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Notes on Naturalism in Sociology

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A number of sociologists allege a correspondence between certain models of inquiry in what are called the hard sciences and the enterprise of sociology. Some sociologists even self-consciously seek to imitate the perceived models of inquiry of other fields.

Thus one tradition in sociology can, without too much violence, be symbolized by the white-coated laboratory worker who manipulates glass and steel apparatus, perhaps utilizing a variety of electrical or even electronic devices. His quest is for a specially and expensively outfitted room or set of rooms someplace where he can manufacture data. A newer tradition may perhaps be symbolized by the data banks and computers, the white shirt and tie of the computer specialist and the economic analyst and adviser (to stretch the hard science model somewhat). (I assume that the image of the scholar secluded in his book-lined and oak-paneled study is dead and bears mention only as a matter of historical curiosity.)

Although such images are doubtless vulgar, we might suggest one further image which characterizes yet another tradition in sociology, one that is also sensitive to the models of hard science. This tradition is perhaps most aptly symbolized by the binoculars, hiking boots and flannel shirt of the geologist or biological naturalist.

This might be called the naturalist tradition in sociology, using the term naturalist in much the same sense as it is employed in botany and zoology where it seems to refer to those who, in the tradition of Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle,

choose to develop accounts of what they observe in natural settings.

The notion of naturalism is not confined to biology, of course, but is found also in literary and philosophical traditions, particularly in the literary productions of such authors as Balzac and Zola.

The common theme in all naturalism seems to be an insistence upon concreteness and dense and detailed description: a disposition to depict subject matter in its own terms.

> Those who have come to share the naturalistic outlook, while they may differ in many details, tend to begin with whatever confronts the human observer in his complete daily living and to endeavor to frame a satisfactory amount of it in its own terms.[1]

NATURALISM IN SOCIOLOGY

While the above characterizes naturalism at a very general level, the specifically sociological variety may be said to include the following distinctive features: (1) Emphasis upon what is called "close" observation of (2) the phenomenological worlds and activities of actors from which (3) an analysis is evolved along (4) qualitative lines.

An explication of each of the four features will, hopefully, provide an understanding of sociological naturalism.

1. Naturalists tend to open and/or close their works with the concept of "closeness" when speaking (often defensively) of their methods. The term is never defined or discussed, but simply used as though it were well understood. The fact that it keeps reappearing in these key places and is considered so

basic as not to warrant discussion suggests, however, that the term might be an important clue to the temper of the naturalists.

Thus, we find on page 1 of Dalton's, Men Who Manage,

> ...the aim is to get as close as possible to the world of managers and to interpret this world and its problems from the inside, as they are seen and felt at various points and levels.[2]

Or in speaking of sociological studies of deviance, Howard Becker feels obliged to comment:

> ...we do not have enough studies in which the person doing the research has achieved close contact with those he studies, so that he can become aware of the complex and manifold character of the deviant activity.... If [the researcher] is to get an accurate and complete account of what deviants do... he must spend at least some time observing them in their natural habitat as they go about their ordinary activities.[3]

The leading contemporary sociological naturalist has perhaps been most insistent and cute (as is his wont) on the matter:

> ...any group of persons--prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients--develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject.[4]

> When seen up close, the individual bring[s] together in various ways all the connections that he has in life... Many who have analyzed role have stood across the street from the source of their data oriented by William James' abstract view of human action instead of the lovingly empirical view established by his younger brother.[5]

> Small group experimenters have certainly stood up close to their data but have used a considerable amount of this opportunity to adjust their equipment.[6]

What in fact does close seem to mean? Closeness, among other things, refers to distance--which comes in at least two varieties: physical and social.

From what we can glean from the works of such people as those quoted above, closeness seems to refer to the minimization of both kinds of distance. Such persons seem to counsel standing close physically; that is being, spatially, with people.

They seem also to counsel standing close socially by developing the kinds of relationships that give access to the actual and total activities of people through the day; close in the sense of intimate or confidential.

An additional sense of close, refers to close attention; searching or minute investigation; attention to the minutiae of daily activity, as in the phrase, "a close account," meaning a detailed account.

To be close in these senses implies for the naturalist an observational methodology much after the manner of geologists, scholarly flower and bird watchers or orangutan and gorilla followers.

It seems also to be felt that the objects under analysis must be scrutinized in their natural settings, for only here, it is believed, is one really close. Moreover, the achievement of true closeness is felt to take a long period of time.

