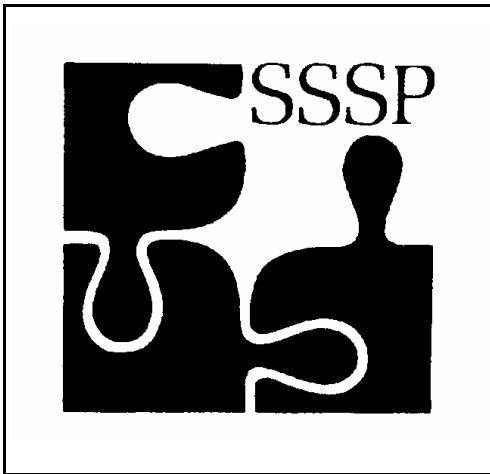


IE NEWSLETTER

Institutional Ethnography Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

November 2005

Vol. 2, No. 2



FROM THE DIVISION CHAIR

Alison I. Griffith

Welcome to our first newsletter of the 2005-06 year! As usual, Paul Luken has done an excellent job of putting together news about our conference program for Montreal as well as notes and reflections from some of our members. Thanks, Paul!

The Philadelphia conference was a rousing success. As Division Chair, Tim Diamond organized a terrific program that drew record numbers to the sessions and to the Division. Our membership increased to almost 200 last year. We had more sessions than ever before. Thanks, Tim, for all your work last year and your support for me during this first year of being the Division Chair!

A final thanks to those of you who organized sessions and presented papers in Philadelphia. The papers sessions I was able to attend were both interesting and useful. The over-lunch, wine, or coffee conversations were lively, prompted by papers read and heard. For me, it was an exciting conference, and I hope it was so for you too.

Well, it's proving to be an eventful year! I'm writing this message from the several freeways, hotel rooms, and rest areas as we travel between New Orleans and Toronto. As many of you know, our house in New Orleans is no more. We had water up above the ceilings after Hurricane Katrina. Our noses are thoroughly sensitized to the smells of bleach, wet wallboard, mold and unidentifiable rotting things. We were able to save some dishes, pots and pans, and a few mementos. If I had the energy, the whole process would make a great research project. The disjuncture between the political talk, the bureaucratic requirements, the media accounts, and the stinking mess that is parts of New Orleans is enough to provoke textually-mediated whiplash.

On a happier note, after much to-ing and fro-ing, the meetings will be held in Montreal this year. The Anglophones can practice their parler-ing of la francais and the Francophones can save us from faux

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pas plus terrible! Regardless of language facility, we will have another great meeting. We have ten sessions planned. Three sessions are IE sponsored and seven are co-sponsored with other Divisions. Thanks to those who volunteered to organize the sessions. And thanks to the other Division Chairs who were so welcoming of co-sponsorship.

When I was young, my father always said as we left for school in the morning: "Write if you get work." Now it's your turn. As you go off to your work, I say: "Write those paper proposals. Send them to the session organizers." I'm sure we can look forward to ten exciting sessions in Montreal.

Business Meeting Minutes August 12, 2005

Tim Diamond called the meeting to order and asked if anything was missing from the agenda. Thanks to everyone who helped put together events.

There was a review of the schedule, it was pointed out that there were too many things scheduled for Sunday and not enough for Saturday. There were three division sessions this year and six sessions overall.

Alison Griffith was welcomed as the new division chair.



The George Smith Student Paper Award was given to Patrick Rodgers. His work was briefly introduced. Marj Devault and Eric Mykhalovskiy were on the committee. Marj encouraged students to submit papers to this competition. Eric pointed out that the submission date should be extended to encourage more students to submit. New Student Paper Committee members volunteered. Kamini Maraj Grahame, Amy Best, and Patrick Rodgers are on the new committee. It was decided that the student who wins the award for this year will be on the committee for next year. There was a continuation of the discussion on whether to extend the deadline for submission to the student paper competition. No resolution was made and it was decided that the committee would figure it out and announce the deadline in the newsletter.

Members volunteered to organize next year's division sessions (Paul Luken, Lois Andre-Bechely, and Lauren Eastwood). The thematic is "Building Just, Diverse, and Democratic Communities."

There was a discussion about the location of next year's meeting. It will probably be held either in San Francisco or Montreal (ASA changed its location to Montreal). Tim volunteered to keep everyone posted.

A question was asked about the experiences of the members who coordinated with other sessions. Frank Ridzi commented that it was not difficult.

Tim explained that joint sessions are not owned by anyone. We can have three core sessions and nine joint sessions. Frank asked how to make sure that IE becomes part of the discussion when there is a mix of people present. Suzanne Vaughan said that she passed papers that didn't fit her session to other sessions. It was also pointed out that graduate students can organize sessions.

