

Basics For Revitalizing Collective Life

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Part 1

Craft for Inquiry and Practice

The end sought in Part 1 is to propose craft in social analysis of collective life as a contributing alternative with science. Expected benefits may be more rapid production of knowledge in the discipline of sociology and increases in understanding of social life. The paper draws upon participatory and other research studies that give attention to social complexities that are instructive. Public Sociology and Participatory Research, which move in these learning directions, are featured in current revitalization efforts. A reminder for the study of sociological inquiries is to look for the craft.

Most of the focus of Part 1 is on outlining the craft alternative to methodology, since it is less prominent in current guidelines for the discipline. Louis Wirth, known for his urban studies but who thought they should be brought together with rural studies, Jane Addams, Charles Horton Cooley, C. Wright Mills, and Erving Goffman will be featured for penetrating social complexities and creating a craftsmanship approach to the experience of social participants. Sociological work should be undertaken in forms that are applicable. Science alone does not go far enough. The ideological claims of science, which often nearly completely ignore the social sciences, may tend to conceal the limitations of science alone. Perhaps forgotten is the claim that all knowledge is interrelated.

Background

Sociological imagination as craft has been carried on by relatively few outstanding scholars among us. Perhaps because of the quality of their work generally they have not been challenged for doing it although this part of their work as sociologists tends to be ignored. It is not what they are remembered for in sociology. It may be the most controversial part of the contributions of C. Wright Mills and considered the least exciting aspect of the affirmative sociology of Charles Horton Cooley. Both are major contributors.¹ Jane Addams chose not to become primarily identified with social research in university settings, which were moving social studies more exclusively onto a scientific methodology track. A theme in both Part 1 and Part 2 is that craft in social analysis (as a contrast) is a promising and essential, largely practice addition.

Shifting Back and Forth for Discovery

What is done in the practice of the craft in the work of sociologists? Exemplary performance requires flexibility in thought and observation. What is done in social analysis is to shift readily back and forth between alternative perspectives. The craft person, for example, can shift readily from the small to the large, from simple story-telling realities to abstractions, and from one interpretation to alternatives that may differ. Of course, craft sociologists in social analysis do not necessarily select or craft the same

¹ Cooley could know what craft was as work producing something from his experience as a cabinet maker. C. Wright Mills acknowledged the role of craft, although some of his supporters interested more in his elitist efforts to be a world-wide intellectual, apparently have ignored this. He is remembered as a motorcycle rider on his way to class to teach at Columbia University. Unstated is that he helped build his own house. My own experience with a productive craft has been as a goat milk cheese maker, or as one of those professors who built his own house. However, it was mastering the making of a caramelized Mexican candy that was most instructive. One batch was added on top of the other at a half way point and a caldron of bubbling liquid almost entirely of sugar and goat milk had to be stirred for one hour and a half and then put aside undisturbed for 24 hours before finishing it off with final stirring. A major source of guidance during this entire process was what could be seen after having done it many times.

dichotomies. There may be strong preferences. When I first read C. Wright Mills' The Sociological Imagination (1959), I wanted to write in my copy of the book that the local was more than an adaptive social unit in society.

Where to Look for It

Where are the crafts needed? From them comes social analysis: interpretations, searches crafted for inquiry. In contrast is scientific methodology to test propositions and to show relationships among concepts or variables in the discipline (what in contrast to dichotomous learning is called gradational learning of science). The craft analysis is designed for discovery. Expect the craft sociologists to make discoveries that lead to interpretations of what is happening.

(What is happening may be controversial so one need not expect that Mills brought others to a “promised land” where an oppositional stance would not be an appropriate response.)

Where is the crafted social analysis needed? Listed below:

In critical or activist settings

In affirmative settings

In non-controversial situations in which social realities are very complex

In situations in which people suffer from severe economic and social disadvantages

Where negative prejudices prevail and permeate collective life (whether or not admitted)

In local and regional settings that are down graded by excessive controls imposed by larger centralizing social orders

In disciplines and projects where participatory programs are adopted

In Public Sociology where created knowledge is to take forms that are applicable

Where service commitments are established in local, regional, national, and international settings

(As a correction) Where science is adopted more for status securities than for inquiry

Some of the items in this list can be applied in discussions that follow.

What Does the Craft Do?