2. If this is, at least in part, what is meant by closeness, then what more specifically is to be done once one gets "close".

As is congruent with the perspective of naturalism as a more general style of thought, primary emphasis is placed upon cataloging the now confronted reality in its own terms.

Naturalists who study other than human objects must perhaps have some difficulty at this point because the "own terms" of what we call rocks, plants and animals are rather moot.

The sociological naturalist is in the happier position of studying objects that present to him a set of terms. These "terms" are literally the words used by the participants; or, to put it more abstractly, the concepts that the participants employ in order to structure their local world.

The specialized vocabulary of the group becomes then, a major element of the observational chronicle. (As for the field biologists, exhaustive notes become indispensable.) Vocabulary lists may be drawn up--attempting, as it were, to discern the folk-ideology of the local scene.

In some branches of current sociological naturalism, such activity is dignified by the use of concepts like "the phenomenology of actors" or even, "the ethnomethodology of actors".

> We studied what was of interest to the people we were investigating because we felt that in this way we would uncover the basic dimensions of the school as a social organization and of the students' progress through it as a social-psychological phenomenon. We made the assumption that, on analysis, the major concerns of the people we studied would reveal such basic dimensions and that we could learn most by concentrating on these concerns. This meant that we began our study by looking for and inquiring about what concerned medical students and faculty and following up the connections of these matters with each other and with still other phenomena.

> We studied phenomena that seemed to produce group tension and conflict because it seemed to us that the study of tensions was most likely to reveal basic elements of the relationships in which the medical student was involved. If it is true that conflict and tension arise when the expectations governing social relationships are violated or frustrated, then it is clear that study of such instances will reveal just what those expectations are; and the discovery of such expectations is an important part of the sociological analysis of any organization. Operationally, this meant that we were eager to uncover "sore spots," to hear "gripes" and complaints. It might seem that in doing this we were deliberately looking for dirty linen and skeletons in the family closet, but this is not the case. The point of concentrating on instances where things do not work well is that it helps one discover how things work when they do work well, and these are discoveries that are more difficult to make in situations of harmony because people are more likely to take them for granted and less likely to discuss them. These two decisions helped us to limit the area of inquiry. Our job was to investigate the school by looking for matters that were important to participants in it in a collective way and/or the occasion of group conflict.[7]

It is the commitment to cataloging activity in this sense of "its own terms" that makes naturalists suspicious of machines such as the Chapple Interaction Chronograph or Bales' Interaction Process Analysis. Such devices have a built-in initial commitment to the terms of the investigator. From the start they collect data in terms of categories used by sociologists in constructing some part of the world, rather than in terms of the categories used "on location."

The naturalists's insistence upon <u>beginning</u> with people on their own terms raises, of course, a major meta-theoretical issue; that of the importance or role of the categories of action used by the participants in structuring and guiding their own activity.

When the naturalist gets to analysis, the participants' constructions will be a major focus. He makes much of particular folk-concepts and their rôle in action. He draws his theoretical stance from that time-ravaged phrase: "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

It is this commitment that draws a fundamental line between the naturalist and those who feel the sociologist must from the very beginning impose his own set of sociological folk categories upon data and can safely minimize the importance of the concepts used by those he studies.

The categories of the participants refer, of course, to on-going activities; the participants are continually coding the stream of one another's actions; they are acting and designating action as instances of concepts and propositions.

The naturalist is necessarily interested, then, in chronicling all manner of actual events; meetings, partings, ceremonials, casual conversations, formal deliberations, and the like. In the same manner that the zoological naturalists have followed baboons and gorillas and observed their rounds and their gatherings, their fights and their fornications, the sociological naturalist strives to maintain a running record of sheer behavior sequences and collective enterprises.

3. Again arising from a commitment to objects on their own terms, the naturalist is very reluctant to begin with pre-formed hypotheses which are fitted to a systematic data collection and proposition testing apparatus.

The model of the explicit set of propositions (or hypotheses), cleanly operationalized and implemented by a

specially designed organization, seems to the naturalist to assume knowledge of exactly those things which for him are problematic.

Such a model assumes that the terms and activities of the world under study are well known and documented; that the concepts significant for the participants are already established; that the significant features of a unit are well-delineated.

