

planned to a market economy, the health care sector is trying to expand outpatient services, yet coverage remains low, as demonstrated in a study using geographical information systems by Yu Wang and colleagues.

This volume covers a large array of different social science methods to highlight the impact and processes of changes in health-care systems around the globe. These include extensive qualitative studies, ethnographic fieldwork, and the above-mentioned study of health geography. However, an overly detailed account is given in some chapters of institutional structures and historical features. Also, a leitmotif is often missing, with a relatively broad range of topics covered within some chapters. For instance, the last chapter provides an account of the historical development of global health organisations, before moving on to describe 'success' stories of single Latin American countries in fighting liberalisation of health-care markets. Similarly, legal developments in the Hungarian efforts to privatise health-care provision are described in perhaps too much detail. The chapter on community health services in China includes, for the second time in the book, a relatively extensive account of historical developments in the health-care sector as a whole, whereas the empirical study itself is summarised within a few pages. At the same time, the rich content of each of the chapters makes the volume especially valuable not only for policy-makers and politicians, regardless of ideological stripe, but also for students of health policy, economics, and political science. The interdisciplinary scope by which health-care changes under neo-liberal settings are framed makes the book less a theoretical contribution than a contribution to the political debates of our times.

Andrea Schmidt

European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and
Research, Vienna

Schmidt@euro.centre.org

Alessandro Baricco: *The Barbarians: An Essay on the Mutation of Culture*

New York 2013: Rizzoli Ex Libris,
xi + 164 pp.

Nicholas Carr: *The Shallows: How the Internet Is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember*

New York 2010: Norton, 276 pp.

Walter Benjamin drew a distinction between two different meanings of the word 'experience'. First of all there is experience as *Erfahrung*. This is the experience from and through which we learn, change, and grow over time to become ourselves. *Erfahrung* is deep experience. Second, Benjamin identified experience as *Erlebnis*. This is the fleeting experience of the moment, the experience remaining in what Benjamin called 'the sphere of a certain hour in one's life' [Benjamin 1983: 117].

Benjamin's distinction of two different kinds of experience—two kinds rather hidden in the English—is taken up by the Italian writer Alessandro Baricco in his stylistically over-egged discussion of contemporary culture, and the effects of its current changes. According to Baricco, Benjamin showed how only through experience might we take control of our lives. Experience—and here Baricco must be thinking of what Benjamin identified as *Erfahrung*—is 'the moment at which the human being takes possession of his realm. For a split second he is ruler, not servant'. Indeed, in this chance of being the master not the slave of the world, Baricco finds nothing less than the chance of the salvation of the human from the animal (p. 77). But it is only possible to 'take possession' of something if it is possessed of an objectivity, a solidity, and endurance over time. It is impossible to take possession of a fistful of water. Consequently, and here Baricco once again draws on Benjamin: 'Experience, in its highest, most redeeming sense, stemmed from the ability to get close to things, one at a time, and to develop an intimacy with

them that might open up their most hidden recesses' (p. 78). In short, the experience which redeems and saves, according to Baricco, takes time, commitment, focus, and concentration. It is not at all the work or possibility of a 'certain hour'.

Baricco makes these points clear in order to provide a basis upon which he can identify contemporary culture as nothing less than *barbaric*. According to him, culture is presently mutating to such a degree that civilisation itself is now bending, as are its subjects. A new kind of human is being born, Baricco contends, one with ambitions and horizons stretching no further than the instant. Put into Benjamin's terms, Baricco identifies a situation in which experience as redeeming *Erfahrung* is being entirely swamped by experience as instant, easy, and passing *Erlebnis*. Where once the human lived through the accumulation of experience, now a mutant form is emerging, which lives from moment to moment, skimming the surface rather than plumbing the depths. The upshot, for Baricco, is the end of the chance of salvation—it is therefore no coincidence when he talks about the new mutant form of human being as being fish-like, breathing through gills. The denizen of the barbarian world is not really human. There is more than a hint of patrician disdain about Baricco's depiction of the world which is emerging.