Alison stated that if anyone wants to organize a session they should start working soon because the deadline for papers is January 31. If people know ahead of time, they will know what to submit. Suzanne volunteered to organize a joint session. Anyone else interested in organizing a session should contact Alison.

There was a discussion of forthcoming conferences. There was talk of the Canadian meetings that take place around the end of May/early June. Liza McCoy and Eric are involved with the CSAA. Is there a way to establish an IE thematic there? There was a brief discussion of Nancy Naples' conference on October 28 and 29 at the University of Connecticut. Lauren stated that Nancy was interested in someone helping her plan the IE part of the conference. Conference information can be announced on the IE website at Syracuse University. Go to Marj's website address: <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/mdevault/>.

There was a discussion of the possibility of holding regional workshops for IE. This would be a good place for graduate students to try out ideas and encourage more communication between everyone. Dorothy Smith said that she missed the times when we had time to really discuss people's work, including the work of graduate students.

Tim asked everyone if we wanted to have an official position on the SSSP location. Most people seemed to prefer Montreal.

New business issues were brought up. Peter Grahame spoke about the special issue on IE in

Social Problems. No one was sure if the issue was still open for submissions.

Peter is editing for the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. The original deadline was October 1, but no one was sure. Contact Peter if you have a work in progress. Peter passed out his new contact information at Dickinson College. The *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* wants an IE edition; they have four slots and are open to a variety of things. We shouldn't wait for a new editor to come in case we lose our opportunity.

A nominations committee was formed for the chair-elect position. Kamini, Tim, Eric, and Nicole Balan volunteered.

Applause to Tim for organizing so much.

Dorothy Smith, Lauren Eastwood, Alison Griffith and Dorothy Smith, Lois Andre-Bechely all have new books out. Coming soon are an edited collection by Janet Rankin and Marie Campbell and an edited collection on social activism and the work of George Smith put together by Gary Kinsman.

The possibility of a bibliography in the newsletter was discussed. Jeremy Brunson pointed out that there is a working bibliography on the Syracuse website. Submissions should be sent to both.

Eric recommended that everyone review the new books out in your favorite journals. Suzanne said that *Contemporary Sociology* is open for reviewing.

There was a discussion of creating an online journal. This has been discussed before. There are reasons for and against the idea. It was agreed that we would go back to the information gathered before about the idea and do some more looking into the idea.

Marie suggested that we try to find out who attends IE sessions next year.

Respectfully submitted, Stephanie Crist

Call for Papers – IE Sessions at SSSP in Montreal in 2006

Ten institutional ethnography sessions are planned for the SSSP annual meetings in Montreal, August 10-12, 2006. This provides a wonderful opportunity to invite many new Canadian institutional ethnographers to become active in our division. Check out the many offerings below and watch for instructions on how to make submissions to the sessions of your choice. The instructions will be forthcoming shortly from the SSSP office.

Institutional Ethnography Thematic Session

“Building Just, Diverse, and Democratic Communities through the Study of Institutional Organization”

Organizer: Lois Andre-Bechely,
Charter College of Education
California State University, Los Angeles
5151 State University Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90032-8143, USA
loisab@calstatela.edu

Institutional ethnography seeks to expand our understanding of how things work beyond the scope of our everyday knowledge, extending our inquiry into the social and textually-mediated relations of ruling that often sustain inequities and inequalities. Presentations for this workshop session will include institutional ethnographic studies that demonstrate the challenges of doing institutional ethnographic inquiry within and across diverse institutions and communities so as to better understand the ways in which institutions could be organized in support of more just, diverse and democratic communities.

Co-sponsored Thematic Sessions

“The Changing Social Organization of Everyday Life Across the Life Course”

Co-sponsor: Youth, Aging and the Life Course.
Organizer: Suzanne Vaughan
Arizona State University
Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences
P.O. Box 37100
Phoenix, AZ 85069, USA
svaughan@asu.edu

The session will focus on inquiries using institutional ethnography to explore those institutional processes which organize the everyday world of children, families, and/or older people across the life course. Particularly important will be the examination of the ways in which the ruling relations have begun to reorganize everyday activities. I hope to draw both historical analyses of the life course and papers which examine in a more contemporary context those processes that have reorganized childhood, work and leisure, retirement and/or growing old.

“Changing the Scene: The Institutional Ethnographer as Activist”

Co-sponsor: Conflict, Social Action and Change
Organizer: Dorothy E. Smith
Sociology
University of Victoria
Victoria, B.C. V8W 2Y2, Canada
DESmith@UVic.CA

This session will address the intersection of institutional ethnographic research and social activism by addressing the question: How can IE be used to address the traditional social inequalities of societies? The panel will be comprised of researchers whose IE research is linked to working within diverse communities.