So it is that naturalists preface their works with passages such as:

> In one sense, our study had no design. That is, we had no well-worked out set of hypotheses to be tested, no data-gathering instruments purposely designed to secure information relevant to these hypotheses, no set of analytic procedures specified in advance. Insofar as the term "design" implies these features of elaborate prior planning, our study had none.[8]
>
> We did not assume that we knew what perspectives the doctor would need in order to function effectively in practice, for we believed that only a study of doctors in practice could furnish that information and such studies were not available. We did not, furthermore, assume that we knew what ideas and perspectives a student acquired while in school. This meant that we concentrated on _what_ students learned as well as on _how_ they learned it. Both of those assumptions committed us to working with an open theoretical scheme in which variables were to be discovered rather than with a scheme in which variables decided on in advance would be located and their consequences isolated and measured.[9]

Another worker tells us that:

> A general characteristic of fieldwork is its temporally developing character. The fieldworker usually does not enter the field with specific hypotheses and a predetermined research design.[10]

And, again being cute, a leading naturalist relates:

> I did not employ usual kinds of measurements and controls. I assumed that the role and time required to gather statistical evidence for a few statements would preclude my gathering data on the tissue and fabric of patient life.[11]

A study may even have evolved as a consequence of holding a given job:

> In the present research no explicit hypotheses were set up in advance, but, as indicated in the Introduction, occupational involvements usually preceded questions and consciousness of problems to be studied.[12]

This is not to say that the naturalists begin without concepts; that they are baconians and believe that the data will speak for themselves; although, as noted, in a significant sense the data do speak from themselves.

They begin, rather, with a set of general guidelines of sensitivity. They begin, in other words, with training in sociology that is brought to bear and tried out on the situation at hand.

> To be sure [the fieldworker] does have general problems in mind, as well as a theoretical framework that directs him to certain events in the field. The trained sociologist or anthropologist is equipped to make discriminations rather quickly between what may be theoretically important or unimportant. The initial phase of fieldwork is a period of general observation: Specific problems and foci have not yet been determined. The fieldworker is guided mainly by sensitivities to data derived both from his professional background and from his general notions about the nature of his research problem. As he surveys the field initially, he is continually "testing"--either implicitly or explicitly--the relevance of a large number of hypotheses, hunches, and guesses. Many preconceptions fall by the wayside during this initial period, as the observer struggles to ascertain the meaning of events and to place them in some initial order.[13]

In what is perhaps the understatement of the decade in sociology, Becker, et al., relate the general framework with which they regarded their materials:

> We decided to work with a theory based on the concept of symbolic interaction, the theory first enunciated by Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead and since used and expanded by many others. This theory stresses the more conscious aspects of human behavior and relates them to the individual's participation in group life. It assumes that human behavior is to be understood as a process in which the person shapes and controls his conduct by taking into account (through the mechanism of "role-taking") the expectations of others with whom he interacts.[14]

Combining received sociological tradition with the local situation, naturalists work toward what they refer to as an emergent analysis. They conceive of themselves as evolving a set of problems or kinds of things that appear to be central to the matters under observation.

So Dalton reports:

> Many questions and hunches originating in the experience at Milo and Fruhling were cross-fertilized by concurrent contacts at Attica and Rambeau. Since no simultaneous systematic study could be made of all, and as Milo was the most accessible, that firm became the nucleus of inquiries and the continuing point of major effort. However, general questions and interpretations were increasingly influenced by study of the other firms, especially the factories. Common processes and similar recurring situations evoked interlocking questions which led to establishment of the problem areas. For example, why did grievers and managers form cross-cliques? Why were staff personnel ambivalent toward line officers? Why was there disruptive conflict between Maintenance and Operation? If people were awarded posts because of specific fitness, why the disparity between their given and exercised influence? Why, among executives on the same formal level, were some distressed and some not? And why were there such sharp differences in viewpoint and moral concern about given events? What was the meaning of double talk about success as dependent on knowing people

> rather than on possessing administrative skills? Why and how were "control" staffs and official guardians variously compromised? What was behind the contradictory policy and practices associated with the use of company materials and services? Thus the guiding question embracing all others was: what orders the schisms and ties between official and unofficial action?[15]

> During the second phase of fieldwork, the investigator has begun to make sense of the massive flow of events. Significant classes of persons and events have begun to emerge, certain aspects of the field have become important, and genuine propositions have been formulated. His initial general problems may have undergone considerable revision and are now coming into clear focus. This second phase then is marked by greater attention to particular aspects of the field and by an emerging set of propositions.[16]

Becker and his colleagues in Boys in White even explicitly contrast their original view with their final emergent view.

