Soc. 470, section 1, Spring 2005
Senior Seminar:
Liberating Social Theory?

UMass Boston, Sociology Dept.
Spring 2005
Class Hrs.: W 9:30-12:00 noon
Class Location: Wheatley, 4th fl, room 22 (soc. conf. room)
Prometheus Address: http://boston.umassonline.net/
Prometheus Course ID: 6650, Password: Soctam (when inside, click “Sociology Spring 05 Courses-Tamdgidi)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
The central purpose of this capstone course in undergraduate sociology is to develop our critical and especially self-critical thinking skills—to be able to consciously problematize what we take for granted as the truths and givens of our everyday life in ourselves and the world, and inquire whether and how we can liberate ourselves from social structures within and without that limit our creativity and growth as human beings. For this end, using a variety of sociological, cross-disciplinary, and cross-cultural readings augmented by selected films, we will explore whether social theory has served, or can serve, as a guide to liberatory human practice in both self-reflective and world-historical contexts. We will critically engage with traditional and contemporary as well as postmodern perspectives to deconstruct both the intellectual architecture as well as the historical experiences of liberating social theory across selected mystical, utopian, and academic traditions in a comparative and applied framework. Student assignments will consist of engaged attendance and participation in discussions, shared reports and presentations, and a research paper cultivating students' critical sociological imaginations by exploring the link between their personal troubles and ever globalizing public issues.

We will study the subject by proceeding from micro- to increasingly macrosociological perspectives. 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 two drafts. The key purpose of the paper is to apply the perspectives and concepts learned in class in the context of our global 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 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, three reading, paper topic, and conference reports, office-hour meetings, 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 on pedagogy). 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:

My discussant #(s):
1. Attendance (30%): Attendance in class will be strictly observed. Attendance is not simply physical presence. It means being attentive. This requires having read the material assigned for the session, being prepared with pertinent comments to raise in class, coming on time to class, being vocal and engaged during class, and not leaving the room during the class before it is over. **Attendance points will not be given for absences, excused or unexcused; however, excused absences may be made up.** All absences for which excusable notice (via email prior to or same day of missed session, and soon in person with documentation) is not given will be considered unexcused. Only excused absences may be made-up based on arrangements agreed upon with the instructor. It is every students’ responsibility to hand in an absence letter (or send an email) to the instructor for each session missed (excused or not), including date of and reasons for any absence, accompanied by all relevant explanation/documentation. Points will be taken off the student’s total grade for each unexcused, unmade-up absent session (For once-per-week classes 3% per session, for twice-per-week classes 2% per session, and for thrice-per-week classes, 1% per session). Students can make-up for their excused absences by writing a 3-4 page critical commentary on the readings/films/subject matter of the session they missed (format may follow the regular presentation report assignment below). Taking personal breaks during the class can be disruptive to other students; please try to avoid it.

2. Presentation Report (10%): 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. The report should be 5 pages (Times font, size 12, double-spaced) comprised of the following (including assigned grade points):

   a)-Summary (2 points). The summary must be in your own words. Rules against plagiarism will apply to presentation reports as well. If you have to quote, you must provide proper citation. You must identify at the beginning of the presentation which part of the textbook you are presenting. Make sure you provide your name and date/topic of presentation at the beginning.

   b)-Concepts (2 points). Identify, list, and define (using direct quotes from the reading, if desired) 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)-Linkages (2 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, and previous sessions when applicable. 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)-Questions (1 points). 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 Presentation (3 points). Presenters must try to orally demonstrate an understanding of the subject in their own words, perhaps aided by some written outlines or notes for specific highlighting of important passages in the text. **Suggested format:** We assume all students have read the reading, so start with a VERY BRIEF summary (2 minutes) of what your assigned reading is about, followed by 4-5 minute 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 the presentation with sharing your questions about the readings. The oral presentation will be evaluated based on the clarity of communication (2 points) and degree to which it generates class engagement and discussion (1 points). Each oral presentation SHOULD TAKE NO MORE THAN 8 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: 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 is available on the course’s Prometheus site. This assignment consists of a 15 page sociological self-research paper addressing the topic “Using various concepts and perspectives studied through class/outside readings, discussions, and films, how do they jointly help me understand in a global context an important, still unresolved issue I face today, have faced in the past, and/or will face in the future, its nature, root causes, and consequences, and how I can move towards its effective resolution?” The sociological self-research paper will be progressively developed throughout the course along 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 (5%): 2-pages. Early in the semester you will be asked to think about 3-5 topic ideas about what you would like to explore in-depth in your research paper. Read the research paper guideline on Prometheus to begin working on your topic and paper.