Institutional Ethnography Sessions

“Focus on Institutional Ethnography”

Organizer: Paul Luken
Department of Sociology and Criminology
University of West Georgia
Carrollton, GA 30118-2110, USA
pluken@westga.edu

This session will be ABOUT institutional ethnography. I am looking for papers that deal with this alternative sociology in various ways: help to clarify it, expand it, and demonstrate difficulties or problems actually doing it, and so on.

“Institutional Ethnography and Policy Studies: Institutional Discourse and Ethnographic Accessibility”

Organizer: Lauren Eastwood
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
State University of New York, Plattsburgh
101 Broad Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901, USA
Lauren.eastwood@plattsburgh.edu

This panel seeks papers that address, using the ontology of institutional ethnography, how macro processes can be investigated ethnographically. Papers accepted for this session will focus on the ways in which institutions that are involved in local and global governance can be made ethnographically accessible. The panel will consist of papers that investigate policy practice in multiple locations or at what is considered different “levels.”

Co-Sponsored Sessions

“Families and Schools in an Age of Educational Change”

Co-sponsor: Educational Problems
Organizer: Alison I. Griffith
Faculty of Education
York University
4700 Keele St
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada
AGriffith@Edu.YorkU.CA

The session will bring together papers that use institutional ethnography to explore the relationship between families and schools. In particular, this session will focus on the intersection of ruling discourses with the educational work of families.

“Ethnographically Exploring the Welfare State: Examining How Institutional Ethnography and Other Approaches to Social Inquiry Can Inform One Another”

Co-sponsor: Sociology and Social Welfare
Organizer: Frank Ridzi
Department of Sociology
LeMoyne College
1419 Salt Springs Road
Syracuse, NY 13214, USA
ridzifm@lemoyne.edu

This session will provide IE researchers and researchers using other ethnographic and text based approaches with a forum to present their work and examine how their approach to inquiry enables insights into the welfare state and its related ruling relations. The focus will be on how research can be used to make the broader social context of people's everyday/everynight life explicit and how this process can be utilized to inform efforts toward social change.

“Threats to Academic Freedom: Academic Freedom and the Commercial Juggernaut in Canadian Universities”

Co-sponsor: Standards and Freedom of Research, Publication and Teaching Committee
Organizer: Marilee Reimer
Sociology and Women's Studies & Gender Studies
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5G3, Canada
mreimer@stthomasu.ca

This session examines the endangered relationship of academic research in the present era of commercializing in Canadian universities. We will discuss the increasingly threatened relationship of academics' authorship and authority over research findings in a milieu of commercial partnering in universities and the gradual undermining or disappearance of programs or voices that fail to conform to commercial goals for institutional expansion and revenue production.

“The Social Organization of Health and Health Work”

Co-sponsor: Health, Health Policy, and Health Services

Organizer: Janet Rankin

Department of Nursing

Malaspina University-College

Nanaimo, B.C. V9R 5S5, Canada

rankin@mala.bc.ca

Emphasizing institutional ethnographic and closely related methods, the goal of this session is to share critical perspectives about forms of knowledge and activity (expert, administrative, technical, local and commonsense) as they influence and impact the public's experiences in the broad continuum of health, health services, health products and technology, and their “consumption.” In particular, this session is interested in exploring the text-mediated activities that individuals engage in that assign more and more power to authoritative “experts” – not just to health care professionals with their medical and technological interventions, but also to managers and administrators with their health information technology and to advertisers, diet promoters, fitness consultants, health store workers and so forth who produce their own forms of advice, direction and product promotion. Health, even in the Canadian context, is emerging as a contested terrain as it is promoted less and less as a social right, and more as a site of investment and profit and a critical contributor to (or drain on) a healthy economy. This session is designed to contribute to “mapping” the many aspects and locations of “health work” – that produced problems, on the ground, for people.

“Immigration and Employment”

Co-Sponsor: Labor Studies

Organizer: Liza McCoy

Department of Sociology

University of Calgary

2500 University Drive NW

Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Canada

mccoy@ucalgary.ca

Research papers are invited which examine experiences, issues, and institutional processes related to the employment of recent immigrants to Canada or the United States. Possible areas of focus include: employment services and skills training for newcomers, foreign credential recognition, employers' hiring practices, strategies of undocumented workers, occupations or industries that draw heavily from particular immigrant communities, and intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, and class as these shape the work and home lives of immigrant women and men. All research approaches are welcome; papers using institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry are strongly invited.

