

PRAGMATISM AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONISM*

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This paper examines the interfaces between pragmatism and interactionist sociology. Four tenets central to social interactionism have been selected for this study: the philosophical perspective on reality as being in the state of flux, the sociological view of social structure as emergent process, the methodological preference for participatory modes of research, and the ideological commitment to ongoing social reconstruction as a goal of sociological practice. It is argued that from the start interactionist sociologists were concerned with the problem of social order and sought new ways of conceptualizing social structure. Special emphasis is placed on the interactionists' predilection for a logic of inquiry sensitive to the objective indeterminacy of the situation. An argument is made that the failure of interactionist sociologists to address head-on the issues of power and inequality reflects not so much their uncritical reliance on pragmatism as their failure to follow consistently pragmatist tenets and to fulfill the political commitments of pragmatist philosophers.

There is a solid consensus among present-day commentators about the profound impact of pragmatist philosophy on social interactionism. This consensus breaks down, however, when it comes to spelling out the exact nature of this impact. Some critics, mostly outside the interactionist perspective proper, charge interactionism with an astructural, subjectivist and status-quo bias and lay much of the blame at the door of pragmatism (Kanter, 1972; Huber, 1973; Reynolds and Reynolds, 1973). Others argue that there is nothing inherently astructural, subjectivist or conservative about either interactionism or pragmatism (Hall, 1972; Stone et al, 1974; Maines, 1977; Stryker, 1980; Johnson and Schiflet, 1981). Still others detect a fissure among social interactionists, which they trace to the division within the pragmatist tradition between the nominalist and subjectivist pragmatism of Dewey and James and the realist and objectivist pragmatism of Peirce and Mead (Lewis, 1976; McPhail and Rexroat, 1979; Lewis and Smith, 1980).

The question that this voluminous literature on pragmatism and interactionism is bound to raise in many a head is, "Shouldn't the whole

matter be left for professional philosophers to decide?"

One answer to this question is suggested by Kuhn's theory of paradigms. Along with substantive theories and research procedures, according to Kuhn, all scientific schools include "metaphysical paradigms" or "metaphysical parts of paradigms". Normally, philosophical assumptions underlying research practice in a given area are taken for granted, but in periods of crisis "scientists have turned to philosophical analysis as a device for unlocking the riddles of their field" (Kuhn, 1970:184, 83). Whether sociology is currently undergoing a crisis is beyond the scope of this paper; what directly concerns us in Kuhn's argument is that the task of philosophical self-reflection is performed by practitioners in the field and not just by professional philosophers. Indeed, the prodigious output in speculative writings by Bohr, Heisenberg, de Broglie, Born, Schrödinger, Eddington, Jordan, Pauli, Weizsacker, and Oppenheimer, to mention only better known names in modern physics, should convince the skeptics that the reflection on the a priori foundations of science is more than a self-indulgent practice of wayward sociologists. As Whitehead (1938:29) put it, "if science is not to degenerate into a medley of *ad hoc* hypotheses, it must become philosophical and must enter upon a thorough criticism of its own foundations." The present inquiry into the paradigmatic unity of pragmatist and interactionist thought accepts this judgement and is undertaken in the hope that it will help to illuminate some of the predicaments of modern interactionism.

More specifically, this study is intended to show that since its formative years, interac-

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tivist sociology contained a structural component, although its pragmatism-inspired approach to the problem of social order significantly diverged from the traditional one. The study also demonstrates that interactionist methodology has a strong predilection for participatory forms of research, which reflects its paramount concern, again directly influenced by pragmatist ideas, with the objective indeterminacy of the situation. Finally, it is held that the relative paucity of interactionist research on the issues of power, class and inequality is not so much a reflection of the conservative bias that the interactionists allegedly inherited from pragmatism as the result of their failure to embrace fully the political commitments of pragmatist philosophers.

The terms "pragmatism" and "social interactionism" are used here inclusively. That is, Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead, despite their divergent views, are all considered to be pragmatists insofar as they took a common stance against rationalist philosophy. Correlatively, Cooley, Thomas, Park, Ellwood, Blumer, and a number of other kindred yet disparate writers are treated here as interactionists for the sake of contrasting their views to those of functionalist thinkers. It is argued, however, that the tension in the premises of interactionist thought has resulted in the division between the more voluntaristically and less voluntaristically oriented brands of social interactionism.

