

SOCIOLOGY ON THE ROCK

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Editor and Founder: Stephen Harold Riggins

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Retirement Party for Susanne Ottenheimer.

Professor Judy Adler: "Suzanne has served as one of the department's most dedicated teachers for many, many years -- a true professional educator, generous in the warmth, attention and welcoming availability she has consistently mustered for students. Year in and year out, Suzanne has helped to make the Sociology Department a welcoming place for students and faculty alike." Front row, left to right: Pouya Morshedi, Linda Cohen, Susanne Ottenheimer, Adela Kabiri, and Lisa-Jo van den Scott. Back row, left to right: Ruby Bishop, Peter Sinclair, Shayan Morshedi, Fran Warren, Malin Enstrom, Adrienne Peters, Colleen Banfield, Daniel Kudla, Audrey O'Neill, Jeffrey van den Scott, and Bob Hill.

On the Sociology of Boredom

By Patrick Gamsby

“Why would you study boredom? Is it boring?” Sometimes serious, sometimes in jest, these are common questions awaiting anyone who is interested in the topic of boredom. But really, why study boredom? Perhaps at first blush it may seem unworthy of serious research. It is a common experience found throughout everyday life, sure, but probe a little bit deeper and it reveals itself to be a complex phenomenon. It has received attention in sociology dating back several decades (Klapp 1986), but it is perhaps most often associated with psychology (Fenichel 1953), and, to a lesser extent, with literary studies (Spacks 1995), religious studies (Raposa 1999), and philosophy (Svendsen 2005). I would argue that it is actually most appropriate as a topic of sociological inquiry, given the historical, social, and spatial aspects of its emergence and pervasiveness in the modern world. As well, the study of boredom fits with Peter Berger’s assertion in his *Invitation to Sociology*: “It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this – things are not what they seem” (Berger 1963: 22). Indeed, I would argue that boredom is not what it seems.

I first encountered the sociology of boredom while I was an undergraduate student at the University of Western Ontario, many moons ago. In the second term of my fourth year I took a course offered by Dr. Michael Gardiner on the Sociology of Everyday Life. At first, I was taken aback by the content, as it was all so different from everything I had learned in my sociology degree up to that point. As I soon found out, boredom and everyday life are extraordinarily complex in their ordinariness. Here, it became clear that Hegel was on to something with his maxim “the familiar is not necessarily the known” (Gardiner 2000: 1). This became especially apparent to me when I had to give a class presentation of an article by Joe Moran titled “Benjamin and Boredom.” This opened my eyes to the complexity of boredom, its seriousness as a topic, and the great potential of the sociology of seemingly trivial things.

I would go on to do graduate work on boredom, specifically on the latent theory of boredom in the work of Henri Lefebvre which would also be the topic of my first book (Gamsby 2022). There is an interesting parallel between Lefebvre and boredom, as both are familiar entities but not especially known. Lefebvre argued that a study of boredom ought to be

part of an inquiry into everyday life. For example, in the second volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, published in the original French in 1961, Lefebvre noted the importance of boredom for his overall project: “On the horizon of the modern world dawns the black sun of boredom, and critique of everyday life has a sociology of boredom as part of its agenda” (Lefebvre 2002: 75). Despite this assertion, Lefebvre did not pursue a sociology of boredom. In assembling the fragments of his theory that are scattered across his vast oeuvre, I set out to construct his unrealized sociology of boredom. In doing so, boredom is revealed to be a dialectical phenomenon, one that is tied to both time and space, modernity, everyday life, urbanism, suburbia, pop culture, avant-garde art, literature, leisure, work, among other areas. In a word, it is complex.

Boredom’s relationship to history is part of its complexity. Simply put, there are three basic views on boredom and history (Gamsby 2019: 210-211). The common view is to pay little attention to boredom, seeing nothing interesting or unique about it. It is part of time immemorial. In such a view, as soon as humans walked the earth they were probably bored with it. Alternatively, there are those that take boredom to be worthy of serious study, but nevertheless view it as an ahistorical experience, often seeing historical terms and experiences such as *acedia* as being synonymous with boredom (Kuhn 1976). Finally, there is the historical view, which is one I subscribe to, that boredom is an historically specific experience that emerged with modernity (Goodstein 2005). This last position lends itself especially well to sociological analysis. It is one that looks to the *Oxford English Dictionary* as proof of the nineteenth century emergence of boredom, as well as one that takes into account the specific conditions of modernity with the speeding up of society, the “annihilation of time and space,” and shifts in perception that came with the advent of steam power (Schivelbusch 2014).