Welcome New IE Division Members

(May 10 – November 8, 2005)

The IE Division continues to steadily grow, with the membership approaching 200. We welcome all of our new members.

Malin Åkerström

B. Nicole Balan

Amy Best

W. Leslie Burleson

Joshua Carreiro

Stephanie Crist

Kirsten Dellinger

Gloria Gonzalez

Lauri J. Grace

Barb Keith

Li-Fang Liang

David J. Piacenti

Elena Yu Polush

Gretchen Purser

Valli Rajah

Marilee Reimer

Patrick J. Rodgers

Linda A. Stelljes

Susan L.A. Sverdrup-Phillips

Michele Tarnow

Lorna E. Weir

Vivian Wong

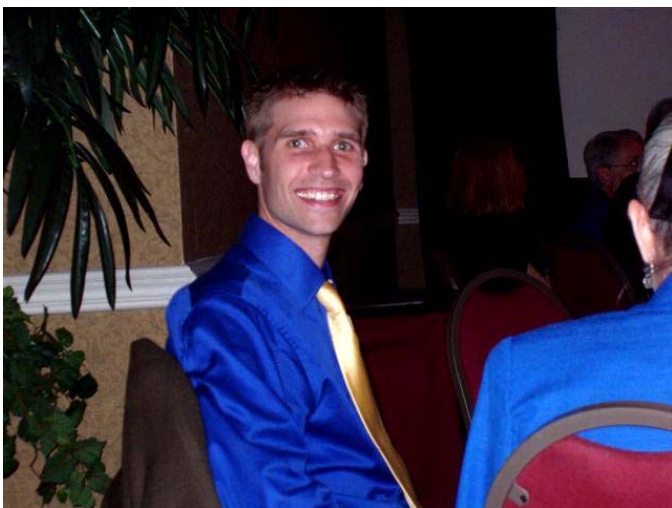
Call for Nominees for Chair-elect

Candidates are being sought to stand for the position of chair-elect of the division. This is a one year position, after which the chair-elect will have a two-year term as division chair. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to serve the division and the society. If you are interested, please contact one of the members of the Nominations Committee. The members are Kamini Grahame (kmg16@psu.edu), Tim Diamond(tdiamond@ryerson.ca), Erik Mykhalovskiy (ericm@yorku.ca), and Nicole Balan (Nicole_Balan@edu.yorku.ca).

Two Students Receive Awards at SSSP Meeting

Patrick Rodgers, Museum Studies, University of Toronto, received the first George Smith Award, the IE Division's honor in the graduate student paper competition. Patrick was selected for his exceptional paper, "Managing Access at the Museum: Disability & Institutional Boundaries." You can access this paper online at the IE Division web site:

<http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/21/pageId/296>



Patrick welcomes comments on his paper. He can be reached at patrick.rodgers@utoronto.ca.

Naomi Nichols, York University, was the recipient of the graduate student award presented by the Conflict, Social Action, and Social Change Division. Her outstanding IE paper is entitled "The Management of Activism by Corporate Discourse: The Activist as an Ideological Code."



Both award winners presented their papers at the SSSP annual meeting, and they were recognized at the conference banquet.

Congratulations! Congratulations!

Submissions Are Welcome

This will sound trite, but a newsletter is only as good as the articles that it contains. This newsletter relies on the contributions of the division's members. I invite you to use the *IE Newsletter* as a way to share your thoughts, to keep others abreast of your ongoing research, and to keep us informed of the events of your life.

Thanks for the Photos

Many of the photographs in this issue were provided courtesy of Suzanne Vaughan, Liza McCoy, and David Jenks.

Remembrances of George Smith

It was 15 years ago that George Smith's important article, "Political Activist as Ethnographer," appeared in *Social Problems* (Vol. 37, No. 4, Pp. 629-648). This was the first piece of institutional ethnography to appear in the Society's journal, and it has become required reading in many research methods and social movements courses. The article and George, himself, have been an inspiration to many; and it is fitting that our division name its graduate student paper award in his honor. But many of us have never had the opportunity to meet George Smith; therefore, several people who either knew George or were very familiar with his work were asked to write brief remembrances of George and to comment on his legacy. The thoughtful recollections by Liza McCoy, Gary Kinsman, Dorothy Smith, Nancy Naples, and Eric Mykhalovskiy follow. This year, as the IE Division bestows the first George Smith Award, it is appropriate that we pay tribute to George.

