

Soc. 281, section 2 Society and the Individual Spring 2008

UMass Boston, Sociology Dept.
Spring 2008
Class Hrs.: Tu/Thu 8:30-9:45 pm
Class Location: McCormack, 1st Floor, room 0608

Prof. Mohammad Tamdgidi
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The central aim of this course is to develop, through autobiographical research, our sociological imaginations about how our individual selves and broader society constitute one another. The course particularly addresses how the developments of personal identity and self-determination are affected by social processes of exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. Selected readings providing a historical typology of autobiographical self-interpretations and sociologically informed auto/biographical snapshots of everyday lives will aid in the interpretation of our own autobiographies. Our inquiries into the link between our personal troubles and broader social issues—the central concern of the sociological imagination—will be pursued throughout the course through a 15-page autobiographical paper developed along a topic essay/bibliography and two drafts. The key purpose of the paper is to apply the micro and macro sociological concepts and ideas learned in class in the context of our sociological self-research. To achieve this end, we will pursue three lines of inquiry throughout the course: 1-class readings, presentations, lectures, and discussions will provide us with collective experiences and conceptual tools and methods necessary for our individual/collective self-studies; 2-an autobiographical research paper will focus our attention and explorations on a still unresolved significant question, issue, trouble, or problem we personally face in our everyday lives today, faced in the past, or may face in the future; 3-the films incorporated into the course will provide us with a common audiovisual medium in popular culture through which we can share our sociological reflections on ourselves and the world alongside class and outside readings. In addition to the sociological self-research paper, grading will be based on class participation, written and oral reading presentations, and self-critical thinking.

COURSE ORGANIZATION:

The course is organized in a “research seminar” format where “teacher-student” and “student-teachers” learn *with* one another common subject matters (see Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on this teaching style). While the instructor will introduce and guide class readings and discussions, students are required to present readings in class as discussants, sharing their reviews, questions, insights, and critical comments with one another. The students’ work will be evaluated on the basis of the following:

1. Attendance (25%): Attendance is a foundational requirement in this class, because literally everything else is derived from the few hours we spend together face-to-face interacting every week. Therefore it constitutes an important part of student grading. **Attendance grade points will not be given for absences; however, absences may be made up by writing a reading/review report on the readings/films and subject matter of the missed class session. Although attendance will be taken in class, it is also the student’s responsibility to send an email to the instructor for each session missed, including date of absence, for record keeping purposes and to indicate whether you intend to make-up for the absence.** Points will be taken off the student’s total grade for each unmade-up absent session (for once-per-week classes 3% per session, for twice-per week classes 1.5% per session, and for thrice-per-week classes, 1% per session). Students can make-up for their absences by writing a 4, 3, or 2 page long (depending on times class meets per week respectively, as above) critical commentary on the readings/films/subject matter of the session they missed (format may follow the regular presentation report assignment below).

2. Class Discussion Participation (5%): Participation can range from active listening to raising questions and engaging in discussion. Please note that attendance is not simply physical presence. It means being attentive. This requires having read the material assigned for the session, being prepared with pertinent questions or comments to raise in class, coming on time to class, being engaged during class, and not leaving the room during the class before it is over. Taking excessive personal breaks during the class not only affects your attendance and participation record, but can be disruptive to class and other students' learning; please try to avoid it unless absolutely necessary. For similar reasons, your cell phones must be turned off during class time and as far as possible please avoid eating especially sound-generating food in class.

3. Self-Critical Thinking (5%): Students are expected to view everything, every text, and every viewpoint, especially their own predispositions, perspectives, and biases with a (self) critical eye. You are in this class to learn beyond what you already know, not simply to prove what you already know. This necessarily means being open to question your own existing views in order to critically enrich and move beyond them with new insights. You will not be graded on whether you agree or disagree with a certain viewpoint. You will be graded on whether you substantively engage with and demonstrate an understanding of the views you agree or disagree with, and self-critically develop your own viewpoints in a well-rounded, researched, and coherent way. I will assess this in various ways throughout the semester—via your papers, comments in class, etc. I keep the grading for self-critical thinking separate from your written assignments, not because it is separate from them, but because I like to see you develop and demonstrate this skill and attitude across various course activities.