Even if some historical parameters can be placed around it, boredom is an elusive subject. It may appear in unexpected places, both out in the world and in scholarship. In sociological literature it may be hiding away amidst other topics. As such, it is not always so easy to find outside of specifically focused articles and books. For example, my favourite definition of boredom comes from Marx in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* where he notes that boredom is a “longing for a content” (Marx

1992: 398). I stumbled upon this definition, and I believe that such a fortuitous encounter is part of the thrill and the challenge of studying boredom. As well, part of the challenge is knowing that it may be called something else, or alluded to, or even implicit in a text. Is the “problem with no name” in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* not boredom? The suburban housewife’s question “Is this all?” (Friedan 2001: 57) could be seen as a quantitative query, perhaps one that is economic in nature, but I argue it is one that emerges out of boredom in Marx’s sense of the term as a longing for content, which is to say a utopian wish for something else. How about Simmel’s depiction of the blasé personality in his essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (Simmel 1997: 174-185)? Is this adaptation to the speed, density, and rhythms of the big city not also boredom? It has been argued that it is (Goodstein 2005: 249-280).



Painting titled "Boredom" (1893) by French artist Gaston La Touche.

Can you ever objectively see boredom in the world? Yes and no. Aside from its declaration, there are certain visual cues, certain gestures, that may indicate boredom. A yawn is one such example. But not all yawns are created equal. Perhaps someone is sleep deprived, or perhaps they simply need to get oxygen to their brain. There have been attempts to measure one’s boredom proneness (Farmer and Sundberg 1986), but I am wary of such psychological questionnaires. If someone is actually bored, they may try to disguise it, as there is a certain stigma associated with it. Who among us wants to be called boring? Who among us wants to admit to being bored? For the former question, it would be few, if any. For the latter question, it depends. To be bored as a young child is often seen as a psychological

deficiency on the part of the child. The boredom of a teenager could also be seen as a deficiency if viewed by parents or teachers, but to the teenager’s friends it could be a mark of coolness. For these various children, to be bored by something is to be either below it or above it, in a certain sense, even if one is only posing as bored. But, of course, one can be bored by tarrying with something. That is, not above it, not below it, but staying with it. As such, there is more than one way to be bored.

But is there only one kind of boredom? It may seem that way, based on how it is discussed in everyday life as just a matter of time dragging, but it is more complex than that. In his 1929/1930 lectures, Martin Heidegger argued that boredom is a fundamental mood. For him, there are three different types of boredom, each of which is fluid, each has the characteristics of “being left empty” and “being held in limbo,” and each is more profound than the last. The first type of boredom is an objective boredom in which we are “bored by something.” It is a situation where there is a certain boringness, a sort of boring quality that you can point to and say “This bores me.” Conversely, the second type of boredom moves from objective to subjective. Here, one experiences boredom but cannot definitively identify the cause. It is not a matter of this or that, but something else, perhaps oneself, that bores. Finally, the third boredom is referred to as “profound boredom,” which is a type of existential boredom. It is something beyond the objective and subjective forms mentioned above and is only accessible if it is not counteracted. It is a boredom that brings one closer to questioning time itself, closer to an authentic philosophical position (Heidegger 1995). Very different from a psychological deficiency. Heidegger’s is but one interpretation of boredom’s diversity, but there are others that believe there are many more than just three types of boredom (Tochilnikova, 2021: 27-35).

What I have tried to convey here is that boredom is not simple. Indeed, attempting to delineate the contours of boredom can prove to be a tricky endeavour. This is part of the opportunity and challenge of its study. In general, boredom studies have been around for several decades, but this area has developed greatly over the last couple of decades. There is now an International Society of Boredom Studies, which publishes a peer reviewed journal and hosts conferences. And, along with numerous articles and books, a few collections of boredom studies have been published fairly recently (Gardiner and Haladyn, 2017; McDonough, 2017). These are all signs of a

burgeoning area of inquiry. Accordingly, in returning to the two questions posed at the beginning of this piece, I would say that boredom is interesting and by no means boring. There is a great deal of work to be done in the sociology of boredom, well beyond what I have written here. If you agree that things are not what they seem, and the familiar is not necessarily the known, then you, too, may be interested in the sociology of boredom.

