❑ MICHAEL KEITH
Goldsmiths, University of London

Public sociology? Between heroic immersion and critical distance: Personal reflections on academic engagement with political life

Abstract
This article attempts to disrupt some of the ways in which engaged social science at times is forced to choose between the *technocratic* workings of the state and the *political* world of civil society. In disrupting the common sense distinction between 'critical distance' and 'heroic immersion' in the everyday life of the city, the piece tries to reframe an understanding of what the 'public sociology' powerfully advocated by Michael Burawoy, when chair of the American Sociological Association, might achieve. Rather than conceptualize the ways in which particular knowledges enter into the public realm, we might alternatively think through the manner in which these forms of knowledge themselves constitute publics, congregate audiences around particular forms of expertise that need to be drawn on pragmatically and instrumentally in attempts both to achieve the good society and to link the academy to the civil realm. To do so we might also need to refigure the relation between the sentimental and the rational in the operating of state bureaucracy and the powerful economization of everyday life that sets precedent for the more influential forms of public engagement.

Key words: bureaucracy, economization, governance, public sociology, Tower Hamlets

One evening in the mid 1990s – not long a councillor – I made the short walk from the flat where I live to Shadwell station to take the Docklands Light Rail (DLR) to Canary Wharf. I was tired because the night before there had been a mini 'riot' in the area around Cable Street between kids from two neighbouring estates, one at the time mostly Bengali, the other at that time mostly white (and African Caribbean). The daily walk across the Exeter estate to Stepney Green School by

© *Critical Social Policy Ltd* 2008 0261–0183 96 Vol. 28(3): 320–334: 091272
Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
©2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

SAGE PUBLICATIONS, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore, 10.1177/0261018308091272

Bengali boys from Shadwell had become one of many contested routes through the city. The micro geographies of the East End – that once differentiated 'Catholic Wapping' from 'Jewish Stepney' or the white Isle of Dogs from multicultural Spitalfields – continue to mutate and the prosaic routines of walking, shopping and worshipping refigure these landscapes just as powerfully as the empirically visible markers of workplace and residential segregation that become the easier focus of conventional academic scrutiny.

I had come into mainstream politics through the combination of academic interest in the racialized politics of the disturbances of the 1980s (Keith, 1993) and related voluntary engagements in a number of organizations that worked at the interface of the criminal justice system and young people's lives. Never particularly interested previously in the 'party political', the municipal socialism of 1980s London was a more picaresque backdrop to research than a tempting stage set for career advance. Even the populism of 1980s Lambeth and the dramatic scene of Brixton uprisings was qualified by an ethnographic participation in a public meeting in 1984 at which myself and two other PhD students 'researching policing' constituted approximately half the audience empowered to consult with the Metropolitan Police.

Personally things changed when one Dereck Beackon won the British National Party's first council seat nationally in an electoral success on the Isle of Dogs, at the heart of the major regeneration of London's Docklands in 1993. The town hall, once at best an invocation of municipal worthiness and more often of something more sectarian, seemed somehow more important. The right to be bored with politicians that did mundane things poorly began to look complacent or even irresponsible when there was a possibility that one of the Balkanized 'neighbourhood councils' that ran Tower Hamlets at that time in the name of decentralization and participatory democracy might be run by the fascists. The solitary victory of a BNP councillor traumatized the area, polarized the place where I lived, was related to escalating racial attacks and made national news.

So the May 1994 local authority elections felt, subjectively at least, more important and involvement in campaigns around Beackon's egregious presence and the local elections led almost incidentally to my standing in a by-election for the council shortly afterwards in August 1994, in a ward where a sophisticated Bangladeshi machine politics looked for a sympathetic white face. After drinking too much one night in an East End lock up with Bengali friends that were of both the 'machine' and the card

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

school based in the pub, I had agreed to put my name forward; less an academic engagement with the political than an accidental councillor.

