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## Editor's Note: Sociological Re-Imaginations In & Of Universities

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***Editor's Note:***  
***Sociological Re-Imaginations In & Of Universities***

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**Abstract:** This is an editor's note to the Summer 2009 issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Knowledge*, themed after "Sociological Re-Imaginations In & Of Universities." Several faculty, graduate students or alumni, and current undergraduate students advance insightful, critical perspectives about their own learning and teaching experiences and personal "troubles," and broader university, disciplinary, and administrative "public issues" that in their view merit immediate attention in favor of fundamental rectifications of outdated procedures and educational habita that continue to persist at the cost of more creative and, in fact more scientific and rational, approaches to production and dissemination of knowledge. The issue includes some very practical, creative, and pedagogically consequential exercises in the sociological imagination by several undergraduate students at UMass Boston, three of whom wrote their papers in their first year freshmen/women seminars.

The Summer 2009 issue of *Human Architecture* is devoted to the theme, "Sociological Re-Imaginations in & of Universities." As part of the journal's continuing series critically engaging with C. Wright Mills's "sociological imagination," i.e., the proposition that the best way to theorize and practice sociology is via a continual conversation between the study of one's personal troubles and that of broader public issues, the present issue turns its attention to fostering sociological re-imaginings in and of universities.

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dissemination of knowledge. In what follows, largely from their own summarizing words, I will try to draw a broad sketch of the studies presented in this journal issue.

In his “In Memoriam—Professor Giovanni Arrighi (1937-2009) and Graduate Mentoring A Reflection on His Teachings and My Academic Development,” Satoshi Ikeda (Concordia University, Montreal, Canada), by citing the example of his own example when pursuing his graduate studies at SUNY-Binghamton, rebels along with his colleagues sharing the experience against graduate studies curricula in which strict hierarchical distinctions are established between students and faculty, and advocates and disseminates the learning model where students and faculty are treated as young, and not-so-young scholars, equal depositories of experiences, personal insights and social/sociological visions that can contribute to a more participatory educational experience. Ikeda writes, “Professor Arrighi continued this tradition and mentored graduate students by embracing them into the extended Arrighi family. He treated students with respect and involved them into research activities as collaborators and co-authors. He acknowledged that he received academic stimulation from his student, and inspired graduate students through critical yet encouraging comments. With anecdotes from Binghamton days, the essay reports that Professor Arrighi continues to live in the mind, heart, and practice of those who received his mentoring.”

In her “Autoethnographic Cultural Criticism as Method Toward Sociological Imaginations of Race, Memory and Identity,” Sandra J. Song, a student of Satoshi Ikeda and a recent doctoral student from the University of Alberta, Canada, devotes her paper to the examination of “a growing body of literature that fuse creative modes of writing with the academic discourse using an autoethnographic approach to

cultural analysis.” Her paper is a testimony to a growing movement in academia that is troubled by the disciplinary fragmentations among various academic cultures (social sciences, sciences, humanities, and their respective “disciplines”) by incorporating voices in her learning and practice of sociology that would otherwise be seen as more or less “different” from conventional sociological perspective—e.g., those of bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Elaine H. Kim, and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés. Song writes, “I highlight key moments in my life as an aspiring scholar and in spheres outside of the academy to engage the theoretical literature. I weave these different moments as part of a larger critical enterprise to trace the gradual rise in consciousness around issues of race, memory and identity as they have touched my life, and to demonstrate the power of writing with the ‘sociological imagination’ through autoethnography.”

L. Lynda Harling Stalker (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada) and Jason Pridmore Zuyd University, The Netherlands), also advocate, as also done in continuing pages and issues of this journal, the significance of C. Wright Mills’ sociological imagination in pedagogical practice. What is additionally emphasized in their work, however, is the heightened advocacy that not only students, but also faculty demonstrate in their actual classroom teaching and learning encounters their sociological imaginations in regard to their own lives. In their view, the teacher who transparently opens up his or her own personal troubles in relation to public issues, provides, by example, a kind of learning experience to students that may not have parallels using other methods. In the authors’ own words, the article “suggests that enabling students to develop their ‘sociological imagination’ is best accomplished through the use of ‘reflexive pedagogy.’ Reflexive pedagogy is here described as the dual process of guiding students through different modes of

sociological learning while maintaining a critical and reflexive self examination of one's own approach to instruction."

Festus Ikeotuonye (University College Dublin, Ireland) presents a compelling argument in his "Nemesis of C. Wright Mills' Promise: Sociology, Education and the Changing Context and Meaning of Teaching and Learning," to demonstrate the significant and continuing contextual relation of knowledge and power in our universities, one that can best be understood not only by a sociologically imaginative framework to the issue, but also one that subjects this very framework to the Foucauldian analysis of knowledge/power matrix in the university context. "Through a critical analysis of the penetration of corporate and commercial values into the sphere of higher education," Ikeotuonye writes in his abstract,

I aim to demonstrate the link between the larger historical scene and the varied appearances of the "designs for instrumental action" that ultimately set the conditions for their own propagation. The reduction of "science" to "technique" as a means of narrowing the uncertainties in cause-effect correlation binds the geometric progression imaginaries of "Neo-liberalism" to Jacques Ellul's "Technological Society" (1964). In this sense, the "nemesis" of C. Wright Mills' promise is the same modern alter ego that evoked "enemies of progress" as an immanent discourse of derision in the early modern period.