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Towards a Sociology of Failure

By Katherine Pendakis and Elisabeth Rondinelli

Katherine Pendakis, PhD York University, teaches in the Department of Social and Cultural Studies at the Grenfell campus of Memorial University. Her previous research as an ethnographer has been about

migration, diasporic identity, and kinship in Greece, Vietnam, and Canada. Publications by Katherine Pendakis have appeared in *Citizenship Studies*, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, and *Surveillance & Society*.

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As Millennial scholars born into the Canadian working class, we (Liz and Kate) were raised on a standard diet of “work hard, get ahead” at a time when it still felt possible to meet the traditional markers of adulthood: graduating with a college or university education; getting a job with a stable income; buying a home; building a family with partners, pets, and maybe children. But as Silva (2013) has shown, this trajectory has become less possible for young adults today. As neoliberalism has reduced state supports, well-paying union jobs have disappeared, and students have become heavily indebted, Millennials, and more recently Gen Z, are searching for alternative ways of claiming self-worth.



Professor Katherine Pendakis

We have been researching an emerging “culture of failure” in North American society. This culture is mainly aimed at, concerned with, and produced by Gen Z and Millennials, and is expressed in mainstream media and social media ranging from observations of changes in the labour market (like the “great

resignation” and “quiet quitting”) to reflections on the mundane failures of everyday life (like “goblin mode” and “bed rotting”). At the centre of our analysis is an examination of how discourses of failure convey a critical and lucid understanding of the limitations of our contemporary social systems as well as traditional markers of adulthood. This departs in striking ways from dominant approaches to failure.

Traditional narratives of failure tell us that it is best thought of as something from which to learn and a necessary stepping stone on the way to success and self-development. A simple Google search will yield hundreds of motivational quotes by entrepreneurs, athletes, political personalities, and influencers – living and dead – that frame failure as an unlikely teacher, urging us to keep trying. Similar aspirational sentiments are reproduced everywhere, from schools and workplaces, to pillows, kitchen walls, and coffee mugs: “Fail again. Fail better!” From this perspective, chronic failure that does not yield identifiable self-development is consequently seen as evidence of an individual’s lack of grit, perseverance, work ethic, or self-discipline.

Certainly, there are many sociological analyses that tell us about the power of this framing. In fact, critical sociologists have long been preoccupied with the power and pervasiveness of individualistic discourses that encourage people to take personal responsibility for their circumstances and status. Working with theoretical contributions from key critical social and political theorists like Bauman (2000), Beck (1992), Bourdieu (1977, 1986), Brown (1995), Foucault (1997), and Rose (1990, 1999), studies have explored the diverse manifestation of these discourses, tracking how individualism shows up, for instance, in entrepreneurial subjectivity (Bröckling 2015), the meritocratic myth (Calarco et al. 2022; Mijis 2021), moral or flexible citizenship (Ong 1999; Valverde 1991), and therapeutic and self-help narratives (Illouz 2007, 2008; Silva 2013). Each of these discourses frames one’s experiences and position in social life as a consequence of one’s own individual behaviour and decision-making. At the centre of each is the self: wealth, prestige, strong relationships, and good health are manifestations of one’s will; financial precarity, divorce, and illness reflect poor decision-making and a lack of self-discipline. We have found that for critical sociologists, self-blame and talk of failure is simply a reflection of these discourses – one that ultimately serves to reproduce social inequality by blocking the possibility of collective awareness and critique of social structures.

A notable example of this tradition is Silva's treatment of working-class Millennials' reliance on therapeutic narratives to come to terms with their sense of failure. With the assistance of self-help books and media, therapists and support groups, Millennials develop a therapeutic narrative through which they position themselves as having succeeded in overcoming their personal demons (like pathological family relationships, bad habits, learning challenges, mental illness, and addiction). At the same time, however, Silva interprets this tendency as a depoliticizing force, turning young people inward and "hardening" them against themselves and others. Silva documents instances in which interviewees blame themselves or others for failing to achieve traditional markers of adulthood or for not having more success in their journey of self-development. Failure and therapeutic narratives thus go hand in hand.

While Gen Z has inherited this now well-entrenched therapeutic narrative and the self-help culture that goes along with it, we argue that there is also evidence of an emerging generational disenchantment with the allure of perpetual self-improvement. Against hustle culture, against "the grind," against performative productivity, and burning the candle on both ends, Gen Z has at their disposal a new framework through which they can understand these norms to be "toxic" remnants of an outdated work-obsessed culture. Foregoing the fantasies of meritocratic social mobility and reward, Gen Z can now appeal to slowness, staying put, and opting out.

