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A SEVEN-MINUTE SKETCH OF MY RESEARCH¹

MICHAEL R. HILL²

Editor, *Sociological Origins*

MY CENTRAL PROJECT is to identify, explicate, and better understand the fundamental dimensions, consequences, and possibilities of human embodiment in the social world. This project is multi-faceted and is continually evolving. Virtually all of my work contributes directly to this project, including my analyses of archives, biography, “bomb talk,” bureaucracies, doctoral training, environmental art and design, epistemologies, landscapes, libraries, novels, organizations, patriarchy, pedestrians, postcards, research methodologies, scholars, surrogate parenting, terrorism, and — yes — disciplinary history. Methodologies I use include: archival excavation, bibliographic research, case studies, disguised interviews, ethnological observation, experiential reflexivity, framing, genealogy, key informants, participant observation, questionnaires, site visits, structured serendipity, systematic documentation, and thought experiments. These methodologies produce data that I subject, as appropriate, to quantitative and/or qualitative interpretation, including: axiology, bibliography, content analysis, experiential reflection, factor analysis, frame analysis, parametric and non-parametric statistics, phenomenological reduction, ritual analysis, sociobiography, spatial and temporal mapping, stochastic modeling, systems analysis, textual explication, and theory-driven critique. As a theorist, I find special inspiration in the works of Mary Jo Deegan, Anthony Giddens, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Erving Goffman, Harriet Martineau, George H. Mead, and Alfred Schutz. A selection of my writings reflecting these interests, methodologies, and interpretive frameworks is included on the handout CD-R. All of these projects contribute to the larger and ongoing whole.

Today, I focus on a small part: the discovery of trace evidence in archival repositories — evidence such as letters, official records, and unpublished manuscripts — evidence that informs our disciplinary history. As a helper-apprentice to an experienced researcher, Professor Mary Jo Deegan,³ I become intrigued by the search for trace evidence in formal archives. This work is time-consuming, intellectually open-ended, often physically exhausting, and sometimes emotionally exhilarating. The trace evidence found in archives and cognate storehouses (public and private) provides virtually the *only* empirical data sociologists can use to explore social patterns older than the last living witness. This reality confronts *all* sociologists regardless of topic: crime, family, gender, health, social movements, etc. Taking seriously Anthony Giddens’ admonition to study society starting with the Industrial Revolution, we *must* at some point throw out our

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³ Deegan is the award-winning author of numerous books and articles. Her major works include: *Social Ethics* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (2004); *Women at the Hague* by Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, and Alice Hamilton (2003); *On Art, Labor and Religion* by Ellen Gates Starr (2003); *Race, Hull-House, and the University of Chicago* (2002); *The Dress of Women* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (2002); *Essays in Social Psychology* by George Herbert Mead (2001); *The New Woman of Color* by Fannie Barrier Williams (2000); *Play, School and Society*, by George Herbert Mead (1999); *The American Ritual Tapestry* (1998); *With Her in Ourland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1997); *Women in Sociology: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (1991); *American Ritual Dramas* (1989); *American Charities* by Amos G. Warner (1989); *Jane Addams and the Men and the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (1988); *A Feminist Ethic for Social Science Research* edited by the Nebraska Sociological Feminist Collective (1988); *Women and Symbolic Interaction* (1987); and *Women and Disability* (1985). Deegan earned the B.A. in chemistry with a mathematics minor and completed a quantitative M.A. in sociology and social welfare at Western Michigan University. She then conducted a qualitative study of physical disability for her sociology Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. In 2002, Deegan won the Distinguished Scholarly Career Award given by the ASA Section on the History of Sociology.

questionnaires, abandon our informants to the grave, and open our eyes to the necessity of using trace evidence, wherever found and in whatever form — there is no other way to look responsibly into our collective social past.

Having worked at Professor Deegan's elbow from 1982 to 1988, I developed my own research question: Was Roscoe Pound, the noted Dean of Harvard's Law School, and the founder of the American school of plant ecology, *also* a major but unknown sociologist? Pound died in 1964, I couldn't ask *him* — and he outlived all of his early colleagues. If Pound had a significant sociological career — it turns out he did — the documentation lay in libraries and archives. My search began.

Now, here's the crucial point regarding what I call "archival frame analysis": As I engaged physically, mentally, and financially in digging for data related to "Roscoe Pound and American Sociology," *I also paid close attention to the process of doing the research.* That is, I became a participant observer in my own project. I was a fly on my own wall. I took notes on variations and similarities in archival repositories, their personnel, their quirks, their policies and procedures. I asked questions of the staff, I joked with archivists, I interviewed other researchers. I compared notes with Professor Deegan (who was now my life-partner and more key informant than mentor). I used Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* to "make sense" of what I saw going on in the dozen archives I visited during a one-year period. Taking a page from Shulamit Reinharz, I also paid attention to my feelings in archival settings: when did I feel bewildered, curious, empowered, envious, intimidated, irritated, joyous, lonely, puzzled, successful, or just plain tired? And, according to Deegan's theory of American ritual, I found each archiving trip replete with ritual elements: liminality, invidious core codes — even the potential for *communitas*. The result of these and subsequent observations, beyond the mandatory "methods chapter" in my dissertation, was my monograph on *Archival Strategies and Techniques* (1993). You'll find a copy of the text on the handout CD-R.

In the interim, my understanding of archives and "archival frame analysis" continues to increase *via* my activities as an embodied sociologist. As a presenter of workshops for the ASA, the MSS, and the AHS, I have interacted with an ever larger sample of archive-using sociologists. The chance to sort, inventory and arrange the official papers of the ASA, then at the Library of Congress, gave me a "backstage" look at one of the world's leading archival repositories. As a ten-year member of the ASA Committee on Archives, I got an insider's view of organizational power struggles related to archives. As the elected Chair of the ASA Section on the History of Sociology, I got to see "section politics" play out in regard to archival issues. Editing my own journal gives me hands-on decision-making experience regarding the publication of archival materials. My continuing research in disciplinary history takes me to still more archives, in the U.S. and abroad.

Most actively, at this moment, I am sharpening my insight into the technological and structural importance of "lists" as mechanisms for social administration — à la Giddens — and as potentially liberating tools of social exploration and organizational reconnaissance. For the ASA, I recently compiled a big list: *A Centennial Bibliography on the History of American Sociology*. I decided it should include *all* American sociological books published before 1925. These are the works from which American sociology took root and grew in stature. This list of books provides an alternative perspective on the development of American sociology. Taken as a whole, these books offer a window (and an intersubjectively verifiable empirical base) through which to document and correct myriad distortions in our subsequent disciplinary narrative.

To close, I leave you with another list: a bibliography of one-hundred-six doctoral dissertations recently completed in seven selected departments of sociology. *All* employ qualitative methodologies. This list provides salient trace evidence of considerable scholarly activity that can likely be multiplied many times over as additional schools are included. If you elect to write a qualitative doctoral dissertation, you will join the company of many students at respected universities who have recently taken the same road. They beckon you to make this liminal journey.

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