> If we take the idea of design in a larger and looser sense, using it to identify those elements of order, system, and consistency our procedures did exhibit, our study had a design. We can say what this was by describing our original view of our problem, our theoretical and methodological commitments, and the way these affected our research and were affected by it as we proceeded. We will, then, turn in the next chapter to a description of the point of view we finally adopted, from which this book is written, and the analytic procedures we adopted to implement it.[17]

4. This brings us to what is perhaps the crux of the sociological naturalist's enterprise.

Having gotten close to some segment of social life on its own terms and having begun without formulated hypotheses or apparatus for testing them, the naturalist must, in the logic of the case, develop his analysis along primarily qualitative lines if he is to remain on safe scientific ground.

While quantitative statements are of the sort that X varies in some way with Y, or A is present under condition B, C, and D and absent when they are absent, or if X then Y; qualitative statements are of the sort that X exists, or X is found in forms A, B, and C. These two latter types of statements represent the main analytic activities of the naturalists.

Perhaps the most thorough rationalization of the X exists activity in recent years is to be found in Selznick's commentary on the logical status of the concept of organizational weapon or combat party. He tells us in the preface to the free press edition of that volume,

> The Organizational Weapon was written with an eye to developing a theory of institutional assessment; and, at the same time, as offering a special key to the understanding of communism. These aims should be kept in mind by the reader for they necessarily introduce a selective emphasis. The study is not a full account of communism in the modern world, nor does it attempt to explain everything about communism. Furthermore, the organizational strategies explored here, important as they are and have been, are not presented as the ultimate arbiters of victory or defeat in the struggle between totalitarian communism and the free world. My aim was to search out certain central features of the communist type of political party and to trace its characteristic role in the political arena.[18]

> The characteristic quest of the interpretive analyst is not for a mere description or history. Nor is he interested in how selected variables are related to each other. The protocol of a free-association interview, or a life history, is scrutinized for "revealing" symptoms. What is revealed? The relation between id impulses, ego structure, and social pressure will form, it is presumed, a constellation inferable from the individual's overt behavior, including his verbal responses. The patient is studied for signs which reveal an underlying (latent) pattern. To expose this pattern, by way of the analysis of symptoms, is the goal of interpretation.[19]

> The basic intellectual task [of The Organizational Weapon] was to formulate a complex hypothesis stating the essential features of a going concern, a system, such that the most important distinctive attributes of communist political action would be accounted for. These attributes included the remarkable [1] persistence of the communist core membership despite great fluctuations and turnover, and [2] the persistence of strategies and tactics of power aggrandizement despite significant shifts in political "line". The search was clearly for a "latent structure," an emergent pattern of adherence and control, of self-perpetuating, interlocking commitment. The name "combat party" was devised to designate this system of interdependent behaviors, relationships and beliefs.[20]

> In a work of this kind, the major concern is to identify the system, to state what the "nature of the beat" is. The task is to construct a conceptual model of a functioning institutional system. But this is also an exercise in typology. We view the structure we are studying as an instance of a class of objects whose general features are to be explored. The class may have only one member but it is the kind of thing we are dealing with that interests us. We ask: what kind of a social system is the communist party? We answer by developing a model of the "combat party," including its strategies.[21]

The same emphasis on complex portraits or models runs through the formulations of other naturalists.

> If we were going to look on the medical school as a social system, it seemed to us that a particular style of analysis was required. We would not be interested in establishing relationships between particular pairs or clusters of variables. Rather, we would be interested in discovering the systematic relationships between many kinds of phenomena and events considered simultaneously. Our analysis would proceed not by establishing correlations but by building tentative models of that set of systematic relationships and revising these models as new phenomena requiring incorporation came to our attention. We did not propose hypotheses and confirm or disprove them so much as we made provisional generalizations about aspects of the school and the students' experience in it and then revised these generalizations as "negative cases"--particularly instances in which things were not as we had provisionally stated them to be--showed us further differentiations and elaborations required in our model.[22]