Arguably, generational divides have been well-documented, characterized by mutual disdain, hostility or suspicion: the young consider the old to be out of touch; the old call the young idealistic and irresponsible, naive to the ways of the world. But we claim that what marks this generation – Gen Z in particular – is the historically specific set of tools they have to articulate their shared condition. This shared condition includes having been born into internet culture and digital practice, the mainstream acknowledgement that it may be too late to do anything about climate change, the widespread forecasting of declining quality of life, and the discourses of mental health crises and isolation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in this context that a "culture of failure" begins to make sense.

As sociologists, what tools do we have to make sense of this emerging culture of failure? In the absence of

an existing "sociology of failure," we are currently conducting a systematic overview of the discipline's implicit attempts to understand failure, with an aim to developing methodological and conceptual tools for a more expansive treatment of failure. Framing our overview in terms of the promises and limitations of these attempts, we examine contributions from both critical and cultural sociology. We show that critical sociologists' preoccupation with how ideologies justify inequality leads them to treat failure as evidence of internalized individualism, false-consciousness, or neoliberal subjectivity. Since our interest is precisely in the critical capacities that are evident in contemporary discourses of failure, we argue that the critical sociological tradition requires considerable intervention if it is to recognize and explore how a culture of failure can also be a culture of critique.

We then turn to cultural sociology. We show that cultural sociologists' focus on agentic forms of meaning-making activity position them to offer a more expansive analysis of discourses of failure. While we do indeed discover these, we argue that, in practice, cultural sociologists tend to avoid taking up failure as a social fact requiring careful theoretical elaboration and detailed empirical investigation. Indeed, the closer cultural sociologists come to investigating failure, the more they rely on analyses from critical sociology that reduce actors' talk of failure to evidence that they lack critical capacity and an understanding of the conditions that shape their lives.



Professor Elisabeth Rondinelli

Ultimately, our project tracks a generational impulse that seems to be wresting failure from the therapeutic narrative and deploying it instead to advance a

collective critique of social systems and the contemporary moment. To meet the emergence of this collective critique, we argue that sociology must reckon with its reductive treatments of failure.

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Revisiting Wool and Needles in my in my Casket

By Lynda Harling Stalker

Lynda Harling Stalker is Professor and Chair of Sociology at St. Francis Xavier University. She is engaged in research in the areas of culture, craft, cultural work, belonging, rural outmigration, islandness, and narrative inquiry. Her research enlivens the emotional, embodied, and material aspects of creative production and culture.

In the late fall I received a lovely email from Stephen Riggins asking me to reflect back on my MA research conducted in Newfoundland. An instant smile came across my face as I was quite chuffed to be asked. Stephen's invitation sparked another memory from a couple of years ago when I received an unexpected but very welcomed email from Doug House. Doug had

been my MA supervisor and was influential in my development as an academic. He wrote that he had given a presentation to NONIA (Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industry Association) about the history of the organisation. His father, Edgar (House and House 2015), had written a small book on NONIA's history (1990), so Doug is the natural choice to continue this legacy. What the current members did not know was that from 1998-2000 I had interviewed NONIA knitters from across the province as part of my graduate programme. This research has become a document (albeit by a very junior academic) of a particular time and place. The women knitters were dealing with a difficult time in Newfoundland history.

Of late, Newfoundland knitting has again become popular following the publication of Christine Legrow

and Shirley A. Scott's *Saltwater Knitting Books* (2018-2022). These books are filled with patterns to knit double-ball mittens, trigger mittens and socks that are seen as a traditional Newfoundland knitting style. Knitted items have been so integral to Newfoundland culture that items were christened with names for objects not used elsewhere: vamps are oversocks that reach the ankle; cuffs are mittens; trigger mitts have a separate covering for the thumb and index finger (*Dictionary of Newfoundland English*). The knitting was always practical and well-executed and important work done by women. Magot Iris Duley (1993) talks about how the "iconic grey sock" knit by Newfoundland women during WWI led to them gaining the vote in 1925. It was very much women's work throughout Newfoundland history, although many of the knitters I interviewed in the late 1990s said there was the proverbial man around the Bay who could knit as good as a woman.

