader with the methodologically intriguing title *The Essential Weber* (Routledge 2004). This volume collects the primary discourse, Weber's own texts, with very good didactic and pedagogic comments.

There are reportedly a number of biographical works under way. Kaesler is collecting material on a large scale and plans a major biography. F Ringer is working on a continuation of his methodology book. W Mommsen is since long contracted by a major British publisher. Scaff is supposed to return to Weber, following the Janik and Toulmin approach writing on "Max Weber's Germany", as well as finishing a work on the Weber's in America.

Uta Gerhardt's recent book on *Idealtypus* offers among other things a central account of the reception history; it appears to me as a weighty contribution from the sociological perspective on Weber's work. John Drysdale's work on concept formation has resulted in a couple of articles and is expected to shape up into a monograph.

Wilhelm Hennis, however, is persistent in his search for *the* key to Weber as a whole. The latest suggestion is Thucydides. There might be a Greek link in Weber's political thought, for instance when he discusses the limits of direct democracy in *GPS* (or *P W*, English translation in selection), but Hennis's

documentation appears as rather weak, which is also pointed out in reactions of “controlled politeness” in German dailies (such as review in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*).

In Europe “recent” could refer to recent decades, while in the more hectic USA it refers to recent years. If we allow ourselves to look into the rear mirror Kari Palonen of Jyväskylä has done important work on Weber and contingency, catching *the Moment* under uncertainty, as a relevant approach in political philosophy involving also Weber, in addition to Machiavelli and Pocock. Bjarne Jacobsen in Aarhus has scrutinized Weber and the neo-Kantian philosopher Albert Lange. Both Palonen and Jacobsen mainly write in German, which has proved an impediment to the reception their works deserve. Weber invites to bridge-building, not only over paradigmatic divides but also language-gaps.

Palonen took the initiative to a symposium at SCASSS in Upsala early May 2003, on Weber’s relevance for political theory today. I was involved as a co-organizer and Björn Wittrock as a benevolent *Schirmherr*. Several RCHS-members took part, only to mention Peter Lassman, whose presentation dealt with comparative value-incommensurability, involving not only Weber but also Isaiah Berlin. We will try to bring about a thematic issue of *MWS*, with contributions also from – among others – Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger, Michael Greven (full program easy to locate via Google, but some contributions might be published separately). Papers from the symposium in Upsala are being submitted to *Max Weber Studies* and will be published as a special edition, very likely entitled *Max Weber’s Relevance for Modern Politics*.

Weber also had a high omnipotence at the annual conference of International Social Theory Consortium (website: www.Socialtheory.org/) at North Redington Beach, FL, later in May, with Weber-relevant contributions by Arpad Szokolczai, P. Lassman, myself, Adair-Toteff and Dirk Taenzler – and several others.

Of course Weber has a high omnipresence and omnipotence in many areas of research and reflections in social thought.

There are a number of “Weber and...” . that might contribute to discursive cohesiveness and cumulativeness in intellectual history. By definition the Weber and...-industry is inexhaustible but I would personally look forward to:

Weber and Tocqueville
Weber and Gunnar Myrdal
Weber and Carl Schmitt
Weber and nation building
Weber and post-Modernity
Weber and Russia
Weber and Mannheim
Weber and Troeltsch
Weber’s criticism of Ostwald
Tenbruck on Weber

Now of course important work has been done in several of these fields, only to mention David Kettler on Weber and Mannheim. Troeltsch-link will be explorede by both Austin Harrington and Christopher Adair-Toteff. Weber and Carl Schmitt is no virgin field but has not been really exhausted. Stellan Andersson has started on Weber and Myrdal.

⁰ I have in mind the edited volume *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy* (Whimster, ed., 1999) and contributions to *Max Weber Studies*. There is also another volume, on the essential Weber, now in print.