Finally, about the plan of the exposition. Without claiming to have exhausted the premises of social interactionism, the following have been selected as central to interactionist thought: the philosophical perspective on reality as being in the state of flux, the sociological view of society as emergent interaction, the methodological quest for a logic of inquiry sensitive to the objective indeterminacy of the situation, and the ideological commitment to ongoing social reconstruction as a goal of sociological practice. These four paradigm-setting features of social interactionism are addressed in this order.

STUDYING THE WORLD-IN-THE-MAKING: THE PHILOSOPHICAL PREMISES OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONISM

"... For rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making..." (James, [1907] 1955:167). This cherished precept of pragmatist philosophy—one of "the philosophies of flux" (Dewey, [1929] 1958:50) that became popular in the late 19th and early 20th century—conveys an image of the world brimming with indeterminacy, pregnant with

possibilities, waiting to be completed and rationalized. The fact that the world out there is "still" in the making does not augur its final completion at some future point: the state of indeterminacy endemic to reality cannot be terminated once and for all. It can be alleviated only partially, in concrete situations, and with the help of a thinking agent. The latter has the power to carve out an object, to convert an indeterminate situation into a determinate one, because he is an active being. The familiar world of color, sound and structure is his practical accomplishment, i.e., he hears because he listens to, he sees because he looks at, he discerns a pattern because he has a stake in it, and when his attention wavers, interest ceases, and action stops—the world around him sinks back into the state of indeterminacy.

There is more than a tinge of post-Kantian idealism in this mode of reasoning, which should come as no surprise, given the prominent role transcendentalism played in the pragmatists' formative years. Traces of transcendentalism can be detected in Dewey's celebration of the mind as "the constitutive author of the whole scheme" ([1929] 1960:33), James' preoccupation with the world "anchored in the Ego" ([1890] 1950, II:297), and Mead's conviction that "what a thing is in nature depends not simply on what it is in itself, but also on the observer" (1929:428). Transcendentalist overtones are unmistakable in the pragmatist view of cognition, which harks back to the idealist metaphor of knowing as carving. From transcendentalist pragmatists learned to distrust the rhetoric of "bare facts" which, in Mead's words (1938:98), "are not there to be picked out. They have to be dissected out, and the data are the most difficult of abstractions. . . ." Pragmatists' resistance to behaviorism as incompatible with the active and conscious mode of man's being in the world, no doubt, also reflected the aversion to materialism bred into their bones in the years of apprenticeship. Salient as the elective affinity of idealist and pragmatist thought is, it should not be taken to mean that pragmatists accepted the idealist legacy uncritically: pragmatism is a post-Darwinian philosophy in which the principle of subject-object relativity was replaced with that of the relativity of organism and environment, the constitutive activity of Absolute Mind with the instrumental activity of organized individuals, and dialectical logic with the experimental logic of situation. Pragmatists parted company with idealists on the issue of the primacy and the constitutive power of thought, which, according to them, needs to be explained, not presupposed. The root of knowledge is not to be found in knowledge itself; it is to be sought in action. The latter

intervenes in the relationship between the subject and object, giving rise to the phenomenon of "emergence" which, in simplest terms, refers to "a certain environment that exists in its relationship to the organism, and in which new characters can arise by virtue of the organism" (Mead, 1934:330). Pragmatists conceded that subject and object are bound to each other by the fundamental relationship of relativity, yet they placed this relationship in a broader context suggested by the Darwinian theory of evolution. The individual continuously adapts to his environment, changing his action to meet the exigencies of the situation and transforming the situation to satisfy his practical needs; in that sense we can speak of "a relativity of the living individual and its environment, both as to form and content. . . . The individual and environment—the situation—mutually determine each other" (Mead, [1924-25] 1964:278; [1908] 1964:86). A key word in this statement is "mutual". Unlike idealists, pragmatists emphasized that action is constituted by, as much as it constitutes, the environment. It is in the course of this mutual constitution that reality opens itself up to the knower. Knowing does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of doing. Whatever doubts the knower has about the nature of things, he alleviates practically, by manipulating his objects, putting them to different uses, literally forcing these objects to conform to his notion of them, and in the process of doing so establishing—in *situ*—whether a thing in question is what it is thought to be. The very mode of handling things, thus, is part and parcel of their objective being. Said Peirce ([1877] 1955:29), "thought is essentially an action." "The unit of existence is the act," concurred Mead (1938:65). The only reality available to us, in James's words, is "practical reality" ([1890] 1950, II:295). "Reality which is not in any sort of use, or bearing upon use," charged Dewey ([1931] 1963:41), "may go hang, so far as knowledge is concerned."