The patrician air is rather reinforced by some of the examples Baricco gives to illustrate his claim. He devotes a lot of attention to what he calls 'Hollywood wine'. Once upon a time, so runs the story Baricco tells, wine was drunk in just a few countries, and in France and Italy winemaking became something of an art form. Wine itself became a medium of salvation (and not in the liturgical sense). Baricco talks about the experience of drinking a 'top-notch Barbaresco' and explains how this wine teaches a lesson in life: 'you realize that wine-tasting is a matter that involves not so much the first sip, or the moments in which

you're actually drinking it, but the entire time that follows, the story the wine tells you afterward' (p. 12). In other words, wine-drinking as *Erfahrung*. But then, to return to Baricco's story, the Second World War broke out and, worse yet, the Americans came and in France and Italy they discovered wine, among other things. According to Baricco's story, the American soldiers found that wine is enjoyable and they wanted to carry on drinking it when they returned home. Consequently, 'A few crazy Americans got it into their heads to try and make some' (p. 9). But the palates of these 'crazy Americans' lacked experience, and so they made wine to be enjoyed in the instant, in the hour. This is Baricco's 'Hollywood wine'. Yes, Hollywood wine is experienced, but it is wine as *Erlebnis*, not the saving experience of the *Erfahrung* of a 'top-notch Barbaresco'. The Americans who just wanted a glass of red wine with their barbeque become destroyers of refined European taste. They become barbarians.

This might sound like a trivial example, but for Baricco the story of wine is a perfect way of thinking about wider cultural trends. He appears to be deadly serious with the identification of the American wine-makers as pioneers amongst the ranks of the barbarians who are wreaking havoc on the chance of deep experience and therefore on the chance of our redemption from base, animal, temptations. When he defines the barbarians and their barbarism, Baricco once again becomes rather patrician. For him the barbarians come not in ships, but on the wave of a 'technological innovation that shatters the privilege of a caste, making a form of action possible for a new population'. Here think about the residents of Tallahassee drinking Californian wine while eating a burger—this is pretty much the picture in Baricco's mind. These barbarians value the spectacular over everything else, repudiate the time honoured, and aspire towards '[s]implification, superficiality, speed, middlingness'. They

promote '[t]he staggering idea that something, anything, has meaning and importance only if it can be fitted into a broader sequence of experiences'. They hold aloft the banner of America (pp. 61–62).

Yet the capital city of the barbarian hordes is not in Washington or Los Angeles. It is in Google. For Baricco, Google has transformed experience. In Benjamin's terms Google has transformed all experience into fleeting *Erlebnis*. When we search for something with Google we are immediately presented with a list of results. However the list is not ordered by the intrinsic value or trustworthiness of the site. Rather it is ordered by popularity. Consequently, hierarchy is not about *quality* it is about *quantity* and, furthermore, juxtaposition. The search engine breaks knowledge up into different and disconnected items, and then puts them back together according to a principle which emphasises change not stability—the hour not the long term (popularity is relational). According to Baricco, Google thereby heralds a new order of things (my allusion to Foucault is intentional, although Baricco himself does not make it): 'Meaning, which for centuries was linked to an ideal of permanence, solid and complete, had gone out in search of a new habitat, dissolving into a form that is mostly movement, extended structure, journey.' (p. 73) It is then no coincidence—although it is of course by no means deliberate—that the activity of moving from one web page to another via Google goes by the name of surfing. When we surf we stay on the surface, move from one place to another according to tides over which we have no control ourselves. When we surf we engage in the activity of a 'certain hour'.

Google is also emphasised by Nicholas Carr, in his rather more temperate book *The Shallows*. He discusses Google in a way which ought immediately to resonate with sociologists. For Carr, Google is most certainly revolutionary, but it has to be understood in a historical context. Carr identifies

Google as part of the history of the technology of reading (a history he sketches either too quickly or with insufficient detail—it is hard to know which). But Google adds something different to this history, something previously external. Carr draws on earlier work by Neil Postman to show how the Google philosophy has its roots in the 'scientific management' techniques of Taylorism. Just like Taylorism, the defining principle of Google is the objective measurement of activity in order to maximise efficient production (p. 150). In both cases the concern is to establish the primacy of the efficient system over and above the subjective. Taylorism leads to Ford's car production line as well as to the page of Google search results. However Carr does identify one key distinction between the kind of Taylorism which was employed in Fordist production, and the kind underpinning Google's philosophy. According to Taylor the system was to be guided by the technical experts, but Google has even removed the possibility of the subjectivity of the experts. Now the system is managed by objective algorithms. Taylor sought to make workers achieve more measurable outputs during the course of the working day, and Google is a Taylorist tool for making us more efficient thinkers: 'In Google's view, information is a kind of commodity, a utilitarian resource that can, and should, be mined and processed with industrial efficiency. The more pieces of information we can "access" and the faster we can distill their gist, the more productive we become as thinkers.' (p. 152) One way Google achieves this is through how easily it permits access to all knowledge. What was once found after months of searching in archives, or which had to be stored in the memory (a poem, for example), is always and already just a few clicks away. We no longer need to work hard to access anything.