A major task is to discover contradictions in society and seek to resolve them as social problems by bringing together the sides perpetuating conflict. The theoretical framework is not always normative (the most common approach in the discipline of sociology), for the normative is clearly not applicable in many situations in which social disorder arises. This may be discovered through exercising sociological imagination that replaces ideological claims for one side or another seeking dominance or exalted status for social control. Sociological imagination may expose excesses in social control. Resolving the contradiction as a social problem may, in addition to normative reform, call for volitional strategies, which on the largest scale may include civilization-wide transformation. (It is interesting that in Barack Obama's campaign for the office of President of the United States he called for an affirmative volitional transformation that was never completely eliminated from even his later campaign speeches.)

Exemplary Craft Sociologists

Who are some major contributors? (Others cited in my other papers on this subject might have been selected.) Note the diversity among them.

C. Wright Mills, who brought classical theorists in sociology into a craft analysis exposing social action "contradictions" at the level of entire societies. History and biography, as an example, are to be brought together for improvements in social analysis.

Charles Horton Cooley, whose craft from the humanities and science promised life-long odysseys, drawing heavily upon affirmative everyday experience, and fulfillment in social life.

Jane Addams, who provided a model of craft for both activism and inquiry and introduced some of the central themes discussed in a later section on participatory research.

Erving Goffman, who seemingly without commitment to whether social life on a macro scale was even salvageable and was engaged in a series of inquiries to expose the complexities of social interaction. Many of these have attracted attention of other sociologists and undoubtedly will in several different ways do so in years to come.

Louis Wirth, who as an urban sociologist with his own background from a small community demonstrates a craft which relies upon rapid shifts from small to large social units for analysis. Like many others Wirth practiced the craft without featuring it as a distinct part of the discipline. But consider what increases in knowledge might come from bringing together the rural and urban. Understanding the diverse social relations in urban social life should uncover much that is being missed in studies of rural life and vice versa. Learning what in our discipline is not applicable for practice without major theoretical revisions might be discovered in such inquiry and analysis.

What should be apparent from this survey is that sociological imagination as craft amounts to much more than such activities as keeping a research journal, important as that and other scheduled activities may be. Sociological Imagination as craft is validated by discoveries which in turn lead to application and improvements in practice.

Themes of Craft in Participatory Research and Practice

Presentations on participatory research projects and programs at the 2008 combined annual conference of the Wisconsin Sociological Association and the Illinois State Association brought out a wide range of themes for the craft. What is highly valued and brought into the craft rather than sifted out as antithetical to mainstream sociological inquiry?

EXPERIENCE – The craft, as in the Charles Horton Cooley and Jane Addams inquiries, can support major conclusions based upon experience. Stories appear to be selected and told as an essential foundation for the social analysis. There is no apology for using them.

RESPECT – Respect for participants is a central theme within participatory research in community studies. This theme is so important it can sometimes be used as an identifying characteristic of the entire approach to research and development. Its impact can be explored where participants are being brought together in a shared life: grassroots producers and professional experts, or Jane Addams' upper class women volunteers and new immigrants in the Hull House area of Chicago.

LIFE (sometimes life-long work ODYSSEYS, and among grassroots producers the store of contributions of work done rather than professional careers appears also in what may be called fulfillment in social life which is a promise associated with the social participation variable).

COLLABORATION – This theme appears often in publications on participatory research. The respect for grassroots producers, especially in developing countries where

small producers are encouraged, opportunities for collaborative relationships are found. What contrasts with this is the model of experts with superior knowledge passing that knowledge on to producers in grassroots producer roles.

Presentations Sited at a State Sociological Association Meeting

Some of the presentations with sociological imagination as craft themes at the 2008 annual meeting of the Wisconsin Sociological Association:²

Studies with data collected by participant observation, which may be used as well primarily on the scientific methodology track.

Participatory inquiry that brings grassroots producers together with the experts. (Presented in a poster).

Sociology courses taught by dividing classes into small groups, each participating in class projects (introducing into the life of the student a participatory experience in education).

A paper on how mega churches "succeed" in a deeply flawed contemporary society and a survey paper on how state and regional sociological associations attempt to "succeed" in an increasingly more highly centralized society.

A session on Urban Problems in which a presentation was on how to transform urban life in the city of Chicago into a safe and socially fulfilling social environment.