As action took precedence over thought in pragmatist analysis, the old question of thing in itself emerged in a new light. "Reality in itself, or in its uninterpreted nakedness," observes Thayer (1973:68), "is a pragmatically meaningless notion. . . ." The problem for pragmatists is not so much that the thing in itself is unknowable in principle, but that it can be known in so many ways: one thing can function as many different objects, and one object can be represented by many different things; which role a thing assumes in a given situation, which determinate object it is made to impersonate, depends not only on its inherent qualities, but also on the interests, assumptions, and practical skills of the actor. A thing we call paper can

be used for building a fire, writing a letter, covering the floor, making a mask, as well as for many other uses, every one of which brings into existence a new situation and a different object. Moreover, as Mead (1936:158, 155) stressed repeatedly, our very treatment of things as definite objects involves an abstraction, in that it requires an active selection of certain elements from among the many encompassed in our field of experience. The status of a thing as an object of a particular kind is problematic; it is determined in the course of interaction between the thing in question and other things: "Everything that exists in as far as it is known and knowable is in interaction with other things. . . . Interaction is a universal trait of natural existence" (Dewey, [1929] 1958:175; [1929] 1960:244). One of the things involved in the interaction that produces a meaningful object is the knower. Things emerge as meaningful objects when they encounter the knower with all his practical skills and the power of symbolization: "Symbolization constitutes objects not constituted before. . . . Language does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created" (Mead, 1934:78). Thus, *situation* in the pragmatist lexicon always presupposes an actor and a transaction between the knower and the known, or as Gouinlock (1972:8) put it, "if there were no human beings (or comparably sentient creatures) there would be no situations in nature."

This pragmatist reasoning is ripe with interesting, if unsettling, implications. It implies the possibility of multiple realities, or to use James's favorite expression, "the pluralistic universe," comprised of many worlds, each one rational in its own way, each reflecting alternative lines of action, ends, and situations. "Other sculptors, other statues from the same stone!" exclaims James ([1890] 1950, I:289). "Other minds, other worlds from the same monotonous and inexpressive chaos! My world is but one in a million alike embedded, alike real to those who may abstract them." This argument, however, runs into a problem: if the world is as fluent and indeterminate as James wants us to believe, how do we go about deciding which course of action to follow, which world to cut out of the primordial chaos of unmediated being? Are we not heading for a solipsism of some sort when we adopt this mode of reasoning? These are the questions that critics posed to the pragmatists and that consumed so much of James's time in the last ten years of his life. His claim that "*the fons et origo of all reality, whether from the absolute*

or the practical point of view, is thus subjective, is ourselves" ([1890] 1950, II:296-7), exposed him to the charges of subjectivism, which, despite all his efforts, James was not able to refute resolutely. This cannot be said about Dewey, who came to appreciate without reservation that "meaning is objective as well as universal," that "significant things are things actually implicated in situations of shared or social purpose and execution," that "communication is a condition of consciousness" ([1929] 1958:188-9, 180-1, 187). The charges of subjectivism are also inapplicable in the case of Peirce and Mead, both of whom saw the terminating of indeterminacy as a fundamentally social process. From the start Peirce was at pains to emphasize that "the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY," that the real problem is "how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community" ([1868] 1955:247; [1877] 1955:13). Similarly, Mead, while acknowledging that "each individual has a world that differs in some degree from that of any other member of the same community," consistently stressed that the individual "slices the events" from the standpoint of community life, and that his very ability to "carve out" an object and to handle it rationally "is social to the very core" ([1924-25] 1964:276, 1934:141).