So that evening, by Shadwell DLR, I met several people that I knew, some of whom had been (locked up) in what was then Leman Street nick in the early hours after our 'riot' that had never made the television news, and I was delayed for a while talking to people that wanted to know what was happening to friends that were either in hospital or in prison. Half a dozen DLR stations later, as the 'chair' of the council's 'regeneration committee' I was the guest of Canary Wharf Group, at a discussion about the return to London of the Reichman family. The Reichman brothers had once run the Canary Wharf complex in their guise as the unlisted company Olympia and York. From Shadwell 'front line' to butlered service on the 30th floor of 1 Canada Square. The building which when redundant after the 1980s property crash, Iain Sinclair (1991) had suggested in his novel *Downriver* might be suitably occupied by the Vatican (with white smoke emitting from César Pelli's iconic pyramid at the top of 1 Canada Square on the annunciation of the new pope) was now reinstated at the heart of what was to become the fastest growing financial centre of Britain. Subsequently, in the late 1990s and first couple of years of the 21st century almost a quarter of London's commercial property development took place in the area around the Canary Wharf estate and on the borders of the City Fringe, a concentration of growth that both irked the City Corporation next door and had major impacts locally.

So this move from the street to the lofty height might be represented as axiomatic – a change of position, of dress code, of postcode, of view, of company, of subject matter. In one step from immersion in the flux of street politics to the self-indulgent bureaucratic deliberations of critical distance. But such a narrative is freighted with clichés that at times can emerge as a privileging of ethnographic proximity to the cultures of the street (Wacquant, 2002: 1521). Interestingly, reading against the grain, the Reichman's family story is one of victimization by Austrian fascists and shelter in North Africa through the Second World War years because of British rejection of the right of refuge. Their return to Canary Wharf was consequently marked by the lighting up of the building in green to celebrate Eid and recognize a family sense of Islamic hospitality that nuanced at least some relations. And conversely, as Stuart Hall (1982) pointed out in an early edition of *Critical Social Policy*, there is an unfortunate tendency for the left to invest vicariously in the street politics of racialized minorities that are

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

supposed to bear the flame of the storming of the Winter Palace whilst suffering the privations of state violence and criminalization.

So in this piece there is a suggestion that we might wish to reconsider the sorts of polarities that such axiomatic positioning offers, to disturb both the notion of the academic as source of technocratic knowledge and the more Gramscian invocations of the organic intellectual, to privilege neither but see the problems of both. Loic Wacquant (1997: 346) has also contrasted 'intensive, ground level scrutiny based on direct observation – as opposed to measurements effected from a distance by survey bureaucracies utterly unfit to probe and scrutinize the life of marginalized populations'. This article attempts to disrupt this juxtaposition slightly, intimating that valorizing a certain form of ethnographic positioning, and aspiring to a 'carnal sociology' from the body in understanding the production of the habitus (Wacquant, 2005) is not quite so at odds with a simultaneous engagement with the bureaucratic rationalities Wacquant disavows.

Through a brief exploration of some of the tensions between the pragmatic and the principled it might just be possible to recognize that the incommensurabilities of academic and political imperatives might offer occasional spaces for the recognition of different knowledges within the political system that might move on systems of recognition and redistribution in a way that is more progressive than we might fear. In this context the fact that certain subjects can speak in certain ways and certain times and others cannot might suggest a thinking through of the sorts of knowledges that might be valorized in academic engagement with the political.

More poignantly, the relation of the left to mainstream politics has frequently been traumatized by the sense at which the operation of power is forever disappointing, a sell out or a betrayal. If the temptation for the academic to remain Pontius Pilate like, with clean hands and a pious expression, or else as a technocratic functionary within the system, is as old as political theory, then the contemporary British context is not only inflected by the demands of the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) and the HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) rules but is also qualified by the curious ways in which the production of knowledges itself is treated within the political system. And it is this latter element that it might be worth considering a little further. The argument here is that the ways in which certain knowledges are valorized privilege some forms of academic engagement and disqualify others in ways that we might wish to consider carefully. Framing the

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

nature of the relationship between the bureaucratic and the political, the economization of everyday life and problem of liberal government, certain knowledges perform in the political arena where others do not. In this sense it might be worth considering less the clichéd oppositions that emerge from the juxtaposition of heroic immersion and critical distance than a reframing of how academic disciplines, traditions and paradigms instrumentally engage with the political process. In passing this takes us beyond a caricatured debate about the epistemological substance of such work. If we can understand why certain forms of academic scholarship work well in some places and not in others then we begin to subvert a sense of the putative relativism of the postmodern or the positivist fallacy that to know all is to measure all.