A major presentation for highlighting sources of sociological imagination as craft at the conference was "Citizen Jane: Jane Addams, A social scientist who made a

² I wish to thank participants in the 2008 annual meeting of the two state associations for the several contributions they provided me both for content and incentive. Such a conference sponsored by states suggests what special contributions local and regional associations can make that more exclusively professionalized conferences may miss.

difference" by Keynote Address speaker Louise W. Knight, Knight Consulting, Evanston, Illinois. (The college where Jane Addams had been an undergraduate student was the site for the conference.)

Promises of Sociological Imagination as Craft

If continued with passion it will lead toward an affirmative volitional transformation in society.

It can enable participants in social networks to remain calm and unafraid in social relationships.

It can support the liberation of those who suffer from negative prejudice in social and economic systems of opportunity and social control.

It can lead to the discovery of sustainable alternatives where contradictions are selected for resolution.

It may speed up production of sociological knowledge even sometimes where mainstream social problems continue on as if they are irresolvable.

It can connect social change to the struggles for political freedom and social fulfillment.

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Postscript

(This description of craft in making a Mexican caramelized candy was written with grassroots producers in mind as readers. The producers may be less troubled by the status ranking that might be generated for the elite.)

The Mexicans have a name for this kind of candy (jamocillo) but I did not use that name because I suspect the name is used for a class of candies rather than this particular kind.

Making the candy does provide some attempt to sort through meanings for science and sociological imagination as craft. At times I want to think of craft as unprofessionalized. It can go in a different direction in agriculture, for example. Michael Pollan in a book by him in 2006 suggests that professionalism is associated with farming as an industry and an alternative conception is farming as an organism. Imagination becomes more important for any significant change in one part will have effects upon other parts. He says that the reality is not a straight line.

Apart from the sales let me relate a bit of this to my experience of making of the caramelized candy. I learned how to do it from a chemist in Delicious, Chihuahua, Mexico. She seemed to know the chemical side of the process from the beginning to the end. At first in my meeting with her she refused to give me “the recipe.” She would only give me a list of ingredients. After the veterinarian I was with interceded she provided instructions and suggested that if this was not enough she might come to Texas to provide additional assistance. I never needed additional assistance, however, I learned mainly from the experience of doing it. Eventually I was able to always get it to come out right. The most difficult part of the entire process was at the end of the final stirring the next day. The chemist appeared to know the chemical transformation that occurred during the last seconds of that stirring. For me I needed to know that the transformation in that dull unattractive substance was occurring and I had to move that transformed candy, now with an entirely different texture and a golden color, quickly into buttered pans for cutting up before packaging. The “miracle” had happened.

A compliment I once received at the local flea market in Alpine, Texas where the candy was being sold was: “This candy is just like the candy I have bought on the street in Mexico City.”

Now all the way back to the question that prompted the postscript: where if anywhere does imagination fit as a source of analysis in craft? People with the skill to make this Mexican caramelized candy say that “the candy must like you or it will turn to sugar.” A more precise way of saying this in accord with the essential contribution of craft in addition to knowledge of chemistry might be: if you cannot apply the craft, the miracle will not happen. It will remain unattractive and have an unacceptable texture. A recipe is not enough and the knowledge of chemistry is not enough. The craft is needed as well. Can sociologists trying to apply sociological knowledge learn anything from this? A first step may be to respect producers and others at the grassroots and then to collaborate with them in the resolution of the contradictions in society – the social problems.

Part 2

Clarity for a Necessary Social Movement

An odyssey in inquiry and practice gives one a chance to build with what fits together but these may remain very different parts whose contributions are merely taken for granted. A major objective in Part 2 will be to sort out what fits together although each part in a core of components is to be restored as a distinct and contributing component in the overall odyssey. What is needed is what Cooley called a “social current” in which researchers ride to make considerable progress. Within a current or a “social movement” even the most contributing components tend to lose their sources as distinct parts of the whole. Objectives in Part 2, in addition to restoring distinctiveness, include looking for origins for a movement that overcome resistances to change.

An inner core of components are to be selected. This is not to downgrade the full range of themes based upon a program of inquiry and experience already sited. For example, respect remains an important guideline in relationships that are usually structured into superior and inferior statuses, grassroots producers vs. elitists or experts.

Selected for an inner core and discussed below are: collaboration, leadership, sociological imagination, odyssey, witness, and voluntarism. After presenting each one they will be briefly outlined in the sequence in which each appeared in the odyssey. At the outset now the one to appear first is most widely used by researchers and practitioners (collaboration) and this first review ends with one most widely ignored in the field of inquiry (voluntarism). Since they are all interrelated (they fit together), one could begin with any of them and then select the others in any order.