In retrospect, many tenets of pragmatism might seem dated; the pragmatist analysis of the social dimension of human existence looms larger and larger as the time goes by. Pragmatists were not the first to recognize the importance of this dimension—Scottish moralists (Stryker, 1980) and romantic philosophers (Shalin, 1984) had done so way before pragmatists. Still, Morris (1970:96) hardly exaggerates when he describes the analysis of the social conditions of man as "one of the most important achievements of the pragmatist movement". Without society, pragmatists realized, there would be no rational human beings, no world of meaning and structure, and the primordial chaos would never be tamed. Precisely because the world out there is not fully determinate, because it can be carved out in so many ways, there is a need for an organizing principle, a reference frame that can guide the efforts of disparate individuals engaged in the process of determination. The individual learns to do the "carving" against the background of meaningful objects shared with others. He grows in the environment "endowed with meaning in terms of the process of social activity" (Mead, 1934:130), in which he partakes with other human beings, and "this community of partaking is meaning" (Dewey, [1929] 1958:185). It is insofar as the individual

perspective on reality is mediated by and rooted in society that it attains a quality of being private or public, objective or subjective: "The objectivity of the perspective of the individual lies in its being a phase of the larger act. It remains subjective in so far as it cannot fall into the larger social perspective . . ." (Mead, 1938:548). The objectivity of any perspective is thus not an arbitrary matter; rather, it is a social, and therefore historical, matter, and as such it invites, nay, requires sociological treatment. Which brings us to social interactionism proper.

Stated in pragmatist terms, the project of interactionist sociology consists in a systematic examination of the process of the determination of indeterminacy, insofar as this process shapes society and, in turn, is shaped by it. Put differently, it is an inquiry into the pluralistic social universe brought into being by various collectivities, each one creating a separate environment of meaningful objects that distinguish its members from those inhabiting different social worlds. A social world is real for those participating in the same universe of discourse. It is "a distinct world, with its own ways of acting, talking, and thinking . . . its own vocabulary, its own activities and interests, its own conception of what is significant in life, . . . its own scheme of life" (Cressey, 1932:31). Such a world is not objective in the traditional sense—it has no being in itself; it is not "a world of independent realities such as might be known by some ideal absolute subject; it is a world of . . . data given to concrete, historically determined subjects, and of actions which these human subjects actually perform upon these objects of their own experience" (Znaniiecki, 1927:536). There is more than a fleeting resemblance between Thomas's theorem, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas, 1928:572), and James's dictum, ". . . *We need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it will infallibly end by growing in such a connection with our life that it will become real*" ([1890] 1950, II:321). The definition of the situation is that unmistakably pragmatist "looking at," "listening to," "reaching for" which constitutes an early, hidden, attitudinal stage of an overt act and which transforms "the big, buzzing confusion" of everyday life (James, quoted in Park, [1924] 1955:265) into a clearly recognizable environment and gives a semblance of order to "the irrational chaos of the real world" (Znaniiecki, 1919:147). "The definition of the situation is equivalent to the determination of the vague," wrote Thomas; before the definition sets in, "the situation is quite undetermined," but as

the definition unfolds, "the situation becomes definite" (Thomas, [1918-20] 1966:240, 23-4). That is when the flow of reality begins to show a pattern and the situation reveals its structured character. The pattern in question, however, is not inherent; it is not a "fact" in the positivist sense of the word. "The great and most usual illusion of the scientist is that he simply takes the facts as they are . . . and gets his explanation entirely a posteriori from pure experience. A fact by itself is already an abstraction; we isolate a certain limited aspect of the concrete process of becoming, rejecting, at least provisionally, all its indefinite complexity" (Thomas, [1918-20] 1966:271).

Interactionists' frequent allusions to James should not be taken to mean that they endorsed his subjectivism. It is of paramount importance from the interactionist standpoint that definitions of the situation vary not only from individual to individual, but also from one group to another, that "different tribes define the same situation and pattern the behavior in precisely opposite ways" (Thomas, 1937:8-9), that "things do not have the same meanings with different people, in different periods of time, in different parts of a country" (Park and Miller, 1921:265). Interactionists clearly understood that humans approach the task of defining the situation as members of certain groups, armed with "models of situations" and "super-individual schemes" (Znaniiecki, 1919:199, 284). The symbolic environment he inhabits is a shared environment, and the outlook he develops is a shared outlook, reflecting a larger social act of which he finds himself a part.¹ As the individual grows older, he can challenge this shared world—one thing he cannot do, as long as he remains a rational member of society, is to ignore it. His actions always refer to the world that is already there, the intersubjective universe existing on the intersection of objectively established group perspectives. The interactionist must begin with the historically determined world of culture and meaning, but he must understand it dialectically, i.e., not as the "block-universe" (James) existing by itself and informing the individual's conduct without being informed by it, but as the world that is still in the making, the world that continuously produces individuals as conscious

human beings and that is continuously produced by them as a meaningfully objective whole.