The outcome of such research is not one, two or a few carefully tested hypotheses but a set of many interrelated propositions. For example, in our study, propositions about how psychiatrists handle patients in a hospital setting are related to propositions about the psychiatrists' professional affiliations and careers, as well as to propositions about the organization of the hospital's wards. Similarly, propositions about the perspectives of nurses toward their work mesh with propositions about their professional identities, the behavior of psychiatrists, the structural necessities of ward organization, and lines of hospital authority. Fieldwork is well advanced when many apparently scattered observations are related to one or more propositional sets and these sets in turn are demonstrably and logically related to one another.[23]

* * *

We needed a transcendent model that would incorporate certain aspects of the discarded models. In addition, we required a model that would permit focus upon <u>the organization as an arena</u> in which ideologies are put into operation, clarified, modified and transformed. We also wanted to focus upon <u>the ideology-bearers</u> themselves, that is upon the psychiatrists and para-psychiatric specialists engaged in the care of patients, who do not always see eye-to-eye upon important matters.

We needed a model that would permit us to focus upon both co-operative and conflicting actions; rational and nonrational actions; structured and emergent behavior, ruled and nonruled behavior; formal and informal or spontaneous division of labor; over-all institutional and subunit actions; intra-individual action and its relation to organizational action; total and partial institutional commitment; intra-organizational and extra-organizational pressures; "social organization" and "social process."

What model permitted all these things?

We developed a concept of psychiatric hospitals as grounded upon minimal bases of consensus, which we might term, after traditional political-science practice, "concord". Concord includes those bedrock agreements about the most generally accepted goals of the organization: in our example, "to cure or treat the mentally ill." Concord is usually taken for granted and is rarely questioned as a whole, although aspects occasionally may be questioned.

> In addition, there are a number of types of working agreement among personnel that can be described initially with a common-sense vocabulary. These working agreements are variously referred to as rules, contracts, agreements, understandings, tacit understandings, and so on. These rules, agreements and understandings involve individuals, as well as echelons and other organizational units within the hospital. As in any organization, in order to "get things done," people must not only violate certain rules periodically but must co-operate when no existing rules seem to guide action.[24]

The notion of proposition in these statements is misleading for it refers to propositions of the X exists sort, as the actual analysis reveals and as is sometimes said.

> ...the propositions with which the fieldwork was concerned were primarily qualitative. Amount or degree was not so important to our theoretical interests as occurrence and form. Again taking negotiation as an example, we were interested that special arrangements were made by certain classes of people about certain matters and were terminated under given conditions. Our methods seemed appropriate to those questions. On the other hand, had we been interested in establishing the extent to which the business of handling patients is carried out through routine procedures <u>versus</u> special arrangements, then other methods would have been appropriate. To answer that question, of course, is certainly an important next step--indeed essential to future general understanding of organizational functioning.[25]

Although not logically different in any fundamental way, the second type of activity, X comes in forms A, B, C, etc., leads to a kind of "type spawning". Thus we find Dalton classifying, among other things, types of cliques:

> Vertical Symbiotic
> Vertical Parasitic
> Horizontal Defensive
> Horizontal Aggressive
> Random.[26]

Or Sykes, in his work on the corruption of authority in prisons, gets mileage out of the ways in which corruption may occur: through friendship, reciprocity and default.[27]

The most extreme of the current sociological naturalists has made a career not only out of X exists but out of building up substance from the ways in which X exists.

4 Types of precaution practices.
2 Parts of front.
2 Alternative parts of front.
6 Discrepancies between appearances and reality.
3 Groups of minor events which can disrupt a projected definition.
2 Functions which must be performed on a team.
3 Dimensions of variation of a position on a team.
2 Types of regions.
2 Types of standards in the front region.
6 Forms of decorum (ends list with "etc.").
3 Limitations on backstage informality.
3 Controls over access to the front region.
4 Ways of managing breakdown in audience segregation.
6 Types of team secrets.
11 Discrepant roles.
4 Types of communication incompatable with the fostered impression.
7 Ways of derogating the audience.
5 Types of staging cues.
5 Subtypes of one type of team collusion.
4 Principle forms of performance disruptions.
4 Types of scanes.
3 Defensive attributes and practices to insure the show.[28]

The X comes in forms A, B, C, etc., activity can, as David Matza notes, become a kind of obsession, filling the naturalist with a "desire to explore all the minute variations observed."[29]

> Thus, for instance, Paul Cressey in his volume on the Taxi-Dance Hall is greatly concerned with distinguishing that institution from other similar establishment--a noble purpose but something that can be easily overdone.
>
> A taxi-dance hall is but one of a dozen or more types of public dance establishments that may be found in the modern metropolitan city. If the taxi-dance hall is to be distinguished from these other places it must be done through a review of

the basic factors which differentiate one type of dance hall from another. Even a brief study of the problem suggests that there are at least seven such factors that must be considered.