One of the most widely used components is collaboration. In cooperative relationships and in an affirmative type of sociology the social relations may be stated as if the foundation already exists. Extension workers in agriculture refer to a partnership. If collaboration is applied in oppositional relations one may learn not to take it for granted. And under some circumstances collaboration is to be avoided. In his study of graduate students in university graduate schools, Jeff Schmidt found students open to cooperation

but not collaboration, a much more advanced form of cooperative relationship. Knowing how to interpret relationships came from prisoner of war camps (2000). Cooperate but do not collaborate!

In a poster exhibit by researchers in Big Bend People & Goats, a central theme was that participatory research and other attempts to widen participation takes more leadership, not less (2008). Wider participation did not come ready-made but was an achievement through increased leadership. Leadership is another of the required components. Confirmed again is sociological practice as craft that enables people to do something. There is more going on than experts passing superior knowledge on to lay role producers.

Research programs are likely to have staff assignments to assess levels of participation. There is a risk in doing this if higher levels of participation are not viewed as achievements but as handed-down ideological sources of acceptance and success or merely as the result of the skills of group discussion facilitators. Leadership that can rise above the ideological assessments is one that practices sociological imagination, a major contributor in the odyssey.

Sociological imagination was named by C. Wright Mills. It was practiced before Mills, however, and is found in the work of sociologists who do not identify the practice as a distinctive form of social analysis in the discipline. In sociological practice sociological imagination is associated with dichotomies which are contradictions to be resolved. If dichotomies are described merely to show a difference without sociological imagination it may be suspected that one is elevated to put down the other. Even Mills did not always practice sociological imagination. It is the bringing together what goes together!

A distinction that may surface over time within an odyssey is whether the oppositional sources are internal or external ones. This came up in a study of requisites for success. It appears that internal barriers may take some years to overcome but overcoming them may not be as formidable as the external barriers such as those that arise in the policy-forming arena in highly centralized systems. Re-establishing interactive relations within highly bureaucratized situations is a major challenge when the threat comes from external sources. The one paper we have written thus far on requisites

of success for participatory research (2008) had been considering mainly internal barriers. Participants in projects may become most critical of external funders: for example, they help you fail! However, it is the internal barriers that may be undermining the program and the usual short project schedules do not provide the five or more years a resolution may require. (The Ojos, New Mexico sheep raising project took five years before a consensus was acknowledged and there was to be no turning back! [KBDI, 1991])

Participation (social participation and participatory forms) is a major component in the odyssey. Social participation came early in American sociology. In the odyssey it appears often and is a major contributor. A promise associated with participation is fulfillment in social life. In the BBPG case support for the social analysis within the odyssey comes from the affirmative sociology of Charles Horton Cooley. Currently, a section with at least some of these affirmation themes is being formed in the American Sociological Association. Identified as an “altruism and solidarity group” it may win support as an alternative to critical or oppositional sociology (hopefully, one that eventually brings the two together with a sociological imagination craft).

This may be an appropriate time to point out a distinction for what has been introduced as an odyssey in this paper. The formulation goes beyond recommendations that a research scholar construct a series of related projects. A contrast in scientific inquiry may be set by a goal to form a career. An advantage of the professional career is that it keeps the inquiry closer to professional colleagues and to the range of judgments accepted in peer review exchanges. The odyssey expands the inquiry to include the knowledge of grassroots producers. The breakthrough in discovery may come from any segment of the collaborators, even those who are on the same journey without professional careers. If the craft dimension of inquiry is not off limits the learning advantages can be increased and judged in terms of improvement in practices. The end sought may be such improvements.

Perhaps enough of the interrelated components have been presented for readers to wonder if this journey is too demanding for a scholar to be tempted by its call. Wait! There is something more which is even more challenging in this journey. Its name is voluntarism. On lower levels of abstraction voluntarism is represented by passion and commitment. Here is the center for so-called social forces in the society. Mainstream

sociology tends to ignore it for study. The reality cannot be acknowledged – let in the fold – except as a metaphor. Or its pervasiveness can be acknowledged only in altruistic forms or, as in an earlier time, as examples of an accepted political practice – democracy. Some of these prohibitions are required by western civilization and if unattended may result in its downfall.