To sum up, pragmatism was a reaction to the overdetermined picture of reality painted by rationalist and mechanist philosophers. Following the train of thought initiated by transcendental idealists, pragmatists replaced the static, predetermined, inherently structured universe with the dynamic, emergent, historical world-in-the-making. This shift in perspective resulted in the "figure-background reversal," which illuminated anew the problem of order. Whereas the chief difficulty for rationalist thought was to explain apparent irregularities and incessant transformations in the overdetermined world of natural order, the problem for pragmatists was coming to grips with order and structure in the overemergent world of natural indeterminacy. How can one do justice to the orderly nature of reality without doing violence to its emergent characteristics—such was the challenging question that confronted pragmatist thinkers. It is in response to this challenge that pragmatists turned to the collective conditions of human existence as a source of meaning, stability and organization. Social interactionism was an outgrowth of this ingenious attempt to find in society an anchorage for the determinate world of objective reality. Interactionists accepted the pragmatist thesis that the world is not inherently determinate, that it is open to multiple determinations, which led them to the pioneering view of society as the pluralistic universe continuously produced by the collective efforts of individuals. Society-in-itself gave way in their work to society-in-the-making, the study of structural givens to the study of the production of social reality as objective and meaningful. With this reorientation, interactionists had to find their own way of coming to grips with structural properties of social life without glossing over its emergent characteristics. They also had to provide a dialectical account of the individual as both the product and producer of society. The view of society as social interaction can be seen as an attempt at resolving these vexing problems placed on the agenda by pragmatist philosophy.

STRUCTURE AS EMERGENT PROCESS: THE INTERACTIONIST VIEW OF SOCIETY

"Interaction" was more than a technical sociological term in the vocabulary of social interactionism; it was also a philosophical category of wide-ranging significance. "The idea of interaction," wrote Park and Burgess

¹ In pragmatist terms, Joas (1983:11) points out, it is appropriate to say that "we find our purposes or ends in the world, and we are practically embedded into the world prior to every intentional act." This statement needs to be qualified, for it does not take into account the dialectical nature of the relationship between intentionalities and situations, and specifically the fact that intentionalities can attain a degree of autonomy from the situation and serve as a source of innovations.

def. phrase

([1921] 1969:129) in their famous textbook, "represents the culmination of long-continued reflection by human beings in their ceaseless effort to resolve the ancient paradox of unity in diversity, of the 'one' and the 'many,' to find law and order in the apparent chaos of physical changes and social events; and thus to find explanations for the behavior of the universe, of society, and of man." Note the reference to the "one" and the "many"—code words for the problem of universals and particulars. The authors clearly thought that interactionism offers the best hope for the resolution of this ancient paradox. Their solution, however, insofar as it applied to the relationship between the individual and society, was itself quite paradoxical. Neither individual nor society, according to interactionist theory, can be accorded unqualified primacy—each one is an aspect in the ongoing process of social interaction, and both are mutually constitutive. "The individual is no thrall to society. He constitutes society as genuinely as society constitutes the individual" (Mead, 1935-36:70). "The individual and society are neither opposed to each other nor separated from each other. Society is a society of individuals and the individual is a social individual" (Dewey, [1897] 1972:55). " 'Society' and 'individual' do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing" (Cooley, [1909] 1962:314). "The human personality is both a continuously producing factor and a continuously produced result of social evolution" (Thomas, [1918-20] 1966:11). " . . . Habit and custom, personality and culture, the person and society, somehow are different aspects of the same thing. . . . Personality [is] the subjective and individual aspect of culture, and culture [is] the objective, generic or general aspect of personality" (Park, [1929] 1952:203-4).