It is intriguing to watch the films of Taylor's experiments in establishing the

domination of the efficient system over the vagaries of the individual worker (and they can be accessed very easily thanks to, you've guessed it, Google). They are, in effect, documents of discipline. All initiative, creativity, and the sheer unpredictability of being human is crushed in the Taylorist system. Carr makes it possible to see how Google is doing something very similar. The Taylorist labourer had to work according to the narrative of the experts and: 'When we go online, we, too, are following scripts written by others—algorithmic instructions ... When we search for information through Google or other search engines, we're following a script.' (p. 218) It is because of algorithms, and their ability to work out what other people with my purchasing habits have bought and are likely to buy, that Amazon is always able to make very tempting recommendations every time I log into my account. But here of course lies an important difference between Taylorism and Google, a difference Carr does not pull out. Taylor's worker submitted to the soul-destroying system of efficiency on account of the dull compunction of labour—do what I tell you to do or starve. But algorithms *seduce* us all into giving up our creativity and unpredictability. Algorithms tell us what we want even before we know it existed, and so they give us time to do other important things. I no longer need to browse bookshops, and so I can research holiday bargains on the web instead. In other words, algorithms give me more free time to *consume* in ways which can be fed into the algorithms and, therefore, be made quite predictable. In using the internet I essentially sell my creativity.

The indivisibility of the internet and capitalism needs to be stressed a lot more than it is by Baricco and Carr. The indivisibility can be thrown into sharp relief through a simple question: If Google is just an example of Taylorism taken from the factory to the computer screen, how has Google become such an immensely wealthy

global corporation? As Carr stresses, and Baricco tends to ignore, Google is in the business of making money (perhaps Baricco feels no need to make this point because the connection of Americanisation and cash is, for him, perfectly self-evident). Google makes money by selling our web-searching activity to advertisers. Google gets paid every time we click on an advertised webpage. Consequently, Google has an economic interest in making sure we access lots of webpages as quickly as possible. And webpage designers have an economic interest in making sure their work gets as near to the top of the Google search list as possible. As such there is a mutual interest in the construction of webpages capable of being accessed and digested extremely quickly. In Benjamin's terms, Google accelerates *Erlebnis*, experience as a matter of a 'certain hour' or, more accurately, seconds. Google is an *Erlebnis* generator and *Erfahrung* destroyer.

Indeed Carr's book has a disturbing dimension. If he is right, Google—indeed the internet itself—does something a lot more insidious than accelerate *Erlebnis*. It actually plays a crucial part in making experience as *Erfahrung* pretty much impossible. *Erfahrung* is dependent upon the ability to sustain experience beyond the hour and to let it seep into the self. Indeed the self is solidified and capable of transformation precisely because it has become a store of deep impressions. Carr cites a lot of evidence to suggest that we internet users are incapable of having deep impressions. The evidence comes from contemporary neuroscience. The essential point is reflected in the title of Carr's book: the internet is rewiring our brains in such a way that we can only swim in the *shallows*. The internet is *shallow*, and so are we. We have lost the ability to go deep into ourselves or our world. The internet has made us all very skilled at multi-tasking (for example, while I have been writing this review I have also been checking my email the instant something arrives

and selecting music to which to listen), but learning these skills means losing others: 'when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning' (p. 116).

Carr is fascinated by the impact of this activity on the structure of our brains. He quotes a wide range of psychological experiments, but one in particular is worth stressing. Research by Gary Small at UCLA demonstrated that internet use alters the brain's neural pathways. Evidently using the internet stimulates the developments of the neural pathways which are linked to decision-making and problem-solving. However, those parts of the brain which are associated with language, memory, and visual processing are relatively less developed. Consequently, Carr concludes, internet use enhances our skills at deciding which webpages to access and how to identify the best link from one to another, but it reduces our skills of comprehension and retention (pp. 120–122). Carr concludes that thanks to internet use: 'Our ability to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction remains largely disengaged.' Indeed, 'we sacrifice the facility that makes deep reading possible' (p. 122). Once again then, *Erlebnis* not *Erfahrung*.