C-The First Draft (15%): 7-pages. 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 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 (15% total) are roughly as follows:

• 4%: Micro exploration of the research problem/question
• 5%: Use of at least 20 concepts from 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 cited linkage each to three articles in Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge (Journal issues on reserve, samples will be shown in class)
• 2%: 1 point for each linkage to the films viewed during the first half of class preceding the paper deadline.
• 1%: A bibliography of prospective outside scholarly readings specifically related to your topic, readings which you will consult and read in preparation of your final draft in the next stage.

D-The Final Draft (25%): 15-pages (including reworked 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 to micro exploration (4 points)
• 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.

- **7%**: At least 5 QUOTED and INDEPTH linkages to issues or arguments advanced in all the required textbook/readings used in class (1 point each linkage)
- **3%**: 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.

4. **Social Theory Forum Conference Participation (5%)**: The Sociology Department will host its annual Social Theory Forum this Spring semester, on April 6-7 (the program of the event will be distributed in class). This year’s topic is “Theories and Praxes of Difference: Revisiting Edward Said in the Age of New Globalizations.” Many faculty and students from this and other campuses nationwide (and internationally) will present papers and participate in discussions about social theory. One of the class sessions will coincide with this event. You must either attend the conference during that class session instead (see schedule), or attend any other parts (panel or lecture) of the conference during its two-day offering, and write a 3-page critical commentary of what you learned from your experience.

5. **Office Hours (5%)**: Each student must schedule and meet at least twice (preferably in the first and second halves of semester respectively) 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. Experience has shown that those students who regularly consult during office hours with the instructor regarding their progress in the course and their papers do better than those who don’t.

6. **Self-Critical Thinking (5%)**: Students are expected to view everything, every text, and every viewpoint, especially their own predispositions and perspectives, 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.

**Plagiarism**: No plagiarism will be allowed in student papers. All quoted and borrowed texts and ideas must be properly credited to their authors and sources. Any ideas or texts you quote from your sources must be clearly referenced, and supplied with an accurate bibliography. Each and every citation and passage quoted must be properly cited, and the reason for its use in text must be clearly elaborated in your own words before and/or after the quotation. For the UMass Policy on Academic Dishonesty and a tutorial on plagiarism visit the Healey Library website at [http://www.lib.umb.edu/webtutorial/module6/Module6-1.html](http://www.lib.umb.edu/webtutorial/module6/Module6-1.html)

**Special Needs**: If you require accommodation due to disability, you should contact the UMB Center for Disability Services, which is located on the First Floor of McCormack Hall, Room 401, Tel: 617-287-7430; TTY: 617-287-7431; Fax: 617-287-7466. Considerations for disability accommodations will depend on presentation of written documentation from appropriate campus offices.

**Final Grade Curve**:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>92-90</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>86-83</td>
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Required Readings: (*in book store, † on reserve/prometheus)

*ISBN: 1565844572, Utopistics: Or Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century, by Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein

†Four issues of Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, Vol. I, No. 1 & 2; and Vol. II, No. 1 & 2. [Two sets of each issue are on reserve; additionally the articles can be individually downloaded from the course’s Prometheus page, to be explained in class].

Recommended Readings:

Gurdjieff: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas, by John Shirley, ISBN: 1585422878
Culture and Imperialism, by EDWARD W. SAID, ISBN: 0679750541
The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy, by Arthur J. Deikman, ISBN: 0807029513,
The New Imperialism, by David Harvey, ISBN: 0199264317
Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labor of Division, by Kevin Hetherington, Rolland Munro, ISBN: 0631207686
Privileging Difference, by Antony Easthope, Catherine Belsey, ISBN: 0333786297
Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality, by Michele Lamont (Editor), Marcel Fournier (Editor), ISBN: 0226468143
Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference, by Nikos Papastergiadis (Editor), ISBN: 1854891537
Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory, by Peter Barry, ISBN: 0719043263
Civilization and Its Contents, by Bruce Mazlish, ISBN: 0804750823
COURSE SCHEDULE:

Important Note: All students (including each presenter) must read all the readings assigned for each session. Presenters basically go further in reading their particular assigned reading more in-depth while preparing their written reports and oral presentations.

WEEK ONE
Wednesday, January 26: First Day of Class.
Course Objective, Organization, Schedule. Assignments of Readings/Introductory questionnaire.
Film: Meetings With Remarkable Men

WEEK TWO
Wednesday, February 2: The Sociological Imagination: Previous Student Papers Symposium.
[Note: Jan. 31 is add/drop deadline]
Readings:
• Tamdgidi, M.H., “Toward A Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Oppressive Selves: Pauolo Freire and G. I. Gurdjieff in Comparative Perspective” (download copy from Prometheus)
• Read the short piece by C. Wright Mills, “The Sociological Imagination,” attached to your syllabus
• Each student should carefully read three student articles chosen from the table of contents of the four issues of Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, trying to see how each student used their “sociological imagination” and various concepts learned in class in exploring their topic (table of contents and copies are available via Prometheus site of the course--details to be explained in class; two copies of each issue is also available on reserve).