Obituaries of 2 Former RCHS Presidents

Kurt H. Wolff

Kurt Heinrich Wolff (1912-2003) served as both President (1988-1992) and Vice-President (1983-1988) of the RCHS. He was active in the ISA from the 1950s to the 1990s.

Wolff is often perceived as a sociologist who wrote largely in reaction against the dominant positivist strain in American Sociology. His work, however, should be located more broadly, namely, as standing within a German tradition of social thought that finds its origin in the literary movement led by Goethe and Schiller two centuries ago, German Romanticism.

Central to this tradition were two themes. First, the autonomy and principled inviolability of the individual, and the understanding of each person as endowed with a unique bundle of talents. To the German romantics the purpose of life involved the discovery of the self - its uniqueness and particular creative capacities - and then the pursuit of an endeavour corresponding to the discovered talents. The identification of the self is accomplished through a placing of the self in many experiential settings and a concomitant introspective evaluation of the self's unique qualities.

Also pivotal in German Romanticism was universalism. A great emphasis is placed upon the fundamental unity, equality, and brotherhood of the human species; all insider/outsider dualisms, whether rooted in ethnicity, religion, class, or gender, are rejected. Wolff's concept "surrender" implies a radical movement toward "the other." A "cognitive love" of the other is foundational. The researcher "loses himself in the other"; the other is encountered without suspicion. Indeed, a "subject" here – the other - is not only recognized by Wolff's "epistemology of the heart," but also genuinely respected on his or her own terms and acknowledged as inviolable for the simple reason that the other is unquestioningly viewed as possessing an autonomous, creative, authentic, and unique self which must be pure. Empathy, trust, and "love" are unhindered; the other is deserving of all.

The autonomy, creativity, authenticity, and fundamental goodness of the individual as expressed by the German romantics is here evident in Wolff's

"surrender." Also manifest, however, is their emphasis upon universalism. "Surrender" is, for him, never qualified; rather, it takes place universally - without reservation in respect to ethnic, religious, regional, national, or gender groupings. American liberalism does not ground these ideas.

However, the origins of Wolff's thinking must be located outside American social thought in another manner. A further central source of its foundational humanism is a direct reaction against the event that, far more than any other, shaped his thinking: the Holocaust. The invidious dualisms at the foundation of the Holocaust - Germans and Jews, Germans and Gypsies, Germans and Communists, etc. - called forth the greatest evil. "Surrender" reacts with unequivocal clarity, forcefulness, and horror against such dualisms.

How did this occur? As almost all educated German Jews of his generation, Wolff felt himself to be culturally German - a member of the "Bildungsbürgerertum", or educated class, and an inheritor of the ideals of German Romanticism of Goethe and Schiller, as well as Kant. "Surrender" sought, in the aftermath of the Holocaust: that is, the victory in Germany of all that stood against German Romanticism's emphasis upon universalism on the one hand and the autonomy, creativity, unique authenticity, and inviolability of the individual on the other hand - to resuscitate these German ideals. Here Wolff's work stands in line also with Marx and the neo-Marxism of Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as the sociology of knowledge of his teacher Karl Mannheim and the sociologies of both Georg Simmel and Max Weber.

Of great irony is the fact that, although Wolff's entire sociology can be read as an unqualified statement against evil, to many it remained unclear on the problem of moral relativism.

If the other is respected and unequivocally loved, and if all are radically influenced by their social contexts - as Wolff, following Mannheim, also argued - how can the other be held accountable for heinous acts? He was well aware of this unresolved dilemma; indeed, shortly before his death he was writing an essay intended to answer a critic who had long ago raised just this issue.

Wolff's sociology rejected emphatically the positivist thrust in the United States, both its rendering of subjects into objects reacting to multiple "social structures" and its separation of "facts" and "values." He insisted instead that the uniqueness of individuals must be acknowledged and an emancipatory agenda must be pursued. Sociology must be engaged in the world and address its problems directly and on a regular basis. Here Wolff again stood clearly within a German tradition, one that ran from Marx to Adorno, Horkheimer, and Mannheim.