Conversations with George by Liza McCoy

George was a research officer at OISE when I was a doctoral student. I was not a close friend, just one of many graduate students over the years whom he mentored, casually and generously. George's office was right by the entrance to the Department in a high traffic area, and his door was nearly always open. I'd walk by and someone would be in there talking to George, a student perhaps or another research officer and sometimes an activist from the community (although at OISE, these could all be the same person, and often were). If George was alone, I'd drop in myself and perch for a while on his low file cabinet, and we'd talk, usually about theorists and research. I was studying semiotics for a while, at one point struggling to understand C.S. Peirce. George, it turned out, had written a 400-page masters thesis on Peirce, which he lent me, after which I actually understood Peirce well enough to explain him to my equally mystified classmates. Several of us in the nascent IE group were reading Bakhtin at the time, and George was one of the enthusiasts. We talked a lot about Bakhtin and how his theory of language was ontologically compatible with institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. George had done research interviewing young gay men about high school and he would speak about how he was drawing on Bakhtin in his work with that data. He died before publishing that research, but he left many computer files of manuscript drafts, which Dorothy Smith edited and published for him posthumously as "The Ideology of Fag': The School Experiences of Gay Students" (*Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 39, 1998). This is the article of George's that I feel the closest to, because he talked about this work so much during our conversations and because it reflects the George I knew: George the philosopher, George the intellectual, George the analytically sophisticated sociologist – and yes, of course, always George the political activist. I assign this article when I am teaching institutional ethnography. For most of my students, it is more immediately useful than "Political Activist as Ethnographer" because it is about a formal project of research, with taped and transcribed interview data, such as they themselves are likely to do for their thesis research. I hold it up to students as an example of seeing social organization in language: analyzing interviews about everyday experience in a way that brings into view the common institutional relations (in this case hegemonic masculinity and the administration of schooling) that shape those experiences. As always with George's work, this article is also a piece of activism, grounded in his concern as a gay man and former teacher about what happens

to young gay men in high school, and however sophisticated the analysis, clearly directed to identifying practices and sites for intervention and change.



Picture of George: Here is George looking uncharacteristically corporate in a shirt and tie. He usually wore khaki trousers and t-shirts, and that is probably how most people remember him. But he also possessed a wardrobe of fine suits. I learned about George's sartorial expertise when I worked with him one summer on a research project in which we interviewed government officials and college presidents. George took very seriously the ethnographer's maxim about dressing in a way your informants could relate to and respect. My efforts at dressing up that summer fell far short of George's achievement. The secret, he explained, was not just the quality of the clothes but orchestrating the whole look: if you were going to dress up, you should do it right, with conviction and skill, and if you didn't have the skill, you should try to learn it. In a way, that was pretty much George's approach to everything he did.

George Smith, Political Activist Ethnography, and Sociology for Changing the World by Gary Kinsman

I first met George Smith as a gay activist shortly after he moved to Toronto in the later 1970s. Along with Tim McCaskell he was teaching a course on Marxism and gay liberation at the Marxist Institute. One of George's favorite expressions at this time was that often left ideas were "grounded in a discourse" and not in people's actual lives. Some of us in a humourous and campy response, in the context of the times, suggested that he really meant that these ideas "were grounded in a disco."

It was in the combined context of becoming a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and encountering the work of Dorothy E. Smith for the first time, and being involved in the dynamic and rebellious gay resistance to the massive police raids on the gay bath houses in the early 1980s that I encountered George as a teacher, researcher, and very

wise activist from whom I learned so much. A political commitment to taking up the side of the oppressed and exploited is key to the institutional ethnography approach that Dorothy and George were both involved with. The world is investigated to disclose its social organization so that it can be transformed from these standpoints. This connection between investigating social organization, activism, and social transformation is what first attracted me to institutional ethnography. This is also where I came to work with and to learn from George Smith.

George studied and worked with Dorothy Smith. He was an activist engaged in gay liberation struggles and AIDS activist movements in the 1980s and early 1990s. *“Political Activist as Ethnographer,”* which draws upon his experiences as a researcher/organizer in these movements, made use of and extended the contributions of institutional ethnography in developing social knowledge creation explicitly for activism. George extended institutional ethnography into a political activist ethnography which more systematically develops sociology *for* social movements and *for* activists. George’s important contributions to activist sociology were unfortunately cut short through his death from AIDS-related disorders in 1994. More than ten years later, however, his work continues to inspire both those who knew him and those encountering his work for the first time.

One of the central propositions of political activist ethnography is that, through confrontation with ruling regimes, activists are able to uncover aspects of their social organization. Through an analysis of the institutional relations movements are up against, more effective forms of activism can be developed. This approach allowed George to link theory and practice, activism and analysis, allowing him to move back and forth between theory and practice, allowing activism to inform his theory and analysis. George in his own life, in his involvement in the Right to Privacy Committee and in AIDS ACTION NOW! bridged the divides between activism and theorizing in amazing ways. At times this major divide many of us live in our lives seemed to almost effortlessly dissolve for George.