4. Written Reading Report and Oral Presentation (15%): At the beginning of the semester, students will be randomly assigned discussant numbers corresponding to the numbers assigned to readings (preceding each reading item on the schedule below; this will be explained in class). For each assigned reading prepare a written report to be handed in the SAME class in which it is to be orally presented and discussed. Students are welcome to choose to revise their already prepared report based on the class discussion, in which case the report will be due a week from the original due date. The report should be 5 pages (Times font, size 12, double-spaced) comprised of the following (note the breakdown of assigned grade points):

a)-Written Summary (3 points). The summary must be in your own words. Rules against plagiarism will apply to reading reports as well. If you have to quote, you must provide proper citation. You must identify at the beginning of the report which part of the textbook you are reporting on. Make sure you provide your name and date/topic of report at the beginning.

b)-Written Concepts (3 points). Identify, list, and define (using direct quotes from the reading, including page citation) on a stand-alone page at least 10 concepts related to the theories or perspectives discussed in readings being presented, concepts which you may find particularly useful to your own and perhaps others' term paper research. **Make copies of this page and distribute it to others in class.** This will be a useful/collective effort to "harvest" important and useful concepts from readings and share them with other students.

c)-Written Linkages (3 points). Critically reflecting on the concepts learned from the reading and the value or shortcomings of the author's viewpoint, try linking the concepts/reading to the other readings of that session, of that week, or previous sessions when applicable (or even to readings you are doing in other classes you are taking). Other useful linkages can be to your own life and self-explorations, and to previous class discussions/films if applicable. **If you make no efforts in critically linking your assigned text to other readings of especially that session/week (and previous ones), and/or to other issues as explained above, you will not gain linkage points.**

d)-Written Questions (1 point). A set of three clearly formulated and relevant questions (listed separately at the end of report) arising from the reading in connection to other readings of class, its personal relevance to you, or in relationship to previous readings/discussions/films in class. Ask creative, mature, and thoughtful linkage questions that merit discussion in class.

e)-Oral Discussion (5 points). The instructor will introduce the session readings in class, so discussants need not present a detailed summary of readings as part of their oral presentations (especially given all students must have read the session readings). The purpose of oral discussion is to help generate discussion in class following instructor's introductory remarks by drawing upon concepts, linkages, and questions as

included in the discussant's report. **Suggested format:** We assume all students have read the reading, so go directly to defining and linking/applying (some) of the concepts/ideas learned from the reading and how they can be useful for your/others' sociological self-explorations; then end your presentation with sharing your questions about the readings. Discussants must maintain an active part in the session in generating and guiding class discussion, helping to make the discussion lively, informed, and interesting. The oral presentation will be evaluated based on the clarity of communication (2 points) and degree to which it generates class engagement and discussion (3 points). Each oral presentation SHOULD TAKE NO MORE THAN 5 MINUTES. [NOTE: depending on enrollment, there may be extra discussant reports assigned to volunteering students, in which case an extra 3-pg written/oral report may be presented for up to 2% extra make-up grading value].

3. Sociological Self-Research Paper (total 50%): This is the heart of your work in the course, devoted to the serious sociological exploration, within a micro/macro framework, of an important issue in your life in conjunction with class/outside readings and films. A Term Paper Guideline will be handed in to you separately in class with the syllabus. This assignment consists of a 15 page sociological self-research paper addressing the topic **“Critically reflecting on all class readings, films, and discussions what is a fundamental, still unresolved issue I face today, have faced in the past, and/or will face in the future, what is its nature, root causes, and consequences, and how can I move towards its effective resolution?”** The sociological self-research paper will be progressively developed throughout the course along a topic ideas essay/bibliography, a 7-page first draft and a 15-page final draft. They must be typed, double-spaced, in Times font, size 12; relevant charts/tables are encouraged but will not be counted towards paper length requirement. The paper length requirement does not include any title pages or reference/bibliographies. For the due dates of the first and final drafts, see the weekly schedule further below.

A-Paper Topic Ideas/Bibliography (5%): 2 full-pages, plus a bibliography of potentially useful and relevant sources for your topic. Early in the semester you will be asked to think about 2-3 topic ideas about what you would like to explore in-depth in your research paper. Read the research paper guidelines handed to you in class to begin working on your topic and paper. You do not need to read anything to choose your topic, but finding a list of potentially relevant readings (articles, book chapters, etc.) will give you a great start in choosing good topics and finding out what sort of scholarly readings are out there to help your research. The topic should be chosen from the fabric of your own everyday life and how you relate to and experience the world. The sooner you begin thinking about your topic the better since the class readings and films will become more meaningful when you have a pertinent personal topic in mind. Try to come up with 2-3 actual possible paper TITLES that best express the issue to be explored. **Note:** student papers are treated confidentially and not circulated or discussed in class (unless volunteered for discussion), so you should feel comfortable choosing and exploring your own personal topics.