Ikeotuonye's study is "underscored by a documentary analysis of the EUA Bologna Handbook and the UCD president's reports and speeches using the works of Michel Foucault."

In "Interdisciplinary Studies and Scholarship Issues, Challenges, and Impli-

cations for "Third World" Development and Social Change" Samuel Zalanga (Bethel University) presents a well-articulated and presented voice in favor of interdisciplinary studies as an essential requirement for advancement of more fruitful development studies and practices. In particular, Zalanga argues that "reducing development to a purely economic phenomenon leads to economic growth without development or progressive social transformation," affirming that "'Third World' development needs to be treated as an interdisciplinary project in order to approach development in a holistic manner. This entails transforming the organizational culture of universities, their reward system, and the social and behavioral orientations of persons that work as scholars within the universities."

Donald A. Nielsen's (College of Charleston) "The Structure of Higher Learning in Fin-de-Siècle America: Bureaucracy, Statistical Accounting, and Sociocultural Change" is a serious critique of public issues surrounding the problems of higher learning in America, rooted in the author's own practical and personal experiences in academia over the past several decades. He uses Thorstein Veblen's ideas "to diagnose current trends in the higher learning in America" and its "increasing rationalization, bureaucratization and emphasis on statistical accounting as well as the dominance of administrative elites within the middle levels of higher education." Nielsen's study "traces the impact of these methods throughout a range of academic areas, including hiring and evaluation of faculty, the place of students, the content and conduct of intellectual programs, and the operation more generally of the academic organization." Nielsen's perspective and arguments deserve a good hearing by any administrator, faculty, and student who is interested in universities and education as practices of freedom than iron cages of assembly line training.

Anne Bubriski (University of Central Florida) and Ingrid Semaan (UConn-Stamford), in their "Activist Learning vs. Service Learning in a Women's Studies Classroom," turn their attention to an important area often taken for granted in the university habitus, "Service Learning" and in particular in relation to questions related to women's studies and struggles. The authors argue that merely teaching issues and knowledges that shed light on women's lives, while necessary and important, is not sufficient for making an actual difference in women's lives. By advocating merging classroom studies with creative and critical service learning projects, Bubriski and Semaan suggest that what happens outside the classrooms in universities can and should be as central to the development of critically and practically consequential educational outcomes. The authors argue that "[w]hile we agree that integrating Women's Studies into college and university curricula is a radical act and an important step toward broader social change, we argue that Women's Studies programs must see promoting feminist scholarship as a beginning point, and not an end point. We argue that faculty members must teach students to merge feminist theory with social action in order to transform systemic gender, class, and race inequalities. ... Based on a pilot of an activist learning project for a Women's Studies class, we make recommendations to faculty members on how to get the best results from such a project."

The journal issue then turns to some very practical, creative, and pedagogically consequential exercises in the sociological imagination by several undergraduate students at UMass Boston, three of whom (Roode, Zheng, and Messing) wrote their papers in their first year freshmen/women seminars, others in their "Elements of Sociological Theory" courses, and another in a course in "Sociology of Work."

In her "Surviving 'Acceptable' Victim-

ization," Penelope Roode presents a powerful argument in favor of the view that recovering from "acceptable" victimhood does not have to result in "forgiving" the perpetrator. In her paper, Penny "demonstrates the occurrence of child abuse using her own history, and explain child abuse using the work of several psychologists and other experts. She also shows methods of recovery she has used and includes methods recommended by experts."

Belle Summer (penname), in her 'Keep It In the Family': Casting Sociological Lights on the Secrets of My Life," takes significant courage to share her own experiences as an abused child, through a rich exploration and application of various sociological theories and concepts in phenomenological sociology, symbolic interactionism, social exchange/rational choice theory, functionalism, conflict theory, and the postmodern perspective. The author writes,

Morrie Schwartz says we must love one another or die. 'The fact is, there is no foundation, no secure ground, upon which people may stand today if it isn't the family. It's become quite clear to me as I've been sick. If you don't have the support and love and caring and concern that you get from a family, you don't have much at all. Love is so supremely important. As our great poet Auden said, "love each other or perish"' (Albom, 91)." She continues, "This message made me feel that I needed to write on a piece of paper about all the people I had problems with and tear it up. I should move forward with forgiveness and acceptance of everything that I have gone through. I will keep an open mind for my future and learn from past mistakes that become my own life lessons.

There will be no more secrets in my life.

E. M. Walsh, in her "Understanding Fear Using My Sociological Imagination," also carefully and meticulously examines her long-standing fear using her sociological imagination, applying various theoretical lenses offered in sociology. She critically explores fear using the theoretical lenses, and subjects her troubles including abuse to insightful scrutiny in favor of more fruitful venues in the contexts of both personal and broader social engagements.