With political activist ethnography, George aimed to develop an “insider’s” knowledge of ruling regimes based on the daily struggles and confrontations that social movements are already engaged in. His premise was that even though most social movements are to some extent “outside of” (or in rupture with) ruling relations, political confrontation provides a means for activists to investigate the organizing logic of the ruling regimes they oppose. By providing a concrete practice mapping out the social relations of struggle – both the dynamics of ruling regimes and of movements themselves political activist ethnography enables a grounded social knowledge for more effective forms of activism.

Beginning from where activists initiate and develop forms of knowing that were suitable to the task, George called for both an epistemological and an ontological shift from conventional sociological research methods and knowledge production. In taking seriously this insider’s knowledge, an “ontological shift” was called for. As mentioned earlier, political activist ethnography requires a shift in theory of knowledge and in the perspective on how the social comes into being towards a socially reflexive or mutually determined epistemology, and an ontological perspective derived from Marx’s work that views the social world as being produced through the social practices of people. This is a crucial way of developing a sociology for changing the world.

Remembering George by Dorothy E. Smith*

George Smith and I were very close friends; our collaboration goes way further back than when we both came to Toronto to the Department of Sociology of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in 1977. In Vancouver we had worked with Marguerite Cassin as political activists for a number of years, mainly in the context of education, discovering ways of doing things that later, in my own work, became more theoretical, and in George's work, the innovative ways in which he connected activism and ethnography.

Contemporary struggles for social justice operate on an institutional ground, familiar, taken for granted, and yet in its reaches and dimensions of organization only at best partially visible. George's most influential writing focuses on the interrelations of activism on and ethnographic inquiry into the complex of institutional organization he called *politico-administrative regimes*, that is, established configurations within the ruling relations organizing and organized around specific functions. The activist engages and discovers the same terrain as the institutional ethnographer, and the ethnographer's investigations can explore and explicate for the activist the workings of the regimes in which he or she must operate. Activism on the terrain of the ruling relations can draw on the kind of knowledge of their peculiar properties and organization that institutional ethnography can create. For the ethnographer who is an activist or the activist who is an ethnographer, there are, George saw, not two kinds of knowledge, the one academic and scientific and the other emerging from the practicalities of struggle. Rather you could pass directly from one to another. Both were grounded in people's actual practices and how they were coordinated as regimes. What the activist learns in the course of his or her engagement with contemporary practices of power is knowledge of the same phenomena that the institutional ethnographer explores.

George was both activist and academic. Reflecting on his work from a standpoint in the academy, as I do now, has implications for the development of institutional ethnography in university settings. Teaching the social sciences in universities is a political act. This is not a matter of the expression of specific political values; it is built into the theories and methodologies of every social science. Institutional ethnography is no exception. It is, however, distinctive in proposing a social scientific project that is designed to discover the workings and structures of power *from the point of view of people's* everyday lives and activities. Developing knowledge from different angles, from different understandings, from different ways of seeing makes possible building towards a more adequate understanding of how these new forms of society are working...The investigations that we can do don't stand by themselves. The different places that we start from feed back into, and give us opportunities for discovering not only different aspects but more about how to find about these new technologies of management and administration that are re-forming politico-administrative regimes and the ruling relations in general. It is absolutely in line with George's thinking to imagine a science that could work for social justice because it investigates and makes visible just how power is organized in the multiple sites of struggle in which activists engage in the contemporary world.

* This note is drawn from a longer paper to be published as: "George Smith, political activist and ethnographer: towards a people's sociology" in Gary Kinsman ed. (forthcoming) *Sociology for changing the world*, Halifax, NS: Fernwood.

Linking Activism and Scholarship by Nancy Naples

I regret that I never had the opportunity to meet George Smith. I had corresponded with him and have in my possession a third draft (“ad usum privatum”) of his paper “Political Activist as Ethnographer” that he presented at the Qualitative Research Conference held at York University May 15-16, 1990, and that was published in Social Problems in November, 1990. George Smith shared many of my concerns for linking activism and scholarship and for finding a methodology that would provide a powerful tool for this important goal. We both were drawn to Dorothy Smith’s standpoint epistemology and her method of institutional ethnography. George had the opportunity to study with Dorothy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and, it appears, quickly took up her approach and applied it to his work on gay rights and HIV/AIDS activism in Canada. George was the first scholar whose work I read that managed to put activism and scholarship together “beginning reflexively” in his own, actual location in the world rather than from the objective standpoint of standard sociology” (p. 633).