That Wolff's sociology found scarcely an echo in the United States is not surprising. It remained in the end too European and too unorthodox, namely, in its incapacity to meet the touchstone test applied by American sociology to all new schools: can the theory be operationalized? Here the two streams could never meet. Wolff's sociology stood clearly on the one hand within a German tradition that has to this day been received only in fragments in the United States, and on the other hand as a direct response to the evil of the Holocaust. American sociology remains to this day predominantly Durkheimian, Parsonsian,

positivist, uncritical of either capitalism or modernity in any fundamental sense, and uninfluenced by the Holocaust.

Finally, when we attempt to understand Wolff's work as a whole we are awed by its integrity and internal dignity. Through relentless, even heroic, effort that continued unabated almost to his dying day, he pursued, in a single-minded manner and with vast internal strength, his life project and finished it. Remarkably, Wolff's mission was not one that, in the end, was Self-created. We can only imagine, had this been the case, the heights he would have attained. Rather, his life's work was given to him by the fate of history in a manner more directly than often occurs. He lived up to the challenge; he completed his task - and far more, as is evident from the many testimonials over the years from his many students.

Stephen Kalberg (Boston University): from his memorial talk on Wolff.

Lewis Coser

Lewis Coser was Vice-President of RC08 (19978-1983), President (1992-1998) and on the executive (1983-1992).

After having been forced out of two countries, Lewis A. Coser, born in Berlin, arrived alone on American shores in 1941. He was penniless and carried one small bag. Uprooted twice and surely traumatized, out of his "handful of thistles" (the title of his collected essays volume) he shaped a distinguished and noble life that bound together scholarship and politics in equal measure. Most of the twentieth century's major "macro and micro" upheavals intersected directly with his journey.

At the center of his scholarship, often in concealed forms, stood a major theme in the works of his spiritual mentor, Georg Simmel: marginality. This (as he would have said) was not by chance. The son of a strict Lutheran mother and a Jewish banker father, he became a rebel and left-wing radical in Weimar Germany—and aware of himself as a Jew. He then found a home in Paris (1933-41) and became a *citoyen*—until rounded up and sent to a labour camp. In the 1940s he fell in with a crowd of Leftist intellectuals in New York City. Although at the time too far to the Left (and too European) to feel fully at home in the American political landscape, he discovered in the late 1960s, after several visits to Europe, that he was more American than European. Even in sociology, and despite having moved from Marx to Weber, Simmel, and (not least) Merton, he always described himself as a "heretic within the church of Structural-Functionalism." Although fully dedicated to the discipline (and a scholar who unfailingly read the major journals from cover to cover) and a major civic player for more than 40 years, from time to time he immersed himself in fiction and world politics—while *The Functions of Social Conflict*, a classic text instrumental in weakening the Parsonsian hegemony, became one of the most widely read and translated books in post-war American sociology. At times one wondered whether his comparative-historical writings on "greedy organizations" (which thoroughly encompass the individual) might not have contained an element of personal longing. Not by chance, more than half of his 18 books charted out how ideas and theories can only fully be understood if located in their political, social, and intellectual

contexts (*Men of Ideas and Masters of Sociological Thought*). He abhorred “the foreshortening of historical vision” that led to a “parochialism of the contemporary.”

The “wanderer” immigrant in possession of “the bird’s eye view” produced, in every decade from 1950 to 1990, classic works that broadly influenced the discipline and from which we benefit deeply, even today. Magnanimous and engaged, Lew Coser eventually became convinced that he belonged in American scholarship and politics. Here his thistles intertwined.

Stephen Kalberg (Boston University) From his remembrance published in Footnotes (ASA)

ISA/RC08 Memberships

According to ISA records the following are paid-up members of RC08. Information on each includes name, institutional base, email and year to which they are paid up for RC08 and ISA. Other Memberships of RC08 held without ISA membership will be listed in the next newsletter.

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