This argument is essentially circular: the individual is explained here in terms of society and society in terms of individuals.² The circle

² It is this circular reasoning that is largely responsible for recent attempts to revise the history of social interactionism by reclassifying interactionists into sociological realists and nominalists (Lewis and Smith, 1980). The whole division appears to be a disingenuous attempt to get around the fundamental paradox of interactionist thought, the paradox of man being simultaneously a product and producer of society. The pragmatist approach transcends the traditional dichotomy of nominalism and realism through its emphasis on the intercessory role of action, which has the power to universalize the particular and to particularize the universal. What this means is that universality is neither *universalis in intellectu* (the nominalist view), nor *universalis in rebus* (the realist view), but *universalis in actu* (the

in question, however, is not a vicious one—it is a dialectical or hermeneutical circle which demands as a matter of principle that the part be explained in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of its parts, i.e., that the individual be understood as a subject and object of the historical process and society as a continuously produced and a continuously producing factor in social interaction. The originality of this approach consists in the fact that it eschews both sociological realism with its reified view of society as a superhuman entity existing before and apart from individuals, and sociological nominalism with its flawed notion of society as a convention set up at will by individuals endowed by nature with minds. The fight interactionists had to wage, accordingly, was on the two fronts: against the realist concept of society as superorganic body and against the nominalist theory of society as convention.

First and foremost, interactionist criticism aimed at the classical view of social order as external, atemporal, determinate at any given moment, and resisting change—a superorganic entity hovering above individuals in the Platonic realm of ever-lasting beings. In response to this "hypostatization of society" (Dewey, [1927] 1954:70) interactionists advanced a series of claims that "society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interaction" (Ellwood, 1907:307), "rather a phase of life than a thing by itself" (Cooley, [1902] 1964:135), that "the social group does not exist as a real entity" (Park, [1904] 1972:24), that "social science cannot remain on the surface of social becoming, where certain schools wish to have it float, but must reach the actual human experiences and attitudes which constitute the full, live and active social reality beneath the formal organization of social institutions . . ." (Thomas [1918-20] 1966:13-14). These and similar utterances widely scattered throughout interactionist literature convinced many a commentator that interactionists, just as their pragmatist mentors, had little use for enduring, patterned manifestations of social life. This conclusion is largely incorrect. The post-rationalist tradition, in which both pragmatists and interactionists were solidly rooted, did not render the notion of structure irrelevant—it rendered it problematic. The whole point was how best to fuse the notions of structure and process and to account conceptually for the fact that "an actual entity is at once a process, and is atomic," that "the stone . . . is a society of separate molecules in violent agitation"

pragmatist view), or emergent universality, which is as objective as the action it affords and as universal as the community behind it.

(Whitehead, 1929:121). "Structure," intoned Dewey ([1929] 1958:72), is "an evident order of changes. The isolation of structure from the changes whose stable ordering it is, renders it mysterious. . . ." "You cannot have a process without some sort of a structure," averred Mead (1936:164), "and yet the structure is simply something that expresses this process as it takes place. . . ." Hughes (1955:6) preserved for us a telling story of Robert Park, who used to invoke an image of the classroom table while discussing the nature of the social group and urge his students to see both not just as things, but as fields, a product of the ongoing interaction of individual particles. Hughes's reaction to Park's invocation of the image of the table qua electronic field is emblematic of the interactionist concern with the problem of order: "I suddenly saw," he recalls, "that, not change, but the dynamics of remaining the same, is the miracle which social science must explain" (1955:6). Similar statements can be found in the works of Znaniecki (1939:84), Thomas (1939:84), and especially Ellwood (1910:598), who went to great lengths to make the point that society is "a mass of interactions, not haphazard, but regular, co-ordinated, and controlled, working for the most part, toward definite ends, and making groups true functional unities, ruled by habit largely. . . . The significant thing for the sociologist . . . is not that these interactions between individuals exist, but that they are regular; not haphazard, but co-ordinated and controlled."

The gist of the interactionist argument concerning the fluid nature of social order and the emergent character of social universals is that the particulars belonging to a given universal (group, class, collectivity) are not tied to it inexorably; they function simultaneously as instances of different kinds, and their behavior as elements in one class is affected by their membership in other classes. Which of these memberships will prove decisive at any given moment is problematic, and so is the status of the universal comprised by the particulars. This becomes dramatically evident in the sociological domain where the situation is exacerbated by the fact that social particulars are individuals marked by multiple memberships and capable of taking a conscious attitude toward their numerous group affiliations. "The difficulty," Park ([1904] 1972:24) pointed out, "lies in the fact that the same individuals appear as members of different groups . . . that the same physical base is shared by two completely different social structures. . . ." At any given moment the individual can defect from one universal to another by literally "taking the role of the other" (Mead, 1934:254). As the