I discovered Dorothy Smith’s work early in my academic career and found that it resonated with my own, less well articulated approach to activist research. However, until I read George’s article in Social Problems, I was unclear about just how her approach would work in practice. What would it look like to start in the everyday lives of people and produce a sociological account that could provide a direct challenge to the relations of ruling that shape them. George’s article demonstrates the power of institutional ethnography for activist goals. Drawing on two different activist research projects, George shows how Dorothy’s method provides “a groundwork for grass-roots political action” (p. 631). As George explains, this is possible, “not only because, as a matter of method, it begins from the standpoint of those outside ruling *regimes*, but because its analysis is directed at empirically determining how such *régimes* work – that is, how they are socially organized” (p. 631). George’s discussion of institutional ethnography as a “reflexive-materialist research method” includes an explication of the concepts that are important to Dorothy’s method including “social relations” and “problematic.” He also illustrates how texts serve as “active constituents of social relations” (p. 636).

“Political Activist as Ethnographer” offers more than a powerful illustration of institutional ethnography as activist research. Since it is published in the high profile journal of the SSSP, it serves to legitimate this approach to scholarship. George’s article helped to firm up my resolve to find ways to continue this process of legitimation so that students and other scholars interested in producing scholarship that supports movements for social justice can point to a body of work that demonstrates the sociological value of activist research. Dorothy’s approach ensures that a commitment to the political goals of the Women’s Movement remain central to activist research by foregrounding how ruling relations work to organize everyday life. With a “thick” understanding of “how things are put together” it becomes possible to identify effective activist interventions. As George wrote, “research studies of this sort are designed to be written up, published, and made available to all members of a grass-roots organization for their political consideration. They are not in some sense special or unique. Rather, they are intended to provide, on a day-to-day basis, the scientific ground for political action” (p. 646). George challenges us to collaborate with activist organizations and to find ways to disseminate our work to those struggling for social justice. He also encourages us to keep our own personal and political commitments alive in our research.

A Wonderful Legacy by Eric Mykhalovskiy

A few weeks ago I was having dinner with some friends at a restaurant in Montreal. We had all come to the city to attend the Canadian AIDS Society Skills-building Symposium. My own participation focused on workshops being delivered by the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE), a national organization that produces and distributes HIV-related health information to people living with HIV/AIDS and others. George Smith helped found CATIE over fifteen years ago.

As we reminisced about our early days of HIV work, a characteristic thing happened. We started to talk about George. For the people at the table George was variously a friend, colleague, mentor and fellow person living with HIV. Some at dinner were surprised to learn that *TreatmentUpdate*, CATIE's flagship publication, was George's idea. At a time when state and biomedical responses to HIV/AIDS in Canada were limited to palliative interventions and HIV prevention, George saw a need to put in place forms of organization that addressed the health needs of people living with HIV. In his vision, *TreatmentUpdate* would push family physicians and others out of their complacency by giving them up-to-date information about what could be done to improve the health of those already HIV positive. Two weeks prior to our dinner, CATIE celebrated the 150th issue of the publication.

As we continued to talk we acknowledged that the very idea for CATIE was also George's. When George formulated his vision, it was of a community-controlled organization that would shift standards of care for HIV infection and build the stock of knowledge about HIV and its treatment among communities of people living with HIV/AIDS. I was lucky enough to work with George at CATIE, first as a staff member, than as part of the Board. As I watched him think and talk about what CATIE did and could do it became very clear to me how the organization arose out of his institutional ethnographic research on the management of the AIDS epidemic in Ontario. While in every way a collaborative undertaking CATIE is sourced in George's IE-informed political vision and community organizing. Today it is a national organization with some twenty staff people.

As our dinner progressed we began wrestling with some of the issues arising out of CATIE's workshop at the Symposium. Some of us wondered aloud "how might George have approached that?" I have heard the question raised many times in multiple settings—in AIDS work and in academic forums such as the SSSP meetings. In fact, I don't think I have been at a single IE conference or conference session where at some point someone hasn't asked "what would George have done" or "I wish George were here, he'd have something to say about that."

Those moments are always complex. It's hard for me not to participate in them without a sense of great loss, without wondering what IE and what Canadian community-based AIDS work might now be were George to be alive. At the same time they are a living testament to George's thought and work. I marvel at how he is still with us, entering into our ongoing conversations and struggles to do better research, to advance our understanding of ruling relations, to build better organizations and futures. It is a wonderful legacy.

A Missive from Marie Campbell

Marie Campbell in Kyrgyzstan at the American University Central Asia, Bishkek.