Ann Marie Moler's "Dying to Live: Exploring the Fear of an Unlived Life Using the Sociological Imagination" also deals with the subject of fear, but of a different sort, philosophically. She applies various sociological theories to explore her fear of living an unlived life, seeking to examine several important issues that provide her with opportunities for introspection, growth and motivation for living a full life. Using her sociological imagination she seeks to open her mind and heart to ponder more questions and dive deeper into what it means to discover how to fully live. Exploring the fear she has had of wasting her life gives her a deeper understanding of how she wants to live, and discovers some valuable tools to encourage her to stay on the right path.

Minxing Zheng's is a deeply moving and honest study on "Measures of Personal Success and Failure: A Self-Assessment, Applying the Sociological Imagination." Anyone who has moved to another country for study and settled there can appreciate the insightful questions and explorations Zheng advances in his sociological self-examination. Zheng explores the meanings of personal success and failure as internalized from broader society in contrast to his own life, culture, and family background, professional aspirations, and emergent critical thinking and values. Using various sociological concepts and writings, he asks

and seeks to explore questions such as: "How am I doing? Am I having a successful life so far or have I had more failure than success? How do I measure my personal success and failure? Was my success or failure based upon my own standards or other people's determinations? How do I decide my standards? Are they influenced by other people's perception? What is considered to be a success and what is considered to be a failure? Was my success really successful or were they considered successful only according to other people's considerations? Did I really fail in my failure or was I just locking myself behind another set of bars created by other people? Am I the only one who has been living in such a life pursuing this kind of success and avoiding that kind of failure or am I just one of many others whose eyes are blindfolded by the society's perception?"

Andrew Messing's exhaustive study and sociology of himself as "an outsider" merits attention for the systematic world-historical exploration that accompanies it, and the engagement with various sociological concepts and perspectives that he learned and critically engaged with during his First Year Seminar. While he has a specific notion of "Neighborhood" in mind, world-historically studied, that he finds himself to be alienated from personally, he concludes his study by arriving at a mixed appreciation of his life's experience and hopes for a sort of intentional integration that to him would bear most fruit. In his own words, his study is "primarily concerned with the effect of community on the development and self-understanding of the individual. I argue that across the historical time and space individuals have consistently defined themselves by the communities to which they belong. I also indicate that I lack any such sort of identification or membership. I then identify both the negative and positive implications of my status as an outsider."

Jillian Pelletier, in her "Money Does

Not Buy Happiness”: Using the Sociological Imagination to Move Beyond Stressful Lives” seeks to free herself from the habitual modes of living that assume seeking money as an end itself would bring happiness. Using her sociological imagination, in her paper she applies various sociological concepts and theories to explore the role played by money, materialism, and media, as sources of undue stress in her life.

“Working to Thrive, Not Just Survive: My Work History in a Sociological Imagination,” by Christine Quinn, explores how all forms of work influence different aspects of life. Social class, gender, familial and societal expectations all have great impact when it comes to the work that people do. In Quinn’s view, work is not solely defined as the way individuals create an income; instead, the term work can encompass many aspects of life. She writes, “[t]he point of this essay is to determine how the different forms of work that I have been exposed to throughout my life have impacted my own expectations and goals as I have matured. When work is seen in broader terms, it can become something to be truly passionate about—something that you love to do.”

The one before last, but not least, paper in this volume is an in-depth, critical study of “Future Hell: Nuclear Fiction in Pursuit of History,” by Trevor Doherty, a graduate student of English at UMass Boston. He masterfully engages with several texts to weave a vision of possible futures by examining the personal troubles and public issues of the personages living the stories. He asks: What is a cyclical history? Why does humanity seem doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again? Are we doomed to this machine called fate? What is a soul, and how do I express it? Predicting what futures may lay ahead for humanity if we continue on some popular cultural paths, a body of twentieth century authors has created literary experiments designed to test the limits of human imagination.

Nuclear warfare, artificial intelligence, inter-galactic travel, and the nature of spirituality itself all come woven together in the texts, which are profoundly affected by enlightened science, the competitive state of twentieth century politics and the eighteenth century German philosopher Georg Hegel.” Reading Doherty’s paper, one cannot help but appreciate the creative quality, precision, and playfulness of his vision that deeply resonates with the integrative approach to the study of utopia, mysticism, and science that also inspires and energizes the present journal.

The issue includes a commentary, “Engaged Buddhism in Retreat’ Revisited A Reply to Barbara Newell’s Response,” by Lisa Kemmerer (Montana State University). This is a reply by Kemmerer to a response provided by Bhikshuni Chan Tung Nghiem (Barbara Newell) (titled “Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World: The Real Heart of Engaged Buddhism—A Response to Lisa Kemmerer,” pp. 145-147) to Kemmerer’s original commentary (titled “Engaged Buddhism in Retreat,” pp. 135-143) published in the Summer 2008 issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* (volume VI, issue 3). The journal issue was dedicated to the exploration of the engaged buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese buddhist and Zen master.