NONIA started in 1925 when the then-Governor's wife, Lady Allardyce, decided that Newfoundland women's skill in knitting could / should be used to improve the health of their families. Money from selling knitted garments in St. John's would fund the salaries of nurses to be stationed in the Outports across the island. The skills of the knitters were quickly recognised by many, including one of the first sponsors, Queen Mary, and the Canadian government christened a naval ship the HMS NONIA. The operations of NONIA have stayed much the same throughout its history. The organisation would mail out wool and patterns to knitters across the province and the women would mail back the finished garments. These garments would be sold in the store located on Water Street in St. John's. While nurses' salaries are no longer funded, knitters receive a piece rate for their work. This is all done as a not-for-profit organisation.

I arrived at Memorial in 1998, when the cod moratorium and the fallout from it was still fresh. Outmigration, particularly of youth and working-age adults, was reaching epic proportions. It was a time of unprecedented social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental change that left Newfoundlanders unsure what the future would hold. In this climate, I set out to interview 19 women who knit for NONIA. More than half the women were 60+, about 80% were married, and a little over 40% started knitting with NONIA around the time of the cod moratorium.

When I analysed the knitters' narratives that were shared with me, I took a Weberian-like approach. I

was influenced at the time by the work of Colin Campbell (1996a, b; 1999), which focussed on analysing the meaning and motivation behind one's actions. Through my analysis I highlighted that the women were motivated to knit because it allowed them to pass the time, do some challenging work, relaxation, and knitting provided a sense of accomplishment and pride. As Mrs. Parson said, "It's something that you worked at, and you're completely satisfied; it's self-assuring." (All knitters' names are pseudonyms.) The motivation was quite intrinsic. It wasn't about external reward or validation; the motivation to knit was linked to ideas of self and almost self-preservation.

The meaning that I argued that the knitting had for the women included filling in the time, a link between generations, enacting and embodying a female identity and being a part of Outport life. Knitting was always part of the planning and figured into much that they did. This was illustrated when Mrs. Murphy articulated when preparing for a trip to Ontario, "See them two boxes there? That's full of wool. So now I'm going up to Ontario and I'm going to take them with me. What I'm going to do is put them in the mail." Others stated similar things; knitting was so integral to who they were and what they did that even when going on holiday they could not be parted from their knitting.

NONIA's role in the knitter's lives was important but not in the way many would assume. It was often speculated that organisations like NONIA provided much needed economic benefits to Outport women during the cod moratorium era. That wasn't the case for these women. Yes, they wished to be paid and knitting for NONIA was not out of the goodness of their hearts. As Mrs. Foley stated, "I knit for NONIA for pastime. I like knitting but I found I was knitting a lot of things that I didn't need, just to knit, before I started with NONIA. The only thing about getting paid for knitting or any other hobby, you never will get paid enough for the time you put in it, but if you enjoy what you are doing that don't matter."

What NONIA provided for the knitters was access to good quality materials to knit with at no cost, provided someone to knit for, and there were no time pressures. NONIA's value to the knitters went beyond the pay they received but what NONIA did was allow these women to be able to do craftwork that allowed them to demonstrate that despite the turmoil caused by the cod moratorium they were Newfoundland (Outport) women. As Mrs. Budgell said, "I get women who say, 'I don't even want to knit' 'cause they say it's

from the Bay. You know I came from the Bay and so what? I love to do it!" The creation of knitted garments with a purpose meant that the women could, through practice and materiality, hold onto this identity that was so important to them.

A dear colleague of mine at St. Francis Xavier University, Dan MacInnes, said that the last way we can assert our identity is through our tombstones. While this may sound a bit morbid, for some of the women I spoke with this is very much the case – although it was through the placement of material items in their coffins. When talking about how important knitting was to who they were and what they did, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Hickey said that they will be buried with wool and needles in their casket. Mrs. Hickey repeated something her children had said, "Mom, we'll have to put some wool and knittin' needles down in the box with you 'cause you always got it in your hands."

This sentiment speaks to what the women identify with and how others identified them as knitters (Jenkins 2000). I'm sure both Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Hickey have passed – I wonder if these wishes were carried through.

I think if I were to do this project again, it is belonging that would be my centralising concepts. As May (2013: 3) argues, "belonging acts as a kind of barometer for social change." The women's talk about the importance of knitting to them speaks to the importance of belonging to Newfoundland, particularly the outports, and the kind of knitting they did demonstrates the relational, cultural and material elements of belonging (May 2013). It seems that this desire to be seen as a Newfoundlander, belonging to the place and its people, was heightened due to the dramatic changes the cod moratorium brought to the province. If I were to advise my younger self, I would urge me to delve more into the narratives about how

belonging in light of the social changes manifests itself through the practice of knitting. Maybe that will be my next project....