WEEK THREE
Wednesday, February 9: Knowing and Working on Oneself
Readings:
1. The Gurdjieff Work by Kathleen Speeth, 1-67
2. The Gurdjieff Work by Kathleen Speeth, 68-117
3. Gurdjieff, Views from the Real World, preliminary pages, and section I (pages 3-37)

WEEK FOUR
Wednesday, February 16: Knowing and Working on Oneself (continued).
Readings:
4. Gurdjieff, Views from the Real World, section II (pages 41-114)
5. Gurdjieff, Views from the Real World, section III (pages 115-192)

WEEK FIVE
Wednesday, February 23: Utopistics
DUE IN CLASS: February 23 ---> 2-PAGE (Maximum) PAPER TOPIC IDEAS
Readings:
7. Wallestein, Utopistics, ch. 1, p. 1-33
8. Wallestein, Utopistics, ch. 2, p. 35-64
9. Wallestein, Utopistics, ch. 3, p. 65-90

WEEK SIX
Wednesday, March 2: Liberating Theory?
Readings:
12. Michael Albert, et. al., Liberating Theory, p. 95-146

WEEK SEVEN
Wednesday, March 9: Film: Fidel. Discussion.

WEEK EIGHT
Wednesday, March 16: HOLIDAY (Spring Break)

WEEK NINE
Wednesday, March 23: “Them and Us” Thinking
DUE IN CLASS: March 23 ---> 7-PAGE PAPER DRAFTS DUE
Readings:
15. Deikman, Them and Us, p. 54-106
16. Deikman, Them and Us, p. 107-149
17. Deikman, Them and Us, p. 150-186
WEEK TEN
Wednesday, March 30: Moving Beyond Your Degree: The Power of Liberatory Thinking
Readings:

WEEK ELEVEN
Wednesday, April 6: SOCIAL THEORY FORUM CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION (Topic: Theories and Praxes of Difference: Revisiting Edward Said in the Age of New Globalizations) Attend either during the class session, or any other time during the two day (April 6-7) conference and write a 3-page critical commentary on what you learned in light of class readings and discussions so far. Due next week.
[Note: April 7 is Pass/Fail grading and Course Withdrawal Deadline]

WEEK TWELVE
Wednesday, April 13: Film Fahrenheit 9/11. Discussion.
DUE IN CLASS: April 13 ----> 3-PAGE (Maximum) Conference Commentary

WEEK THIRTEEN
Wednesday, April 20: Moving Beyond Your Degree: The Power of Liberatory Thinking (continued)
Readings:

WEEK FOURTEEN
Wednesday, April 27: Moving Beyond Your Degree: The Power of Liberatory Thinking (continued)
Readings:

WEEK FIFTEEN
Wednesday, May 4: Film: Billy Elliot. Discussion.

WEEK SIXTEEN
Wednesday, May 11: Last Class. Student evaluations of the course.
DUE IN CLASS: May 11 -------> 15-PAGE FINAL DRAFTS DUE
C. Wright Mills on the Sociological Imagination

The Sociological Imagination

social life are explained by the meaning of events and the meaning of events is, in turn, explained by the structure of society. The concept of the structure of society is introduced by the idea of the role and status of individuals within society. The role is defined as the set of expectations that society has for an individual in a given situation. The status is defined as the set of positions an individual occupies in society. The relationship between role and status is explained by the concept of the social structure, which is defined as the system of roles and statuses in society. The social structure is explained by the concept of the collective conscience, which is defined as the shared understanding of the nature of society and its institutions. The collective conscience is explained by the concept of the social order, which is defined as the pattern of social relationships in society. The social order is explained by the concept of the social field, which is defined as the set of social relationships that exist between social actors. The social field is explained by the concept of the social system, which is defined as the set of social relationships that exist between social actors and their environment. The social system is explained by the concept of the social structure, which is defined as the system of roles and statuses in society.
will come to play a greater role in human affairs.

The promise that all such sensibilities—and in fact, human reason itself—will come to play a greater role in human affairs.

It is a matter of great inaccuracy to think of the computer as an extension or replacement of human reason. If we think of the computer as an extension or replacement of human reason, we are overlooking the fact that the computer is not a human being. The computer is not a human being. It is a machine, and it is a machine that can do things that humans cannot do. It is a machine that can do things that humans cannot do.

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