On bureaucratic reason

London changes rapidly. The city invents itself anew with a regularity that is beguiling but also can be confusing. So does the function, form and personnel of governance. A project initiated by colleagues at the Centre for Urban and Community Research in 2007 and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was titled 'Fluid communities and solid structures' (http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr/research/) to give a sense of the manner in which local government was or was not able to accommodate the rapid demographic transitions of a decade of mutating multiculture. Ironically, one of the findings of the research was that the networks and 'soft' infrastructure of community formation were frequently almost more 'permanent' than the rapidly restructuring, reconfiguring 'right sized' bureaucracies of the town hall. The solid structures melted into air almost as quickly as the fluid communities coalesced around the places and the spaces of the city.

So in making sense of metropolitan governance how do we think about the structures of government that are themselves subject to scrutiny in the disciplines of social policy and politics and yet are also the source of particular forms of credentialism, closure and career advance that focus on particular sources of 'best practice', management speak and consultancy expertise? One way might be to return us to the work of Max Weber, whose take on bureaucracy was less sanguine than is sometimes suggested but whose work is singularly insightful in understanding the systemic tension between the political and the

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

bureaucratic. Through Weberian insights it is possible to understand the prerogative of the political as the moment of disruption and the moment of the bureaucratic as the imperative of reproduction. And to understand the ethical nature of each, notwithstanding the incommensurability of both.

In part such a move might valorize the functioning of the bureaucrat as unlikely hero of the urban arena. There is a sense in which a serious engagement with the protocols, practice and ethics of the bureau is more important than Wacquant's positioning suggests (du Gay, 2000). But in such a context an ethnographic understanding of the relationship between the bureau and the political might also illuminate the potential of a different form of public sociology that demands both more descriptive detail about the minutiae of institutions of local governance and a clearer analytical take on how such institutions are patterned, subdivided and driven.

Any suggestion that a local authority represents the cumulative power of a singular function ('the local state') strikes most as implausible through their empirical engagements with local councils up and down the country. The notion that maybe it should not do so might appear at first sight to be less obvious. Yet at the most basic level the institutional forms of local governance are constituted by a series of managerial and executive functions that may or may not sit under the democratic control of the local council. Moreover, the contested arenas at the heart of the political process at some moments in history focus on some functions or points of governance failure and then at others on something else again. The discovery of the social and the fears of the city were closely related in the late 19th Century industrial metropolis and the regular failings to sustain the clean street and the healthy social body (Osborne, 1998). In this setting there has always been something slightly arbitrary about the functions that are controlled by the local council and those that are controlled by police boards, health authorities or arm's length regulatory institutions. In Victorian London sanitation and the boards of works were at the heart of the political action, the municipal land banks and vote banks of social housing were the crucible of mid 20th Century municipal politics and the red, green and radical politics of 1980s London. These new social movements became key political actors with a cast list structured by consumption and a lifestyle structured by local political cultures. Maybe in the London of the 21st Century, the agenda of contest switches back to the sustainability of the city itself.

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

In this sense, structures of governance are in some ways arbitrarily politicized but also, in their British forms, commonly the source of a social settlement that bears the imprint of past political struggles that have been normalized. The amount of work involved in British local authorities addressing the rights of the homeless to be housed is just one example of many progressive advances in local governance that was once the subject of fierce contest but by the 1990s becomes the less glamorous routine of homeless officers of the council, waiting lists and bed and breakfast accommodation. It also bears little correspondence with, for example, the very different local politics of housing in ostensibly similar welfare states in Australia or Germany. In such settings the interplay of the technocratic and the sentimental is important to understand within the rules of the bureaucracy. The value of bureaucracy – in its Weberian sense of dispassionate, regulated, transparent and repetitive processes of decision making – suddenly appears both more elusive and more valued when advocating for the many in London in need of a house, a home or a move away from intense forms of overcrowding that characterize much of the inner ring of boroughs.