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A Sociological Rebel with a Cause: Remembering Les Samuelson (1953-2022)

By **Harley Dickinson** and **Terry Wotherspoon**

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in Saskatchewan 1905-1984. His articles have appeared in *Management and Organization Review*, *Journal of the American Society for Information and Technology*, *Social Science and Medicine*, and in other journals.

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Professor Les Samuelson

Les Samuelson was a complex character. This in itself, of course, did not make him unique. But he was. We all are complex characters. And like everyone, Les was complex and contradictory in his own way. Although a professional social scientist throughout his professional career, Les was often something of a loner. He never married, he did not have any long-term relationships, and he had no children, though he deeply desired to have all three. He was dedicated to his extended family in Newfoundland.

Most of his colleagues never met most of his family members, although we would occasionally hear about both the distress and strife in which members of his family were entangled, and their accomplishments and achievements. Les's ruminations on these matters invariably focused on what he could do to alleviate tensions, resolve problems, and aid and support the aspirations of his family members. Over the years, those of his colleagues who knew him realized that at

heart he was a deeply caring problem-solver. This was obvious to any who would take time to listen to his musings about his family, but it became increasingly apparent that he also cared deeply about his friends, colleagues, and students, and, of course, they cared about him. In various ways, mostly unintended, however, he made it difficult to get and stay close to him.

Classifying people is notoriously fraught. It is, however, slightly less difficult and risky to identify a dominant personality characteristic or two. A contradictory form of libertarianism was foundational for Les's identity. His life-long love of motorcycles symbolized this. Indeed, there is a photo of Les standing proudly by his bike in his black leather jacket, looking every bit the tall, dark and handsome rebel without a cause. Despite appearances, however, he did have a cause.

In both his personal and professional life Les's cause was to look after people. Preparing and sharing food was one way in which he expressed his caring. There are numerous examples. One that stands out revolves around the department's annual potluck lunch, held at the end of the Fall term between the end of classes and the start of the final exam period. As is the case with potluck meals, people bring a wide variety of things to eat. Les, however, was consistent. Year after year he prepared and brought a roasted turkey with stuffing and side dishes, or a large roast ham. Even on those few occasions when Les was himself unable to attend the lunch, he would prepare the turkey and arrange for a friend to deliver it on schedule for the lunch. It was a large and generous gift of his time and money for which he received, but never sought, gratitude. As we observe later, he also carried his deep and genuine need to care for people into his academic contributions.

Most of Les's academic career unfolded in a place where he had never expected to stay. He began a term appointment in the Department of Sociology at the University of Saskatchewan in 1988, immediately upon completion of his Ph.D. at the University of Alberta earlier that year. His journey from Newfoundland, after completion of a B.Sc. in Psychology at Memorial University, also included time at the University of Toronto, where he completed an M.A. in Criminology, as well as several motorcycle

trips to places between and beyond in the interim. His term position at the U of S led to a tenure-track appointment the following year, and then the award of tenure in due course.

Riding a motorcycle was one of his greatest joys, but it was also the source of misfortune. One beautiful sunny, autumn weekend he was seriously injured in a biking accident. While out riding with a friend south of Saskatoon he was struck by a reckless motorcyclist racing in the wrong lane. Although both riders and their passengers were injured, Les was the most seriously injured and ultimately lost both his legs below the knees.

Despite being on the cusp of life and death, Les bounced back with a new enthusiasm for life. His vow, to be back on his feet before the end of the year, was fulfilled when he demonstrated his prosthetics to visitors who had stopped by in December to give him Christmas greetings. The accident did not dampen his zeal for riding – with both a truck and motorcycle outfitted to accommodate his new condition. In the years following his accident, Les embarked on several more local and cross-country outings. Unfortunately, while riding his motorcycle again in 2022 he was involved in a second accident with a truck. Despite once again vowing to re-engage after release from hospital, he died in hospital as a result of complications related to his injuries.

Les is remembered for several contributions to the scholarship and to the life and work of his colleagues, students, and numerous community partners. His publications, based on research and work in the areas of critical criminology, social control, and relationships between social inequalities and criminal justice systems, appear in several journals and books, including *Canadian Public Policy*, *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, and *Journal of Crime and Justice*, and his edited works, *Power and Resistance: Critical Thinking About Critical Social Issues* (which was regularly updated in several editions) and *Criminal Justice: Sentencing Issues and Reforms* (co-edited with a former colleague). He also produced several technical reports and presentations for numerous government agencies in Canada and Australia.