1. type of ownership
2. management's dominant motive
3. method of payment and cost of attendance
4. type of patronage
5. range of services over and above dancing
6. type of physical equipment provided
7. location of establishment

Cressey goes on to tell us about many more kinds of dance halls than I at any rate have any wish to know about. I am certain that our threshold for this sort of detail varies. However, I think we can agree that detailed description and classification beyond some unknown point ceases to be useful. This sort of detailed description of mundane human behavior is the vice that attends naturalistic virtue. It was well summarized and assessed in Gaugin's barbed comment on the greatest of literary naturalistis. "Everyone shits," said Gaugin, "But only Zola bothers about it."[30]

Put in more conventional fashion, the naturalists are engaged, with a vengeance, in the first steps of theory building--the concocting of conceptual frameworks. But it is the concoction of conceptual frameworks with a difference: the concepts and any tentative propositions grow out of a self-conscious immersion in, and effort to bring order to, a segment of social life for the very purpose of such discovery.

This brings us to the question of the relation of systematic evidence to this kind of enterprise.

Insofar as the naturalists move on to quantitative statements involving, of necessity, large numbers of cases, each measured in a comparable way, they stand on shaky ground. As a consequence, propounded links come to be stated in a highly qualified manner, as, "it is possible that..."; "it seems

to be the case..."; "although the data are not systematic, it appears that...".

And of course, their works are replete with paragraphs of the following sort:

> That other methods could fruitfully have been employed to follow through on the field methods we do not argue. Proceeding from where our research leaves off, there are multitudinous possibilities for quasi-experimental studies, objective surveys, testing procedures--even for more controlled observations and conversion of fieldwork results into statistical form.[31]

However, insofar as they concern themselves with building structures of essential features or types of things, the question of evidence involves a different set of canons than that more usually associated with scientific proof. It involves rather a set of canons used typically in legal and intelligence operations.

X may be said to have certain features that justify a certain characterization or a certain classification. In such a case the prime question seems to be: what is the evidence that any such feature ever existed even once any place in the world? The question is one of the accuracy of certain alleged concrete space-time-bound purported facts.

As readers of the works of sociological naturalists, we face something of the same problem as that faced by a judge, jury or intelligence agent. Are the facts actually as asserted so that they can possibly warrant a given conceptual classification?

There is, of course, a reasonably codified set of rules in law and in intelligence work for such assessments--

essentially involving such matters as internal and external consistency and observer reliability.

Beyond this, the works of sociological naturalists must be judged on the kind of grounds used in assessing frameworks of a grander sort. We say, that's all very beautiful, but what do we do with it? That is, we invoke the criterion of fruitfullness. (There is, of course, the additional criterion of logical coherence which may also be invoked.)

DECORUM

While these four features seem reasonably to characterize the work of sociological naturalists at a conceptual and methodological level, there is yet another feature of their work that bears mention; a feature that is related to their enterprise in a somewhat different way. For lack of any better terms, this feature might be viewed as a type of metaphysical bias or existential orientation.

Although _beginning_ with an insistence upon considering social life in its own terms, their resultant analyses are constructions, built upon these terms, rather than merely depictions of them. In one sense then, the naturalist becomes a formalist, for he eventually steps outside the world as it is viewed by the participants and projects an independent construction that _incorporates_, rather than merely depicts, the perspectives and activities of the participants.

The most conspicuous feature of this construction is a singular lack of _decorum_, to borrow a word used by Gouldner

in this connection.[32] To possess decorum is to be "characterized by propriety"; "to observe the requirements of polite society"; to be seemly, sedate, decent and proper.

Whatever the topic, naturalists seem able to contrive ways in which to violate the publicly polite conventions of decorous discourse.