Weber's bureau is politically neutral; it serves equally the despot, the enlightened monarch or the legitimate plebiscite. But it also sits in incommensurable tension with the political. Bureaucracy demands ideological stasis, the political is in most theoretical conceptualizations framed by a sense of contested change (Barry, 2001: 3–7 and Ch. 9). In passing, it is for these reasons that a study of the interface of multicultural dynamics and bureaucratic process is essential (and frequently forgotten) in a study of 'race relations sociology' (Keith, 2005: Ch. 3).

In this sense there is an academic function that might take as axiomatic the bureaucratic imperatives that inform each of the subsections of the bureau (and each of the silos of local governance) and consider in turn the knowledges that become useful at particular times. In social services (or more recently children's services) departments, particular forms of sociology define families, children and elderly as 'at risk', actuarial calculations match resource rationing with local authority budgets to define eligibility criteria for the rationing of welfare state support. In the realm of development control, particular notions of the good city are premised on the notion of functional land use zoning, rooted in a technocratic urbanism. The landlord function of council homes, housing associations and new 'arm's length management organizations' depend on both the calculus of expenditure and rental return and an

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

assortment of normative figurations of the social world. Construction equations and refurbishment costs that match build costs, ecological obligations, density potential and the offset of land costs and private sales that define the political economy of social housing are conflated with more 'moral knowledges' of social mixing that prescribe mixed neighbourhoods as preferable to sink concentrations of new housing estates with 90% of tenants on housing benefit. And in the licensing of drinking, feasting and having a good time the various regulatory regimes of local governance encode normative models of the 24 hour city, new consumer cultures and forms of work time/leisure time flexibility that sit just below the surface of apparently mundane functions.

For Weber the bureau is coded to reproduce the status quo, the politician the challenger of it. But if we are to understand the proper role of a 'public sociology' or the engagement of the academy and public life then it is worth thinking through, in a little more detail, the ways in which we understand both the working of the former and the sorts of information that might be useful to the latter.

Crudely put we need both the forms of *technocratic* knowledge that might make the workings of the bureau transparent both to itself and to its public (to ensure for example the 'fair' working of the rationing of the scarce resource of social housing in the allocation of new tenancies) and the forms of *ethical* knowledge that might challenge the status quo itself (when for example new priorities emerge in the turbulence of city change and the ethical settlement of social form). To take just one example: in the late 1990s an ageing demographic within the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets prompted a number of activists to demand the provision of a facility that catered for Muslim needs of the newly elderly. Supporting this strongly politically, colleagues and myself went through a painful process by which a partnership with a housing association (putatively 'privatizing' the service), a development deal on a land site in my ward and – most fundamentally – the recognition of particular cultural rights were supported by some parts of the bureaucracy but opposed by others. Most vividly, David Davis, then shadow Home Secretary denounced the proposals vigorously, leading to demands in the tabloid press that the facility be torn down. Importantly, a debate about welfare provision, a deal around the financially plausible and – most significantly here – a debate about when the 'separation' of multicultural difference trumps the solidarities of integrated service delivery are conflated around a single development site.

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

The site became the Sonali Gardens Day Care Centre in Shadwell, won many awards and subsequently the support of even the Conservative Party at the local level. But hindsight is easy and the project might have fallen on many occasions. However, the forms of knowledge in play, including a debate on a new moment in the local identity politics of recognition (of 'Muslim needs'), a new eligibility subject position (both *demographically* in terms of the Bangladeshi community and *categorically* in terms of 'the Muslim elderly') and a new form of service provision (combining the community sector with a housing association) all replay a particular choreography.