I would like to make a personal observation at this point. The UK university sector has an obsession with teaching methods. The content of a lecture, for example, has tended to become of almost less importance than the methods by which the lecture is delivered—is powerpoint used? Film clips? Audio material? Increasingly UK academics are encouraged to use web resources and to exploit the alleged possibilities that the internet offers. Baricco's response to this is easy to anticipate. For him this would be almost conclusive proof of the final victory of the Barbarians. Now the universities have succumbed. But Carr's argument leads to rather more interesting

conclusions. If all of the research he quotes is correct (and it does all seem to point in one direction), and if the internet and other electronic resources are used as teaching aids, that teaching is actually going to prevent students from being able to think. Yes, the students will have developed excellent problem-solving skills but they will not have the neurological capacity to make connections between what they have read nor, indeed, let what they have read settle down. In other words, if we use the internet and electronic resources in our teaching we are consigning our students to a life lived in the intellectual and neurological shallows. We as academics (and I assume that academics are the main readers of this review) are thereby complicit in depriving our students of the possibility of *Erfahrung*. We are consigning them to a life of *Erlebnis*. More strongly yet, we are consigning them to a life of experiences without experience. The answer from the evidence Carr cites is clear—the answer is to return to the printed text.

With this point I am trying to be more than just anecdotal. I am also trying to put the questions which are raised by Baricco and, more pressingly, by Nicholas Carr, into a *sociological* context. I am seeking to stress how the internet is also about *institutions*. Apart from their shared focus on Google, institutions are rather absent from the arguments of Baricco and Carr. Baricco rather ignores them because he is writing from the position of a cultural patrician, looking out at a world in which the things he values are being cheapened or forgotten. When he tries to explain what he sees happening Baricco does no more than take the easy—although admittedly rhetorically enjoyable—choices of 'Americanisation' and the 'Barbarians'. He writes from the top of the mountain, looking down. Carr ignores institutions because his focus is upon the neurological implications of internet use. Carr writes as someone who sits before the screen wondering what im-

pact this activity is having on him, and by extension, on everyone else. Even as he draws upon neuroscience which is imputed with general validity, Carr is really writing to and about a world of individuals. But in so doing he might well get far closer to the significance of the internet than Baricco. Carr is writing to and for his peers, whereas it is hard not to conclude that Baricco is actually rather disappointed in all of us who might prefer Hollywood wine to a 'top-notch Barbaresco'.

The internet is reducing experience to the a kind of *Erlebnis* for which even Benjamin's 'certain hour' is likely to be regarded as a tediously long time. But the internet is not doing this on its own. It is important to try to think about what or who will benefit from this reduction of the human compass. As soon as thought turns in this direction, a direction stimulated by Baricco and Carr but one taken by neither of them, the stakes of the internet-driven transformation of experience become clear. The beneficiaries of *Erlebnis* are not the men and women who are consigned to live in the perpetual certain hour, but rather the institutions which derive profit from filling up those hours and, moreover, promising something better on the next click. There is also the question of politics: without experience as *Erfahrung*, politics becomes little more than a variation on Taylorism and so outrages can be perpetrated with little obstacle. This is why it is actually important to do what Baricco and Carr have done—commit reflections on the intent to print and thus to play a part in trying to stimulate the neural pathways upon which self-scripting human life to some degree depends.

Keith Tester
University of Hull
K.Tester@hull.ac.uk

References

- Benjamin, W. 1983. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. by Harry Zohn. London: Verso.

Nicole Bolleyer: *New Parties in Old Party Systems: Persistence and Decline in Seventeen Democracies*

Oxford and New York 2013: Oxford University Press, 272 pp.

There is a large comparative literature on new parties, both as a generic phenomenon and as expressed by the rise of new party families such as the Greens or the radical right. The bulk of this literature has been preoccupied with how and why new parties break through electorally. However, a more intriguing—and largely unexplored—question, suggests Nicole Bolleyer, is how and why some successful new parties endure while others live out meteoric existences as 'flash' parties but then quickly collapse.

To answer this question Bolleyer examines new parties in 17 established democracies in the period 1968–2011: eleven core West European EU states plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland and additionally Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. For once such a case selection is not 'advanced democracy' parochialism, but is central to Bolleyer's attempt to distinguish the organisational *persistence* of new parties from their *sustainability* as actors repeatedly able to win representation in national parliaments. A comparative study of new parties in well-established party systems, she argues, makes it possible both to distinguish between the two phenomena empirically and to unpick the factors conducive to each. Newer East European and Southern European democracies (Greece, Spain and Portugal) are therefore excluded, as is Italy, where party system collapse in the mid-1990s makes it conceptually difficult to distinguish new and established parties.

Much of the literature on new parties in Western Europe has been preoccupied with underlying sociological forces driving them: value shift; newly emerging material/post-material cleavages; or patterns of