B-The First Draft (20%): 7 full-pages. The First Draft involves exploring the problem or issue based on your present knowledge, views, and attitudes towards the subject. The first draft is mostly self-reflective and microsociological in nature, but should begin to involve concerns and curiosities about larger national and global forces at work in your life. You must also, at the end, include a further refined bibliography of what readings in class or outside may be of relevance to your further self-exploration in the final draft. Although this paper is basically self-reflective, it must be serious, analytical, and as engaging as possible regarding all relevant facts or ideas pertaining to your inquiry.

The breakdown of percentage points for the first draft are roughly as follows:

- 4%: Micro exploration of the research problem/question
- 5%: Use of at least 20 major concepts from Jodi O'Brien readings from the first half of class preceding the paper deadline (0.25 each concept) (**bold** each concept used in text) [use of each concept must be thoughtful and detailed enough to convey your practical understanding of its meaning in context]. Don't bold generic or common words as concepts; the concepts must be clearly derived from the theories and perspectives learned in class.

- 3%: 1 quoted linkage each to three articles in *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* (Journal articles available as PDF files on the website <http://www.okcir.com> and also in Healey Library's SocINDEX database with hard copies also put on reserve, sample issues will be shown in class)
- 2%: 2 quoted linkages to the required reading by Louise DeSalvo (*Wirting as a Way of Healing*). First part of the book up to page 92.
- 3%: For three linkages to three of the films viewed during the first half of class preceding the first draft deadline.
- 1% A bibliography of prospective outside **scholarly** readings (scholarly journal articles, book chapters) specifically related to your topic, readings which you will consult and read in preparation of your final draft in the next stage. Make sure to include the class's own readings in your bibliography, since you will be citing from them in the first draft.
- 2%: Overall quality of writing and creativity of paper. Spell checking, proofreading, and proper and accurate citation of sources will be considered in applying this part of the grade. All papers must include a title and bibliography. The quality of your writing and the care you have taken to spell check and proofread it are indicators of the extent to which you have taken your paper seriously and spent time going over it in both content and form. So, make sure you proofread at least 3 times the paper that you hand in to me.

C-The Final Paper (25%): 15 full-pages (including reworked and further improved pages of the first draft). The concern with macro dimension of your inquiry, i.e., the relation of your selves and broader social forces must now become the central subject of your investigations. The final draft is to link together in a purposeful and meaningful way your critical self-reflections begun in the first draft, with class/outside readings and films shown in class. The evaluation and grading of the final term paper will be roughly divided in terms of how students bring the three essential required elements of the term paper together (self-explorations, broader social dimension as learned through required class readings, and ALL films shown in class). Other outside sources with specific relevance to each student's particular topic/issue/problem must also be critically incorporated into the class readings.

The breakdown of percentage points for the final draft (15 pages, including reworked pages of the first draft) are roughly as follows:

- 8%: Macro exploration of research problem/question (4 points) and its linkage (4%) to the micro exploration
- 5%: Use of at least 20 ADDITIONAL concepts from readings for the second half of class (0.25 each concept) (**bolditalic** each of these new concept used in text) (continue the concept usages from the first draft and keep them marked in **bold** only) [use of each concept must be thoughtful and detailed enough to convey your practical understanding of its meaning in context]. Don't bolditalic generic words as concepts; the concepts must be clearly derived from the theories and perspectives learned in class.
- 2%: 2 quoted linkages to at least two outside scholarly readings (journal articles, book chapters) that directly pertain to your topic (1 point each linkage). These may include relevant readings you are doing, or have done, in your other classes, but they have to be directly pertaining to the topic of your paper.
- 2%: 2 quoted linkages to the book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which is a required reading of the course.
- 2%: 2 quoted linkages to the required reading by Louise DeSalvo (*Wirting as a Way of Healing*). Second part of the book from page 93 to the end.
- 2%: 2 ADDITIONAL linkages to the other films viewed in second half of class [keep and further develop the linkages to the films linked to in the previous draft]
- 2%: Based on your critical sociological self-explorations in the paper, in the conclusion of

the paper list and elaborate on specific and concrete steps you can take to bring about important change in your life towards resolving the issues and problems you explored in the paper.