How badly can voluntarism be downgraded at a local community level? Some unsuspecting people are likely to bring it up in local discourse. In agriculture some people raise goats and goat raising is associated with social class and ethnic realities. Hostile things can be said about goat owners by putting down the goats. The volitional relations between people and animals in a volitionally deprived civilization come out in strange patterns. The agriculture is labeled a “hobby.” There is no word for voluntarism. People are “goat lovers.” The commitments are assessed in strange personalized constructions. The people are speaking in step with a deeply flawed civilization: goat raisers are “enthusiasts.” That can carry a put-down for the goat raisers and the ethnic and social class segments in the locality associated with goat animal agriculture. What a mess such a deprived practice has on voluntarism and upon all of the other components that go with the revitalization of collective life.

Voluntarism, if proposed as a social science concept, could be expected to originate in the multi-field of voluntarism: volunteerism, non-profits and philanthropy. Unfortunately, this field also accepts the volitional weaknesses of western civilization, referred to above. Here also is an adherence to one-sided commitments to scientific inquiry. Here too the volitional weaknesses are ignored.

What the proponents of this aberration rely upon is a normative social order imposed upon collective life with negative sanctions. The excesses of these attempts in social control lead to extermination of people in places throughout the world. When volitional sources of peaceful social control lose credibility, enlightened practice does well to help preserve a witness of a better social life (Quinney, 2000). Bearing witness may not at all be a preferred practice in social studies but including it in the collection of important components may be justified. Failures are numerous. The mainstream projects in agriculture may fail and the “sustainable agriculture” coming as a prospect for success

may also have disappointing impacts. Learning from mistakes and blockages may open the way for a witness.

Participants who accept the guidelines outlined in this discourse will find that even though affirmative orientations are provided as essential for revitalization, so is the oppositional. Critics of anything oppositional may be unforgiving. Already suggested is that the mainstream attempts in social control build upon resources in a deeply flawed civilization. An oppositional position, of course, may have an awareness of these limitations. Both normative and volitional guidelines and controls when brought together may contribute to a fulfillment in social life, restored themselves by sociological imagination.

Next is a brief review of the appearance of the components in the odyssey which can be dated as starting in the early 1970s. At the outset my adaptation to professional sociology was as an affirmative sociologist drawn to the study of everyday social life. Normative social structures provided the data for analysis. Even though Charles Horton Cooley was a favorite scholar among sociologists my research had included an occupational study of public administrators. This opened an exploration of society-wide transformations but I remained committed to the affirmative and everyday life events approach. From this background I wrote a paper entitled "In Defense of the Local."

At the beginning of the odyssey the social participation component to revitalization was foremost in importance and prominence and was applicable in all three sectors in which the odyssey proceeded: voluntary (sector), education, and agriculture. In all three sectors I became an experienced participant, eventually receiving service awards in two of the sectors.

Teaching a course on volunteerism provided an opportunity to create an approach to voluntarism by featuring exemplary volunteers. Furthermore, what was found in the voluntary sector was searched for in the other two sectors. National surveys for levels of voluntarism were conducted to measure levels of voluntarism for different fields in animal agriculture, including horses, sheep, and goats. This was done both before and immediately after retiring from teaching.

Perhaps the most perspective building period in the odyssey was between 1986 and 1995 when what had been learned about revitalization of collective life was explored in a

ten-year project abstracting current publications (books and articles) and visiting research and development projects for published reports. (These published three and four times a year are now being prepared for microfiche coverage for library files and in pdf format on the internet [<http://www.corch.net>].) From the first issue a recognized topic area for searches was militant voluntarism in both peaceful and violent forms.

Sociological imagination, which made its appearance in the odyssey, had its major impact within the odyssey during and after visiting several times with a group of sociologists meeting in the name of C. Wright Mills during ASA annual meetings during the early 2000s. What had a major impact in the odyssey was sociological imagination as craft, largely ignored³ within the group.

Readers may want to reduce the number of “themes” or “components” to three in order to sharpen assessments within an odyssey. Readers might select: sociological imagination as craft, volitional resources in collective life, and a goal – improvements in sociological practice. Revitalization of collective life might have a chance under this odyssey or be pursued within another odyssey if the mainstream continues to fail to meet the challenges for a desired revitalization.

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³ An impact of C. Wright Mills’ contribution of sociological imagination was a much greater use of power as a resource in social systems analysis. What the present paper calls for is a more widespread use of volitional resources.