

DAVID PATRICK FRISBY

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David Frisby's clear, intelligent, and persuasive voice will be missed across many fields of scholarly endeavour. As the only son of a coppersmith and his wife, David was born into modest circumstances in Sheffield in 1944. An outstanding grammar school career led to employment as a management trainee for the National Coal Board, which in turn led to a Coal Board-funded scholarship to study sociology at the LSE. Although destined for a starry academic career, David at no point lost his attachment to his roots, and happily recounted tales of a series of improbable summer jobs, which saw him painting coal trucks black and learning the tricks of bus conducting from old hands in the Chesterfield depot. Judging the right moment to ring the start bell just as the sprinting passenger was about to leap on board was, by all accounts, one of the finer skills.

More serious employment soon followed, with a five-year sojourn at the University of Kent, followed in 1975 by a move to the University of Glasgow, where David was a leading

light in the Department of Sociology for thirty years, before taking up a chair at the LSE in 2005.

Although firmly and productively settled in Glasgow, he traveled widely throughout his career; teaching and researching at Heidelberg, Konstanz, Princeton, San Diego and Yale.

David's wanderlust matched his intellectual restlessness, which constantly pushed him in new and demanding directions. His PhD, awarded by the University of Glasgow in 1978, was on the origins of the sociology of knowledge, and addressed in particular the work of Max Scheler, Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim. This dissertation already confirmed David's high-level skills in the German language, which enabled him to work on the Mannheim Papers in Heidelberg University, where the text was completed. It was subsequently published by Heinemann in 1983 under the title *The Alienated Mind: the Sociology of Knowledge in Germany 1918–1933*, and republished in an extended form in 1992 by Routledge in its *International Library of Sociology*. Introducing this text, David defined in one characteristically clear and simple sentence the conviction that drove much of his subsequent work, namely that "... the reflections that we associate with the sociology of knowledge emerge out of a theory of culture, usually a critique of contemporary culture that is seen to be in a state of crisis."

Georg Simmel was the lens through which David focused his initial investigations, and in the same year that his doctorate was awarded he published (together with Tom Bottomore) a pioneering translation into English of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*. A string of further works on Simmel followed, which included: *Georg Simmel* (1984), *Simmel on Culture* (1997), *Sociological Impressionism: a Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (1992), *Simmel and Since* (1992) and *George Simmel: Critical Assessments* (1994). David also worked with German colleagues in situating Simmel within the broader context of German sociology, most notably in his essay on Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber, published in 1988 in Ottheim Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel und die frühen Soziologen*, and in *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (1985), which introduced twentieth-century German social theory to successive generations of undergraduates across the world and elegantly delineated the febrile and precarious nature of modernity. Simmel was born in Berlin on the corner of Leipzigerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse – a junction, as David pointed out, that "was to become the point of intersection of the social circles of consumption and circulation". The formation of society, the sociology of culture,

modernity and its implications were recurring themes in Simmel's own writings, and formed the armature for David's scholarly explorations, for which the metropolis, the great city or *Großstadt*, was the inescapable context.

With the sociological background so comprehensively covered, David's thoughts in the 1990s turned increasingly towards the fabric of the metropolis, its planning and its architecture. Vienna around 1900 was the city of choice and the initial focus was the architect and designer of the General Regulation Plan for Vienna, Otto Wagner. The resulting text, *Metropolitan Architecture and Modernity: Otto Wagner in Context*, was awarded an MArch by the Mackintosh School of Architecture in the Glasgow School of Art in 1998. It was contracted for publication by University of Minnesota Press but remains, sadly, unpublished.

The connection formed by David between the disciplines of sociology and architectural and urban history was to prove enormously fruitful, as it mirrored the intellectual constellation that informed much of the theoretical discussion of the city in the first six decades of the century. Moral consensus, social solidarity, individual identity within the larger community, and the need for shared meanings in a secular culture were issues of vital importance both to the sociologist and to the architect and city planner over this period. The attempts to shift the balance between what Simmel termed "subjective" and "objective" culture in the modern metropolis in favour of the former; the desire to shape a genuine individuality in periods of excessive individualism (Durkheim); the search for a positive urban way of life in the face of increasing social differentiation (Wirth, Geddes); the longing for a re-enchantment of the world despite the forces of disenchantment (Weber); the parameters of a viable 'asphalt culture' (Sombart); and the filling in of 'empty' spaces (Bloch) by a new spirituality that embraced utopianism – all found tangible forms or resonant echoes in contemporary architectural practice and debate.

In 1998–2000, David was awarded a senior Senior Scholar Grant by the Getty Grant Program, Los Angeles, together with Iain Boyd Whyte, which enabled them to advance their research on these themes more fully. Among the outcomes were David's *Simmel in Wien* (2000), and the collection of his essays brought together in *Cityscapes of Modernity* (2001). Whilst primarily focused on Vienna and Berlin, one of the texts in this volume looks more generally at the city as the purlieu of the detective and, in particular, at Dashiell Hammett and his one-time employer, the Pinkerton Detective Agency, famous for its motto: "We never sleep". The same restless energy marked David's pursuit of detective novels, which sat in their hundreds, double-banked on his bookshelves. By happy coincidence, Alan Pinkerton, who set up the eponymous Agency in Chicago in 1850, had been born in Glasgow in 1819.

A further essay from this period investigated the great Viennese debate of the 1890s on the competing charms and meaning of straight versus crooked streets (in: Iain Boyd Whyte, ed., *Modernity and the Spirit of the City*, 2003). Very typically, David did not simply content himself with a straightforward account of the Otto Wagner versus Camillo Sitte dispute, but used it to test Michel de Certeau's proposition that the activities of the planners and architects and the everyday practices of the urban population are divergent, with the planners producing panoramic visions that are inaccessible to those who live "below the thresholds at which visibility begins."

A sojourn at the Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University in 2004–05 saw more work on the German-speaking metropolis, and the gestation of an anthology of texts on Berlin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (with Iain Boyd Whyte). The manuscript had already been submitted before the onset of David's final illness, and found a very positive resonance with the external readers of the commissioning publishers, the University of California Press, one of whom noted:

"Its major contribution is to reconstitute the built environment of Berlin during the period of its classical modernity by the selection and juxtaposition of texts from fields including architecture, urban planning, sociology, political theory, cultural criticism, literature, and journalism. Few cities in the world have had this type of comprehensive multidisciplinary treatment. Publication of the book will be an extremely important event in spatial cultural studies, for it will set the standard for a methodological

model that could be employed in many different national and historical contexts.”

As David’s final publication, it will be a worthy monument to a brilliant career.

Academic brilliance, however, is rarely so happily combined as it was in David’s case with a charming modesty, great intellectual generosity, and a sincere desire to support the work of others. His marriage of almost thirty years to Tanya Ticktin was an enormous source of strength, and Tanya’s vigour, anarchic scepticism and vivacious humour were the perfect complement for David’s own quieter and more reflective wit.

David Frisby will be sorely missed by all who had the good fortune to know him: he was a wonderful colleague and friend, who left life as he had lived it: quietly, uncomplainingly and with great dignity.

Ian Boyd Whyte

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