- 2%: Overall quality of writing and creativity of paper. Spell checking, proofreading, and proper and accurate citation of sources will be considered in applying this part of the grade. All papers must include a title and bibliography. The quality of your writing and the care you have taken to spell check and proofread it are indicators of the extent to which you have taken your paper seriously and spent time going over it in both content and form. So, make sure you proofread at least 3 times the paper that you hand in to me.

Office Hours: Based on past experience, those students who regularly consult during office hours with the instructor regarding their progress in the course and their papers have done better than those who don't. Each student is encouraged to meet with the instructor during office hours to discuss the topic and progress of her/his research paper. The meetings should indicate serious and active engagement by students with their papers, readings, and discussions of the course.

Student Conduct. Students are required to adhere to university policies on academic honesty and student conduct. The current Code of Student Conduct, including information about academic dishonesty and plagiarism is available online at: <http://www.umb.edu/academics/undergraduate/office/students/CodeofStudentConduct.html>.

Accommodations. Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offers guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services, CC 2-2100, (617-287-7430). If this applies to you, you must present these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Add/Drop period.

Student Referral Program: If it appears to the instructor that you might not pass this course, and if the instructor cannot figure out how to support your success in the course, the instructor might inform the director of the Student Referral Program (CC-1100; 287-5500). The staff in this program will attempt to help you address the difficulties that are interfering with your success in the class. If you do not want your instructor to let the Student Referral Program know that you are having difficulty, please let your instructor know.

Grading Policy: The grading system used in this course is based on the accumulation of percentage points you receive for each requirement/assignment of the course. In other words, for each graded requirement/assignment, instead of receiving a letter grade (A, B, C, etc.) you will receive a percentage point grade up to the total assigned for that part of the course expectations. The only letter grade you will receive will be your final course grade submitted at the end of semester, per grade curve system listed below. To see where your course grade stands at any time, add what percentage points you've received so far, and assume you will do perfectly for the rest; then look up the total below. Note that you can miss a few sessions and still receive an A, without doing a makeup for the session (93 out of 100 still brings A); however, by not making up absences, you increase the risks of other grading shortfalls affecting your course grade. So try to make up absences as much as you can.

100-93=A	92-90=A-	89-87=B+	86-83=B	82-80=B-	79-77=C+
76-73=C	72-70=C-	69-60=D	59 or less= F/NP		

Required Readings: (*in book store, †on reserve in hard copy and online at <http://www.okcir.com> and also on Healey's SocINDEX with Full-Text--see the "Indexes and Databases" link on the homepage of Healey Library)

--O'Brien, Jodi. 2006. *The Production of Reality: Essays and Readings on Social Interaction*. FOURTH EDITION. Thousand Oaks, London: Pine Forge Press. ISBN: 9781412915199

--DeSalvo, Louise. 2000. *Writing As a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Boston: Beacon Press. ISBN: 0-8070-7243-5

--Albom, Mitch. *Tuesdays With Morrie*, Broadway, 2002. ISBN: 076790592X

†Selected articles in previous issues of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. [These are all available online at my website <http://www.okcir.com>, click on "Publications" on the left and click on each issue. Also, two sets of each issue are on available as hard copy on reserve in the Reserve Library; additionally the articles can be individually downloaded from the SocINDEX database available on the Healey Library's homepage link "Indexes and Databases, to be explained in class].

Recommended Readings:

Elliott, Anthony. 2001. *Concepts of the Self*. Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers. ISBN: 0745623689

Deikman, Arthur J. *The Observing Self: Mysticism & Psychotherapy*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983. ISBN: 0807029513

Keating, AnaLouise. 1996. *Women Reading Women Writing: Self-inventions in Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. ISBN: 1566394201

Gloria Anzaldúa. *La Frontera/Borderlands*. Aunt Lute Books; 2nd edition. 1999. ISBN: 1879960567

Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Editor), AnaLouise Keating (Editor). *This bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. Routledge. 2002. ISBN: 0415936829.