Marie (Professor Emerita, University of Victoria) has been appointed as a non-resident Academic Fellow of the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation, New York and Budapest) that operates various academic programs in universities in 13 previously-Soviet countries. Her appointment is to consult with and support the social research upgrading efforts of faculty in social science departments in AUCA. Below is a note written after her first visit to Bishkek and just before leaving for the second of four visits during this academic year.

I arrived in Bishkek very early in the morning of August 30, met by the Soros Foundation driver. As I had never been to either a Soviet country nor to Asia before, I was entirely curious about what I would find. I was put up in a hotel with several other new Fellows for a few days before we all were transported out of the city by coach to an orientation held at a lake-side resort about five hours away. Here we met about 40 members of the OSI academic programs who are working in the Central Asia division. I won't talk about the meetings, but rather mention that the lake was big (I'd say about the size of Lake Huron), glacier fed from the surrounding snow capped mountains, and salty! And surprisingly warm for swimming. It has no outlets so it sits, warms, and dissolves underlying minerals – thus the saltiness. The resort that we stayed in is new and well-appointed, as one says, meaning nice bathrooms! Here, too, we had ethnic entertainment – unique musical instruments, for instance. And good food. From there, one day, we made an excursion to see petroglyphs on apparently “erratic” rocks, centuries old, or hunting scenes, including some of snow panthers.

I had been in Bishkek for the Independence Day celebrations on September 1. It is my understanding that Kyrgyzstan has been an independent republic since 1992 and it is that event that was being celebrated. People filled the public spaces, watched and participated in parades and listened to speeches and music. From my inquiries, I gather that the Kyrgyz people were nomadic and composed of 40 different tribes until the late 1800s when Russians first moved in at the invitation of the dominant tribe to help it set up a state government. Russians have immigrated into the region in several waves since the late 1800s, sometimes invited and sometimes not. As I traveled into the countryside, I saw evidence of the Russian presence, its legacy, and of the Soviet pullout in the early 90s. The little cottages with decorative blue window frames that I admired in villages, I was told were “Russian-style”. It appeared that the factories I saw had been simply abandoned. I heard that the Kyrgyz economy collapsed at that time and that unemployment and poverty rates continue to be high. I watched for evidence of collective farms and did see harvesting going on. Lots of available water in the country, the warm climate and apparently good irrigation systems make for productive land. E.g., plenty of vegetables and fruits in the bazaars in town. Currently, as I witnessed in the university community, the population is diverse, ethnically, although the common language is Russian and the alphabet, Cyrillic. (I have so far failed to make sense of any street signs, for instance). Immigration has come from China, Korea and local Turkic countries. The Kyrgyz people have been Muslims for centuries, but I

didn't notice any mosques, nor indeed churches. (So much for my superficial comments on social history).

My assignment is to work with faculty members, (I think there are ten participating) teaching them new approaches to social research. Because my own expertise is institutional ethnography, I draw on that but talk about “non-positivist” ethnographic methods. This focus “fits” with the program goals which are to bring new approaches to scholarship from the west into the previously soviet-style academy. In the social sciences, the soviet approach had been positivist, focusing on survey or experimental methods and lacking feminist and/or critical influences. (Where participants did graduate work in American or European departments, they may have been introduced to some of these influences, of course). My participants are sociologists and anthropologists, but also, political science, psychology and journalism professors. So I have had to plan carefully how to offer something useful to all of them; obviously, the focus is methodological and ethnographic. I took a selection of readings with me to build the theoretical focus that I'm demonstrating. My strategy has been to meet individually with each participant to learn about his or her research preparation and current projects or plans, and then to discuss what I can see as a possible way of proceeding – one that incorporates what I am teaching into his or her research plan. “Non-positivist” ethnographic interviewing, contrasted with survey interviewing, is where I began the teaching and I left an interviewing exercise for each participant to do in their own research area before I return. Of course, in order to make this direction “make sense” I gave some lectures about social organization. I drew on an experience of mine at AUCA of having a text-oriented “conversation” with a university security guard (where I had to show my identification pass) to demonstrate both how observations, interviews, and personal experiences can be used to inform an inquiry into social organization, in this case into the university's security policy.

There is much more I could say about the university, the city, my lodgings, and the enthusiastic and friendly young faculty members (and some who are not so young) with whom I am working. The university offers undergraduate programs, the students speak English and many of the faculty teach in English – although Russian is the language in common use everyday. Like the country in general, the university is poorly resourced and the faculty members work hard teaching many courses. Space is a problem. Books and journals are not easily accessible. I try to bring relevant supplies with me. By the way, I am looking for back copies of journals where qualitative methods are published – if any SSSP member has an extra set, I'd be pleased to know about it (mariecam@uvic.ca).