Les left an especially impressive legacy through his long-time service towards the decolonization of the

academy and the building of bridges between the University of Saskatchewan and Indigenous communities. His commitment in this regard is expressed in what is arguably his most innovative and important academic contribution, namely, the development in 1994 of the Aboriginal Justice and Criminology (ABJAC) degree program, a program that continues to operate (now as the Indigenous Justice and Criminology program). The program, introduced to prepare Indigenous students for careers in corrections, public safety, advocacy, and other areas related to criminal or social justice, was to gain recognition as an exemplary case of Indigenous programming and engagement at the University. Its implementation and success represented a labour of love. It was also pioneering work – work that Les gladly took on largely by himself. When Les conceived of, and decided to build, the ABJAC program there was nothing like it on the University of Saskatchewan campus, nor, for that matter, anywhere else that we are aware of. Although his departmental colleagues at the time understood what he wanted to accomplish, the main form of support they provided was to not get in his way.

Les developed the program in response to concerns that, while Indigenous people as inmates are over-represented in the criminal justice system as inmates, they are under-represented as employees and officials. In developing the ABJAC program he consulted with, and was able to negotiate start-up funding support from government agencies responsible for policing, courts, and corrections. Les designed the program to ensure that students had rigorous training, combining the learning of core skills and knowledge related to sociology and criminology with applied knowledge, skills, and competencies designed to enable students to gain experience working with communities and agencies in relevant fields. Graduates of the program have achieved high levels of success working in many areas, including government agencies, First Nations and Métis organizations, and non-governmental agencies and community organizations in Saskatchewan and further afield.

While this is an especially notable contribution, it is only one of many activities he undertook to work with and support Indigenous students, Elders, and other Indigenous community members in Saskatchewan and

Australia. His life and career overall were marked by his consistent dedication and committed service to make the University a welcoming place for everyone, underlined by a focus on justice reform and improved life chances for oppressed and marginalized populations.

Some of his greatest joys were associated with his travels abroad – though limited in number, they took him to Tibet, Australia, and other places. His relationships with Indigenous scholars in Australia was especially prominent in his commitments to decolonization and Indigenous justice at home.

Unfortunately, newer colleagues who did not have an opportunity to meet Les after his initial accident were

deprived of the many colourful stories and astute commentaries (some of which made sense) with which he regaled friends and acquaintances alike. However, Les has left a strong legacy for all of us to remember him by.

Les Samuelson has finally returned to his beloved Newfoundland, but sadly not in the manner in which he had planned. Following a celebration of his life, in Saskatoon in October, 2022, his ashes were taken back to St. John's by family members. It is fitting that Les ended his journey in a place that was always central to his core.

Gianfranco Poggi (1934-2023)

By **Stephen Harold Riggins**



Professor Gianfranco Poggi

Sociology at Memorial University in the early 1970s had a rather lowly and insecure status. It had been taught at the St. John's campus since 1956 by a handful of instructors who were young except for retirement-age Nels Anderson, author of the Chicago-School classic *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*. Consequently, an effort was made to

bolster the MUN department by hiring a senior sociologist. That effort failed.

The next strategy was so successful that it gave the department an aura among Canadian sociology departments that lasted until the early 1990s. The solution was appointing Visiting Professors. Since the department's Ph.D. program did not exist then, offering local graduate students short-term teaching contracts was not an option. Department heads at Memorial had the power to make short-term appointments and could hire per-term instructors primarily on the basis of their CVs. To my knowledge, Peter Baehr, formerly of Lingnan University of Hong Kong; and Michael Gardiner, now at Western University of London, Ontario, were the last scholars who benefitted from the department's commitment to appointing Visiting Professors.

These Visiting Professors, some of whom taught at MUN on two or three occasions, had degrees from prestigious universities: University of Florence, Brandeis University, State University of New York at Buffalo, University of Leicester, University of Warsaw, University of California at Berkeley, University of Essex, University of Bristol, Mining Institute of Leningrad, and the University of Toronto. Most Visiting Professors were relatively young and only later established excellent publication records. The best-known visitor was Zygmunt Bauman. He was

retired when he came to MUN but was not yet a celebrity.