Audre Lorde. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press. ISBN: 0895941414

Audre Lorde. 1980. *The Cancer Journals: Special Edition*. Aunt Lute Books. ISBN: 1879960737

De Veaux, Alexis. 2006. *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*. W. W. Norton. ISBN: 0393329356

Paula Gunn Allen. 1992. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press. ISBN: 0807046175

Paula Gunn Allen. 1984. *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. Aunt Lute Books. ISBN: 1879960184

Elliott, Anthony. *Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis, and Postmodernity*. Paradigm Publishers, 2004. Softcover. 1-59451-007-5

Gurdjieff: *An Introduction to His Life and Ideas*, by John Shirley, ISBN: 1585422878

Kathleen Riordan Speeth. *The Gurdjieff Work*. 0874774926,

Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World: Early Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York and Chicago (Arkana S.)*. 0140190643

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Indignation*. 2004. Paradigm Publishers. 1-59451-051-2.

Andrews, William, ed. *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993.

Bjorklund, Diane, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography*, University of Chicago Press, 1998. ISBN: 0226054470

Scheff, Thomas J. *Goffman Unbound: A New Paradigm for Social Science*. 2006. Paradigm Publishers. 1-59451-196-9

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. ISBN: 0804719446

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor, 1959. ISBN: 0385094027

bell hooks. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press; 2nd edition. 2000. ISBN: 0896086135

Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2000. ISBN: 0415924847

Horowitz, Irving. C. *Wright Mills: An American Utopian*. Free Press, 1095. ISBN: 0029150108

Charon, Joel M. 2006. *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration*. Ninth Edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. ISBN: 0132276917

Smith, Dorothy E. *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Northeastern University Press, 1997; ISBN: 1555530362

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Important Note: The reading by Louise DeSalvo (*Writing as a Way of Healing*) is a required reading, but not assigned to a particular session. Students are expected to read on their own half of the book in the first half and the other in the second half of the semester, as they progress in working on their term paper.

WEEK ONE

Tuesday, January 29: First Day of Class. Course Objective, Organization, Schedule. Assignments of Readings/Introductory questionnaire.

Thursday, January 31: FILM: GOOD WILL HUNTING

[Note: February 4 is add/drop deadline]

WEEK TWO

Tuesday, February 5: FILM (continued). Discussion.

Thursday, February 7: The Sociological Imagination. Previous Student Papers Symposium.

- Read the short piece by C. Wright Mills, "The Sociological Imagination," attached to your syllabus
- Each student should carefully read one student article on the list of recommended student writings handed out previously in class based on selections from the table of contents of various issues of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, trying to see how the student used his or her "sociological imagination" and various concepts learned in class in exploring his or her topic. The papers of previous issues of *Human Architecture* are available as pdf files online at <http://www.okcir.com> (click on publications and go down to the journal section) and in the SocINDEX with Full-TEXT database accessible through the Healey Library "Indexes and Databases" link on the Healey homepage. This will be explained further in class.

|||||||||||||||||||||| **DUE IN CLASS: Thursday, Feb. 7---> 2-PAGE PAPER TOPIC IDEAS/Bibliography**

WEEK THREE: INTRODUCTION

Tuesday, February 12:

Readings:

1. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, Preface and "Essay: What is Real?"
2. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Reality as a Collective Hunch"

Thursday, February 14:

Readings:

3. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Researching Social Life" and "Essay: Symbolic Interactionism: A Perspective for Understanding Self and Social Interaction"

WEEK FOUR:

Tuesday, February 19: *HUMANS AS SYMBOL-USING CREATURES*

Readings:

4. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Essay: Shared Meaning as the Basis of Humanness"
5. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Naming" and "Language and Socialization"

Thursday, February 21: FILM: Multiple Personalities

WEEK FIVE:

Tuesday, February 26: *HUMANS AS SYMBOL-USING CREATURES*

Readings:

6. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Language and Culture"

Thursday, February 28: *PRODUCING SOCIAL ORDER THROUGH INTERACTION*

Readings:

7. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Essay: Meaning Is Negotiated Through Interaction"
8. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Naming as an Interactional Process"

WEEK SIX:

Tuesday, March 4: *PRODUCING SOCIAL ORDER THROUGH INTERACTION*

Readings:

9. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Projecting the Definition of the Situation"

Thursday, March 6: *PRODUCING SOCIAL ORDER THROUGH INTERACTION*

Readings:

10. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Negotiating a Working Consensus"

WEEK SEVEN:

Tuesday, March 11: FILM: THE GIRL IN THE CAFE
Thursday, March 13: FILM, continued. Discussion.