In this dance the old eligibility and priority criteria of a well run welfare system sit at odds with these contested measures of a new ethical settlement. In this particular instance it is not particularly helpful to label the old 'bureaucracy' racist, any more than it was helpful to stigmatize the new form of provision in Sonali Gardens as a form of apartheid as some in the national tabloid press preferred. Change is prompted by the political trumping of bureaucratic processes but rests on the implicit and sometimes explicit knowledges that are sociological and ethical, routed through the imperatives of contemporary multiculturalism. Personal experience showed that wrongly presented they can result in both a personal denunciation from Davis' office and a potential lawsuit (see for example http://iaindale.blogspot.com/2007/08/david-davis-demands-labour-apology-over.html). Equally the debate was crying out for an informed (and 'knowledgeable') understanding of the choices that must be made in balancing the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition in today's multicultural urban settings, and rethinking the balance between state and civil society in looking after the most vulnerable.

So understanding the tension between the bureaucracy and the political imperative consequently illuminates both the value of the former and its limits; the proper sense of the political as a notion of 'ethics in public' and its limits when translated into the public arena of the tabloid press. Through this situated tension we might then also begin to understand the sort of knowledge that might be performatively helpful in constituting a public rather than one in which artefacts of academic production sit as ornaments in a 'public sociology'.

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

On knowledges of the local and the economization of everyday life

When the political can trump the bureaucratic in some circumstances but not in others, this might lead us to think about the performative value of different knowledges. We might also want to think carefully about the ways in which different knowledges themselves trump each other, how some disciplinary traditions at some times and places become more powerful than others in social policy contexts. And though it is a largely impressionistic suggestion, it appears to be the case that, in the British public realm, the political holy grail of economic competence and the paradigmatic legacies of forms of rational choice and public choice theory lend economic expertise a performative value second to none.

Whilst in the USA as much as in contemporary China the sociological might inform the policy maker, the anthropologist inform the corporation, and both might provide knowledges for government; in the UK there appears a sense that economic knowledges are in some ways the makers of a privileged realm of expertise (Balls, 2006; McClean and Jennings, 2006). In some ways we have witnessed the economization of everyday life, or at least an economization of its governance.

How do we understand both the growing general power of the discipline of economics and the particular privileging of economic reasoning in the public realm in Britain? There is a literature that considers the relative merits of forms of economic knowledge in the structuring of social policy, and in particular the manner in which governments have taken their lead from the US property rights school to legitimize a privileging of the economic over the legal in many realms of policy formation (Coase, 1960, 1992; Rutherford, 1996; Williamson, 1975, 1985). There is also a set of literatures around 'governmentality' that explains the manner in which the calculable self can be related to the evolutions of structures of governance that take as their object 'the conduct of conduct' and at times there is a sense that such a calculus lends itself to a cognitive notion of rational choice and utility optimizing behaviours that fits well with mainstream economic reasoning (Rose, 1999).

These are related but distinct trends and there is no space to examine them in detail here. However, matched with the growing power of the Treasury in setting the parameters of social policy intervention in the period from 1997 onwards, their influence in part explains the national trend for 'evidence based policy' to develop national mobilizations of academic knowledges that explain the central

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

government predilection for policy reviews that are framed by the search for economically optimal policy options. Adair Turner's (2005) review of the funding of pensions, Nicholas Stern's (2006) review on the economics of climate change (in which he described climate change as 'market failure', http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/nov/29/climatechange.carbonemissions) and Kate Barker's reviews of housing supply (2004) and the planning system (2006) are just a few of the many high profile Treasury rooted examples of inquiries that structure public policy. The relationship between policy outcomes and the review process is contingent but what is shared is a sense that privileges both an economic mode of analysis and economists' expertise and analysis. If it is easy to condemn the disciplinary complicity of the economic, it might also be worth examining the disciplinary efficacy of the sociological if powerful and persuasive calls for the social sciences to engage in a 'public sociology' (Burawoy, 2005) are to be taken seriously.

The example of the way in which the British conceptualize the universal need for a home provides an interesting case in point. The upturn in macroeconomic growth of the last fifteen years has been paralleled by an arguably unprecedented rate of sustained house price inflation in the UK. It was in this political context that Kate Barker (2004), formerly a member of the Bank of England monetary policy committee, was asked to review land supply and its impact on the housing market. In an exemplary review, couched in the vocabulary and the grammar of neoclassical economics, the supply constraints are identified and the shortage of homes in the UK is translated into a completely logical set of tabulations and graphics.

