

# SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

## Book Prize Winner 2002

The BSA Medical Sociology Group announced the winner of the Sociology of Health and Illness Book of the year prize, 2002 for the first time at the Medical Sociology Group Annual General Meeting (28th September 2002, University of York).

**Margaret Lock (2002). *Twice Dead. Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death.*** (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Nominated by Ronnie Frankenberg.

"The composition of vast books is a laborious and impoverishing extravagance. To go on for five hundred pages developing an idea whose perfect oral exposition is possible in a few minutes! A better course of procedure is to pretend that these books already exist, and to offer a resume, a commentary".\*

I suppose many if not most people in MedSoc feel some sympathy with this ironic view of Borges's, so the first question about any book by a colleague might be was it really necessary and if so why. We can, and usually do, say what we need to in a paper or two. This book, unlike many, seems to me to be necessary for many telling reasons; Ethicists tend to prefer philosophers, theologians or even psychologists to us as advisers. This will show them what they are missing.

First, Lock provides, and make strange in the technical sense, vivid and readable, even moving analytic descriptions of both operations involved, donor and recipient. Second she situates these procedures in the biographies of the participants before and after the event. Third she situates them in the history and tradition of western and Oriental views of bodily death (not orientalist or in other way patronising, she has studied Japanese practice and thinking at first hand, at length and in Japanese) and she is as aware of both Japan and of Canada as modern as well as traditional societies and explains why. She uses a comparative method as it should be used to point not only to similarity and difference but also to the non-inevitability of particular views and practices. It is not a matter of exoticism but of science and rational thinking applied in different ways. She demonstrates in detail the rational impossibility of absolute and uniform certainty within and between particular social and historical traditions.

Lock is, of course, alongside Scheper Hughes, Virginia Olesen, Bryan Turner and others, well known as a pioneer of the recognition of the significance of embodiment in sociological study. This book brings these particular dry bones (so to speak) to life. One of the major reasons for its importance is that its clarity makes it an ideal exemplar for both would-be medical sociologists and prospective clinicians (nursing, medical or other) to read at the beginning (and perhaps again at the formal conclusion) of their course of studies in order to see the relationship between theory and practice; humanism and science, personal and political. Finally, she accomplishes that we all aspire to, but usually fail to achieve, she makes clear and demonstrates in a way even sociological purists will find hard to refute the relevance for the general understanding of society at large, of sociology in, of and for, medicine. Medical Sociology is still often despised and even its practitioners discriminated against as merely one of several narrow "applied" subdisciplines. Finally she reminds us as medical sociologist of what we can learn from writers as far apart in outlook, space and/or time as Bronfen, Bauman and Borges, Hacking and Heidegger and Hertz: Leach, Latour and Law, or Titmus, Tolstoy and Toynbee and, of course, alas only by virtue of her reporting, countless Japanese Scholars and Practitioners.

\*The Borges quotation is from the Foreword to 'The Garden of Forking Paths' (1941) reprinted in 'Fictions' (1944) which is reprinted in turn in 'Jorge Luis Borges' (1999) newly translated by Andrew Hurley Collected Fictions Allen Lane: The Penguin Press at p67. The quotation continues "That was

Carlyle's procedure in *Sartor Resartus*, Butler's in *The Fair Haven* - though these works suffer under the imperfection that they themselves are books, and not a whit less tautological than the others. A more reasonable, more inept, and more lazy man, I have chosen to write notes on imaginary books. Those notes are 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' and 'A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain'."