WEEK EIGHT

Tuesday, March 18: Holiday. Spring Break.
Thursday, March 20: Holiday. Spring Break.

WEEK NINE:

Tuesday, March 25: *PRODUCING SOCIAL SELVES*

||||| **DUE IN CLASS: March 25---> 7-PAGE PAPER DRAFTS DUE**

Readings:

11. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Essay: From Masks to Selves" and "The Self as a Process of Interaction"

Thursday, March 27: *PRODUCING SOCIAL SELVES*

Readings:

12. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Self-Development and Reference Groups"

WEEK TEN:

Tuesday, April 1: *PRODUCING SOCIAL SELVES*

Readings:

13. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Self-Presentation in Interaction"

Thursday, April 3: *THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY*

Readings:

14. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Essay: Building and Breaching Reality"

WEEK ELEVEN

Tuesday, April 8: *THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY*

Readings:

15. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "'A Theory of Reality'"

Thursday, April 10: *THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY*

Readings:

16. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Self-Fulfilling Prophecies"

[April 10 is Course Withdraw Deadline]

WEEK TWELVE

Tuesday, April 15: FILM: THE CORPORATION

Thursday, April 17: FILM, continued. Discussion.

WEEK THIRTEEN

Tuesday, April 22: *THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY*

Readings:

17. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "The Social Construction of the Cultural Status Quo"

Thursday, April 24: *AMBIGUITY, COMPLEXITY, AND CONFLICT IN SOCIAL INTERACTION*

Readings:

18. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Essay: Boundaries and Contradictions"

WEEK FOURTEEN

Tuesday, April 29: *AMBIGUITY, COMPLEXITY, AND CONFLICT IN SOCIAL INTERACTION*

Readings:

19. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Contradictions and Conflict in Self-Production"

Thursday, May 1: *AMBIGUITY, COMPLEXITY, AND CONFLICT IN SOCIAL INTERACTION*

Readings:

20. PRODUCTION OF REALITY, "Contradictions and Change in Cultural Production" and Epilogue

WEEK FIFTEEN

Tuesday, May 6: FILM: BROTHER SUN, SISTER MOON

Thursday, May 8: FILM, continued. Discussion.

WEEK SIXTEEN

Tuesday, May 13: Last Class. Student evaluations of the course.

||||| **DUE IN CLASS: May 13-----> 15-PAGE FINAL DRAFTS DUE**

[NOTE: THERE ARE NO FINAL EXAMS FOR THIS CLASS]

From *The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, 1959. Excerpted in *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings* edited by Charles Lemert, Boulder: Westview Press

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) was born in Waco, Texas. After undergraduate studies at the University of Texas, Mills did his doctoral work at the University of Wisconsin. There, he met Hans Gerth, with whom he edited, translated, and introduced *From Max Weber*, a still-important collection of Weber's writings. After teaching in what he considered a provincial exile at the University of Maryland, Mills moved to Columbia and the Bureau of Applied Social Research in 1945. His earliest days at Columbia were spent in empirical social research. Yet he never became an accepted member or even a full professor in Columbia's department. In the 1950s, Mills became much more the public intellectual, while teaching primarily undergraduates at Columbia. Works like *Power Elite*, *Listen Yankee!*, *White Collar*, and *The Causes of World War Three*—all written in this period—brought him much public acclaim and informal membership in New York's Left, intellectual elite. Mills was considered arrogant by many colleagues and a hero by many of his readers. He dressed and played the part of the young intellectual radical—complete with leather jacket and motorcycle. However, he suffered from a chronic heart condition that killed him at age forty-five in 1962, the year of SDS's *Port Huron Statement*. Mills was a source of intellectual inspiration to younger radicals and social theorists because, true to his ideal of the sociological imagination, his writings based strong critical ideas on careful empirical work. He read Weber in relation to Marx and the American pragmatists. He sought to unite the best of European and American classical theory into a social philosophy for the New Left.