To be clear, it is not the purpose of this article to provide a critique of Barker, regardless of the validity of her logic and conclusions. It is rather to ask what sorts of ways of imagining policy options are excluded from the mode of thinking and writing that the work is premised upon. In part what is clear is the absence of a sympathetic ethnographic sense of how the bureau works, planning decisions are made and are (at times) politicized; an unspoken sense of what it might mean to build communities as well as building units of housing; and a silence about the ways in which cultural forms of race, gender, sexuality, lifestyle and age preference are continually reconfiguring what it means to dwell as well as to reside in the city. And this does impact on the ways in which policy imperatives are then translated into the modes, regimes and regulation of programmes of city change, urban renewal and regeneration.

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

In a sense these dilemmas are most vividly brought together in trying to understand the 'meta-politics' of the growth of the Thames Gateway, to the east of London. Once associated with the badging of a major tract of post-industrial land as an opportunity for 'urban regeneration' with origins more in Sir Peter Hall's geographical imaginary than in any other academic discipline, the reputation of this scheme was seriously dented in 2007 by a highly critical report of the Public Accounts Committee, linked to a National Audit Office inquiry into the success of the scheme (NAO, 2007; PAC, 2007).

Succinctly put, the scale of the Gateway ambition is consequent on not just the analytical logic that informs the appropriate and potential land use functions of a particular 'brownfield' tract of land. In an economic vocabulary, the Thames Gateway becomes a territory whose regeneration has a price (that might be calculated) and whose capacity can be defined teleologically in terms of numbers of putative homes and potential jobs. A calculus that appeals to the ratio between investment inputs and regeneration outputs can thus generate a sense of the value for money of the Gateway; the extent to which public sector expenditure might be justified here rather than in other 'growth areas' that warrant alternative public sector investment sits in an opportunity cost relation to the Gateway itself. In part this is understandable. The sense that public investment should be rational, its opportunity costs transparent and the externalities of investment made visible are all entirely laudable goals. But as a consequence, the territorialization of social policy is not inflected by the disciplines of the built environment that address the lessons learnt in building new communities, the imperatives of governance and the recognition of cultural difference. Sites in the Gateway must justify public investment against criteria principally structured by their ability to contribute to the entirely laudable social goal of building three million new homes to address the housing shortage. And neither do they address the more contentious, complex and controversial elements of social engineering that will determine how many of those homes would be bought for sale outright, private rental or in some of many senses will be made 'affordable' through the deployment of public subsidy in generating new 'social housing'.

So what is the alternative to this? In part the answer is about a more detailed critique of the forms of governance imperatives that become received wisdom. But equally there is a demand for more populist, more visionary, more credentialized forms of public sociology that make problematic both the sorts of social form that emerge through

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

major programmes of regeneration and the ways in which the economic calculus might be understood otherwise in analytically strong models of congregation and the public realm that address the 'externalities' of social polarization, exclusion and intolerance. Detailed ethnography might teach us to be sceptical about the voices that are heard – both in the corridors of power and in the debates about expanding new settlement that might think backwards about decades of experience in building the city beautiful and more contemporary reflections on the cultural forms that emerge in new towns that determine whether places are socially (as well as ecologically and economically) sustainable. This demands a more aggressive publicization of forms of sociological intervention that engage critically with structures of power but also offer technocratically a sense of academic expertise and knowledge production that is savvy about the ways in which the levers of local governance and Wacquant's derided bureaucracies actually work.

Conclusion

The demands of a 21st Century public sociology necessarily confuse categories. The imperative to engage with public debate that Burawoy (2005) urged, proffers both a complex epistemological argument and a persuasive but paradoxical ethical one. To generate an audience and a plausibility in the public realm, the sociological must be prepared to engage in an interdisciplinary fashion with the rules of knowledge production that characterize other disciplines that are invoked in the formulation of social policy, not least with the 'economization of everyday life'. To do so involves a recognition of the complexities and incommensurabilities of some of the moral knowledges on which the sociological episteme is premised and, in making these transparent, the comfortable positioning of a 'critical' social policy is also suddenly nuanced by engagement, functionality and possibly even – at times – complicity.