When naturalists study a reputable and conventional institution, such as a medical school or general hospital, the participants emerge as types who are fully as fumbling and conniving as the sorts of people who are publicly defined as disreputable. Medical students, for example, are seen as responding to the pressures of medical school by moving from a perspective of "The Best of All Professions" to "An Effort to Learn It All" through "You Can't Learn It All" and ending in "What Do They Want Us to Know? That is, "the fate of idealism" is chronicled.[33]

In contrasting studies of the medical trade done by the formalistic Harvard-Columbia axis and the naturalistic Chicago base, Gouldner comments more generally.

> It is difficult to escape the feeling that the [Harvard-Columbia people] are more respectful of the medical establishment than the Chicagoans, that they more readily regard it in terms of its own claims, and are more prone to view it as a noble profession. Chicagoans, however, tend to be uneasy about the very idea of a "profession" as a tool for study, believing instead that the notion of an "occupation" provides more basic guide-lines for study, and arguing that occupations as diverse as the nun and the prostitutue, or the plumber and the physician, reveal instructive sociological similarities. Chicagoans seem more likely to take a secular view of medicine, seeing it as an occupation much like any other and are somewhat more inclined toward debunking forays into the seamier side of medical practice. Epitomizing this difference are the very

> differences in the book titles that the two groups have chosen for their medical studies. Harvard and Columbia have soberly called two of their most important works, "The Student-Physician", and "Experiment Perilous", while the Chicagoans have irreverently labelled their own recent study of medical students, the "Boys in White."[34]

So too, the naturalists contrive ironic puns for the titles of their works, such as Men Who Manage,[35] Liquor License[36] (a study of bars by an author with the doubly ironic first name of Sherri), "Normal Crimes,"[37] "Peers and Queers"[38] (when that author is in his naturalistic mood), and a study of death entitled Passing On.[39]

These and other studies violate decorum by focusing upon aspects of various institutions and employing concepts that call attention to certain areas of institutional life which the institutional guardians would prefer not to have spoken of or written about publicly.[40]

And they violate decorum by conceiving the respectable in disrespectable terms and vice-versa. Mental patients become inmates,[41] medical practice becomes a tinkering trade,[42] psychoanalytic theory becomes psychiatric ideology,[43] junior colleges become coolers of educational marks.[44]

Their scrutinization of publicly disrespectable institutions likewise violates decorum by their tendency to conceptualize such institutions in polite and respectable terms and to report in detail the "problems" (read victimization) of the disreputable. Mental hospitalization becomes a career;[45] crime becomes normal;[46] heroin users become victims of bigotry.[47]

It is tempting to dismiss such violations of decorum with the explanation that they result from the proclivities of the most disaffected survivors of Ph.D. programs in sociology. That is, naturalists are simply "writing out" their personal dispositions to debunking.

It is more interesting, however, to view this lack of decorum in terms of the previously enumerated characteristics of the naturalistic stance. Naturalists aim to, and presumably do, get close. They seek to chronicle the words and deeds of people from this range.

This is the rub. They chronicle _all_ the words and deeds to which they are privy; the public and the private; the laudable and the reprehensible; the prideful and the shameful. They pry into what goes on behind closed doors, in secret places and into what is said in off moments and off the record. They work, in short, with the speakable and the unspeakable.

I suggest that anyone who sets out self-consciously and explicitly to make a detailed chronicle of everything that happens in some local part of the world must, if he is at all successful, be forceably confronted with the division between publicly fostered impressions and rhetoric and the facts of the place. We are all aware of such a division; knowledge of it and adeptness in managing it is part of what it means to be a socialized and normal interactant.

But this is the special poignancy of the naturalistic stance. While we only live this division, the naturalist must contemplate it, he must dwell on it. Because of his commitment

to taking things on their own terms, the differences between public professions and understandings and private feelings and doings become a central feature of his materials.

As a result, the naturalist becomes, perhaps, too conscious of how understandings of situations vary; he becomes overly-aware of the poor "fit" between official and unofficial versions of reality. (Both versions, of course, are equally valid in the sense that what is real is always a matter of where one stands.) Just as our stereotype of the reporter as cynical is in a measure true, so too, the cynacism expressed in the naturalist's violation of public decorum is, in some degree, a true reflection of his stance. (Sociological naturalists, unlike reporters, tend not to have conservative publishers and fearful rewrite men.)