The Sociological Imagination

C. Wright Mills (1959)

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that

From *The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills, Copyright © 1959 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Renewed 1987 by Yaraslava Mills. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

The Sociological Imagination

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framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one. We do not know the limits of man's capacities for supreme effort or willing degradation, for agony or glee, for pleasurable brutality or the sweetness of reason. But in our time we have come to know that the limits of 'human nature' are frighteningly broad. We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. It is characteristic of Herbert Spencer—turgid, polysyllabic, comprehensive; of E. A. Ross—graceful, muckraking, upright; of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim; of the intricate and subtle Karl Mannheim. It is the quality of all that is intellectually excellent in Karl Marx; it is the clue to Thorstein Veblen's brilliant and ironic insight, to Joseph Schumpeter's many-sided constructions of reality; it is the basis of the psychological sweep of W.E.H. Lecky no less than of the profundity and clarity of Max Weber. And it is the signal of what is best in contemporary studies of man and society.

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

- (1) What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?
- (2) Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period—what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?
- (3) What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining?

Whether the point of interest is a great power state or a minor literary mood, a family, a prison, a creed—these are the kinds of questions the best social analysts have asked. They are the intellectual pivots of classic studies of man in society—and they are the questions inevitably raised by any mind possessing the sociological imagination. For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being.

That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society. In large part, contemporary man's self-conscious view of himself as at least an outsider if not a permanent stranger, rests upon an absorbed realization of social reality and of the transformative power of history. The sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of this self-consciousness. By its use men whose mentalities have swept only a series of limited orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar. Correctly or incorrectly, they often come to feel that they can now provide themselves with adequate summations, cohesive assessments, comprehensive orientations. Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountably dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again. They acquire a new way of thinking, they experience a transvaluation of values: in a word, by their reflection and by their sensibility, they realize the cultural meaning of the social sciences.

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.' This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu—the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus if only because it is the very nature of an issue, unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary

men. An issue, in fact, often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements, and often too it involves what Marxists call 'contradictions' or 'antagonisms' . . .

In every intellectual age some one style of reflection tends to become a common denominator of cultural life. Nowadays, it is true, many intellectual fads are widely taken up before they are dropped for new ones in the course of a year or two. Such enthusiasms may add spice to cultural play, but leave little or no intellectual trace. That is not true of such ways of thinking as 'Newtonian physics' or 'Darwinian biology.' Each of these intellectual universes became an influence that reached far beyond any special sphere of idea and imagery. In terms of them, or in terms derived from them, unknown scholars as well as fashionable commentators came to re-focus their observations and re-formulate their concerns.

During the modern era, physical and biological science has been the major common denominator of serious reflection and popular metaphysics in Western societies. 'The technique of the laboratory' has been the accepted mode of procedure and the source of intellectual security. That is one meaning of the idea of an intellectual common denominator: men can state their strongest convictions in its terms; other terms and other styles of reflection seem mere vehicles of escape and obscurity.

That a common denominator prevails does not of course mean that no other styles of thought or modes of sensibility exist. But it does mean that more general intellectual interests tend to slide into this area, to be formulated there most sharply, and when so formulated, to be thought somehow to have reached, if not a solution, at least a profitable way of being carried along.

The sociological imagination is becoming, I believe, the major common denominator of our cultural life and its signal feature. This quality of mind is found in the social and psychological sciences, but it goes far beyond these studies as we now know them. Its acquisition by individuals and by the cultural community at large is slow and often fumbling: many social scientists are themselves quite unaware of it. They do not seem to know that the use of this imagination is central to the best work that they might do, that by failing to develop and to use it they are failing to meet the cultural expectations that are coming to be demanded of them and that the classic traditions of their several disciplines make available to them.

Yet in factual and moral concerns, in literary work and in political analysis, the qualities of this imagination are regularly demanded. In a great variety of expressions, they have become central features of intellectual endeavor and cultural sensibility. Leading critics exemplify these qualities as do serious journalists—in fact the work of both is often judged in these terms. Popular categories of criticism—high, middle, and low-brow, for example—are now at least as much sociological as aesthetic. Novelists—whose serious work embodies the most widespread definitions of human reality—frequently possess this imagination, and do much to meet the demand for it. By means of it, orientation to the present as history is sought. As images of human nature become more problematic, an increasing need is felt to pay closer yet more imaginative attention to the social routines and catastrophes which reveal (and which shape) man's nature in this time of civil unrest and ideological conflict. Although fashion is often revealed by attempts to use it, the sociological imagination is not merely a fashion. It is a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities. It is not merely one quality of mind among the contemporary range of cultural sensibilities—it is the quality whose wider and more adroit use offers the promise that all such sensibilities—and in fact, human reason itself—will come to play a greater role in human affairs.