References

Balls, E. (2006) 'Stability, Growth and Labour's Macroeconomic Policy', pp. 96–124 in I. McClean and C. Jennings (eds) *Applying the Dismal Science: When Economists Give Advice to Governments*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

Barker, K. (2004) *The Barker Review of Land Supply*. London: HMSO. [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/consultations_and_legislation/barker/consult_barker_index.cfm]

Barker, K. (2006) *The Barker Review of Land Use Planning*. London: HMSO. [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/barker_review_land_use_planning/barkerreview_land_use_planning_index.cfm]

Barry, A. (2001) *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society*. London: Berg.

Burawoy, M. (2005) '2004 American Sociological Association Presidential Address: For Public Sociology', *British Journal of Sociology* 56(2): 259–94.

Coase, R. H. (1960) 'The Problem of Social Cost', *Journal of Law and Economics* 3: 1–44.

Coase, R. (1992) 'The Institutional Structure of Production: The 1991 Alfred Nobel Memorial Prize Lecture in Economic Sciences', *American Economic Review* 82: 713–19.

Du Gay, P. (2000) *In Praise of Bureaucracy: Weber/Organization/Ethics*. London: SAGE.

Hall, S. (1982) 'The Lessons of Lord Scarman', *Critical Social Policy* 2: 66–72.

House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) (2007) 'House of Commons Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts, Wednesday 13th June 2007'. House of Commons HC 693–1.

Keith, M. (1993) *Race, Riots and Policing: Lore and Order in a Multiracist Society*. London: UCL Press.

Keith, M. (2005) *After the Cosmopolitan: Multicultural Cities and the Future of Racism*. London: Routledge.

McClean, I. and Jennings, C. (2006) 'Public Finance, Public Choice and Political Economy', pp. 1–23 in I. McClean and C. Jennings (eds) *Applying the Dismal Science: When Economists Give Advice to Governments*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

National Audit Office (NAO) (2007) *The Thames Gateway: Laying the Foundations. Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*. HC 526 Session 2006–7, 23 May.

Osborne, T. (1998) *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth.* London: UCL Press.

Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rutherford, M. (1996) *Institutions in Economics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sinclair, I. (1991) 'The Isle of Doges (Vat City plc)', in *Downriver*. London: Paladin.

Stern, N. (2006) *The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*. London: HMSO. [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Independent_Reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm]

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.

Turner, A. (chair) (2005) *A New Pension Settlement for the Twenty-First Century: The Second Report of the Pensions Commission*. HM Treasury. London: HMSO.

Wacquant, L. (1997) 'Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 20(2): 341–53.

Wacquant, L. (2002) 'Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography', *American Journal of Sociology* 107(6): 1468–532.

Wacquant, L. (2005) 'Shadowboxing with Ethnographic Ghosts: A Rejoinder', *Symbolic Interaction* 8(3): 441–7.

Williamson, O. (1975) *Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Implication. A Study in the Economics of International Organization*. New York: Free Press.

Williamson, O. (1985) *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism*. New York: Free Press.

❑ Michael Keith is professor of sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. He was a founding member of the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths College. He is the author of seven books and many articles on the changing nature of city life, most recently the book *After the Cosmopolitan: Multicultural Cities and the Future of Racism* published by Routledge. He was leader of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets for five years and cabinet lead member for regeneration and partnerships for six years in the period from 1994 to 2006. He has sat on the boards of over 10 small area partnerships and complex community based urban regeneration initiatives. He was the founder and chair of the Local Strategic Partnership in Tower Hamlets, chair of the Thames Gateway London Partnership and a founder member of the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation Board, and chair of the Local Authority Urban Design Forum. He is also a member of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. *Address*: Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK. email: m.keith@gold.ac.uk ❑

Downloaded from http://csp.sagepub.com at UNIV CALIFORNIA BERKELEY LIB on August 24, 2008
© 2008 Critical Social Policy Ltd. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.