“What made the MUN department exciting,” Volker Meja told me, “was the people passing through. At large universities such visits happen naturally. Due to the location of St. John’s we had to make a special effort to attract prominent scholars. This really worked for over ten years. It drew people together intellectually.”

Gianfranco Poggi was one of the visitors. Meja met Poggi at the World Congress of Sociology in Madrid in the summer of 1978. He invited Poggi to give a lecture or seminar in St. John’s at a time of his choosing. It was then common for sociologists and anthropologists to give public presentations in the Great Hall at Queen’s College, the building where the department was located. Poggi was overcommitted when first invited, but did teach at MUN in the summers of 1980 and 1982 as well as the autumn of 1983. Poggi was an authority on sociological theory, especially the classics of the 19th and early-20th centuries; the development of the modern state; and political power. If you have never read Poggi, a good place to start might be his little book *Weber: A Short Introduction* or the book co-authored with Giuseppe Sciortino *Great Minds: Encounters with Social Theory*.

Poggi (1984) wrote a memoir about his early experiences, which he titled “The Wopscot Chronicle: Reflections of a Half-baked Sociologist.” The title is a pun on *The Wapshot Chronicle*, a novel by John Cheever. “Wop” is an insulting slang term for Italian; Poggi was then living in Scotland. He was born in spectacularly beautiful Modena, Italy. It should not be a surprise that his first degree was in law when his father was a judge and in the 1950s sociology had not yet been reestablished in Italy following the catastrophe of Fascism. Poggi was attracted by what he learned about American society at the U.S. Information Service library in Bologna. Browsing among the sociology books in this library, he began to form an idea of sociology as a discipline. Sociology seemed like a distinctly American subject, which also made it appealing to him. When he applied for graduate school in the US in 1956, he still knew little about the discipline. The University of California at Berkeley was not his first choice. Some bureaucrat decided to send him there. After a while, he realized that he had been very lucky. His dissertation, published by Stanford University Press, was about social activism by Italian Catholics.

Poggi’s first full-time teaching position was at the University of Edinburgh where he remained for 24 years but during those years often taught on short-term contracts in North America and Australia. Beginning in 1988, he taught for several years at the University of Virginia before returning to Italy where he was affiliated with the European University Institute in Fiesole and the University of Trento. It could be argued that Poggi’s research contributed to the revival of sociology in Italy after World War II, although he adamantly downplayed his role in this development.

“I am reminded of [David] Riesman’s remark,” Poggi wrote, “that there are two kinds of sociologists, those interested in sociology and those interested in society. My problem is that I would like to be one of the latter, but if I am any good at all it is as one of the former. ...I am not a *natural* sociologist, a shrewd observer and interpreter of social facts-on-the-ground. ...[I prefer] instead to think of another writing project which I can handle by reading other people’s books” (*The Wopscot Chronicle*).

A letter to Meja (September 17, 1980) also gives some insight into his status among well-known professional sociologists and into his personality. He had recently contacted Daniel Bell, author of *The End of Ideology* and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. “He received me in his home and said he could only give me twenty minutes because his eye was bothering him – but then kept me there for nearly two hours, talking (quite entertainingly, I must say) almost all the time.” Poggi also mentioned that he had chats with German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. Poggi’s presentation at the 1980 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association was “quite well received” even by the “Redoubtable Niklas himself.” Poggi certainly name drops in his letters, and indeed the references are to well-established sociologists, but he does this in a way which is not offensive.

In another letter to Meja (January 2, 1986), Poggi expressed interest in returning to MUN for a fourth visit and writing for a sustained period of time with Victor Zaslavsky. Poggi’s daughter, Maria Johnson, professor of religious studies at the University of Scranton, confirmed to me that her father enjoyed living in Newfoundland. Perhaps it is not insignificant to mention that he displayed Volker Meja’s photographs of Newfoundland icebergs in the family’s Edinburgh home.

Scottish sociologist David McCrone, who taught as a

Visiting Professor at MUN, wrote in *Scottish Affairs* (vol. 32, no. 4) that Poggi was an intellectual tour de force with Italian boyish charm. Giuseppe Sciortino, in his obituary for Poggi in the magazine *il Mulino* (The Mill) commented: "His intellectual output is also a magnificent example of passion without pettiness. ...if he continued to deal with other authors forgotten by many, it was not out of inertia. They were thoughtful choices, which did not need controversy and tactical positioning to be taken calmly and communicated transparently."

Major Publications by Gianfranco Poggi

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Newfoundland style mittens knitted by Lynda Harling Stalker.