In this light, also, we can perhaps partially understand why it is that a document like Goffman's _Presentation of Self in Everyday Life_, could, perhaps, have been written only by a naturalist, since it is an extended explication of the line between and the management of public profession and private understanding.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have sought in this informal document to take a first step toward delineating those characteristics of a number of contemporary sociological practitioners which make it possible to reasonably construe them as a "set". I have necessarily obscured the ways in which they are different in order more

firmly to determine the ways in which they are alike. So, too, I have ignored a traditional label applied to many of them, that of "symbolic interactionist". All symbolic interactionists are not naturalists and all naturalists are not symbolic interactionists.[48] I have focused, rather, on the logical and methodological structure of their procedure; logical and methodological matters seeming; indeed, to be increasingly the basis upon which "sociologies" are differentiated.

I have intentionally attempted to be non-evaluative, albeit playfully irreverent, in setting forth the elements of this tradition. It is better, I suggest, carefully to perceive what is afoot before launching either an attack or a defense. So too, much more thought must be directed to the more general question of the nature and standing of all present sociological theory and research before one can reasonably assess the variant here described.

NOTES

1. Harold A. Larrabee, "Naturalism in America," pp. 319-353 in Y. H. Krikorian, ed., Naturalism and the Human Spirit, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944). Quoted in David Matza, "Advent of Naturalism," Center for the Study of Law and Society, March, 1963, p. 4. Matza's treatment of the 'advent of naturalism' in the study of deviance helped call my attention to a tradition much broader than that topic and I am much indebted to his paper. While Matza focuses upon the naturalistic subversion of the "correctional perspective," the present statement seeks to develop the characteristics of naturalism *per se*.

2. Melville Dalton, *Men Who Manage*, (New York: John Wiley, 1959), p. 1.

3. Howard Becker, *Outsiders*, (New York: Free Press, 1963), p. 168.

4. Erving Goffman, *Asylums*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1963), pp. ix, x.

5. Erving Goffman, *Encounters*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 143. (Italics added.)

6. *Ibid.*, p. 143, fn. 46. (Italics added.)

7. Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, Everett Hughes and Anselm Strauss, *Boys in White*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 20.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

10. Anselm Strauss, Leonard Schatzman, Rue Bucher, Danuta Ehrlich, and Melvin Sabshin, *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions*, (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 20.

11. Goffman, *Asylums*, p. ix.

12. Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

13. Strauss, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

14. Becker, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

15. Dalton, *Ibid.*, p. 274.

16. Strauss, *et. al.*, *Ibid.*, p. 20. (Italics added.)

17. Becker, *et. al.*, *Ibid.*, p. 17. (Italics added.)

18. Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), p. v.

19. Ibid., p. vii.

20. Ibid., p. xii.

21. Ibid., p. xiv.

22. Becker, et. al., op. cit., pp. 21-22.

23. Strauss, et. al., op. cit., p. 19.

24. Ibid., p. 14.

25. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

26. Dalton, op. cit., pp.

27. Gresham Sykes, "The Corruption of Authority and Rehabilitation," Social Forces, 34:257-262, (March, 1956).

28. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959).

29. Matza, op. cit., p. 23.

30. Ibid., pp. 23-24.

31. Strauss, et. al., op. cit., p. 35.

32. Alvin Gouldner, "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of Value-Free Sociology," Social Problems, 9:199-213, (Winter, 1962).

33. Becker, et. al., op. cit.

34. Gouldner, Ibid., p. 207.

35. Dalton, op. cit.

36. Sherri Cavan, Liquor License, (Chicago: Aldine, 1966).

37. David Sudnow, "Normal Crimes," Social Problems, 12:255-276, (Winter, 1965).

38. Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Peers and Queers," Social Problems, 9:102-120, (Fall, 1961).

39. David Sudnow, Passing On, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1957).

40. Cf. Howard Becker's remarks on conventional and unconventional sentimentality in H. Becker, ed., The Other Side, (New York: The Free Press, 1964, pp. 1-6).

41. Goffman, Asylums.

42. *Ibid.*, Ch. 4.

43. Strauss, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*

44. Burton Clark, *The Open Door College*, (New York:).

45. Goffman, *Asylums*.

46. Sudnow, "Normal Crimes," *op. cit.*

47. Marsh Ray, "The Cycle of Abstinence and Relapse Among Heroin Addicts," in Becker, ed., *The Other Side*, pp. 163-177. The papers in this anthology seem, indeed, to have been selected on the basis of this criterion.

48. Cf. the mixed bag of approaches in the symbolic interactionist anthology by Arnold Rose, ed., *Human Behavior and Social Process*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).