individual gives up one role and assumes a new attitude, he makes a quantum jump from one universal to another, and thereby affects, however marginally, the objective status of the universal. Every time he universalizes his action with reference to a given group, he fortifies its objectivity and universality. Conversely, when he abstains from framing his action in terms of designated categories and determines the situation by recourse to an alternative reference frame, he deprives it of a quantum of objectivity and a corresponding measure of universality. Any single episode of the individual's symbolic entry into and withdrawal from a given universal can be negligible from the standpoint of its objective status, but the cumulative effect of such border-crossing incidents is not. It forces social bodies to oscillate, renders them fuzzy not only at the fringes but at the very core, and it makes social universals emergent. Social universals emerge as real or meaningfully objective when they are placed in the perspectives of conscious individuals who, drawing on the same means of universalization (symbols, definitions, values), identify themselves as instances of familiar classes and act accordingly. When individuals fail to generalize the situation in the same perspective and to universalize their own selves in the same terms, i.e., when they fail to take "the attitudes of the generalized other" (Mead, 1934:156), the universal becomes less real and more nominal. Whether social universals are real or nominal is therefore a matter of degree, an empirical matter. We are dealing not with natural constants but with social variables whose value cannot be established entirely a priori but must be gauged in concrete situations.

If we accept the emergent universality of social universals, we have to be ready to take the next step and acknowledge that there is a degree of indeterminacy endemic to any social whole (system, institution, structure). With humans crossing group borderlines at will, the outcome of each social encounter becomes a matter of probability. High as this probability might be, one cannot assume the outcome will follow the same pattern the next moment simply because it happened this way the moment before. What this means is that social structure is not an atemporal, immovable being lurking behind the scenes and shaping individual conduct (a sociological equivalent of the Newtonian ether totally independent of the movement of particles), but an event continuously made to happen by individuals in concrete situations (a sociological analogue of the relativist spatio-temporal structure informed by the interaction of particles). That is to say, structure does compel the behavior of individuals in a

given situation, but the conduct of individuals structures the situation into a definite pattern. Structure is only a possibility, a "virtual" reality until it becomes an "event," is eventualized, i.e., made to happen in the here and now of the practical situational encounter. "Reality exists in a present," said Mead (1932:1, 32), the situation is the "seat" of reality; and so we can say that every structure to the extent that it has reality must have a locus in a specific situational present—must be temporalized. Situations are structured by individuals who, in the course of interaction, establish a joint sense of the present, develop a corresponding sense of shared past, open common horizons to the future, and shape their conduct with respect to this collectively-established and situationally-sustained time-frame.

The interactionist treatment of structure as emergent process is amply documented in numerous research projects. Thrasher's (1927:75) study of the Chicago gangs highlighted "the ganging process [a]s a continuous flux and flow," the never-ending business of "coalescing and re-coalescing," the peculiar mode of aggregating, consensus building, status display, and settling disputes in the course of which the gangs are dissolved and regenerated as interactional wholes. Zorborough (1929:53) left us an account of "the social game" of climbing the ladder of prestige in Chicago's high society. This game requires "a continual planning, maneuvering, reciprocation of invitations, efforts to 'keep in the swim'" from all those aspiring to a coveted position in a high society, and it is this game that assures the continuity in the social structure of an elite social group. Anderson's pioneering study illuminated the world of homeless men whose life revolves around "the game of 'getting by,'" "faking it," "making it," the game that has its own ethical code, status system and hierarchy of authority, and that must be learned and practiced if one is to survive in the harsh environs of Hobohemia (1923:55). Whyte ([1943] 1981:318, 323) compared his study of an Italian slum to "taking a moving picture instead of a still photograph," the effect he was able to achieve through a long-term involvement with the local racketeers, policemen, politicians, and other inhabitants of the slum, whose personal transactions offered him a rare glimpse of "the social structure in action". These are the studies of structure in action and time, as it makes itself felt in the thoughts and actions of individuals. The concern for the emergent properties of social reality is underscored by the use of the gerundive mode of description—"ganging," "climbing," "getting

by." This peculiarly interactionist mode of description helps the reader to share a present in which the social world unfolds as a process, continually recreated by individual participants. To facilitate the sense of presence and immersion interactionists supply the glossaries of local terms, the local lingos, which represent "different universes of discourse,—'little languages' whose meanings depend on past experiences peculiar to the groups, catchwords, jokes, and songs linked to group memories" (Thrasher, 1927:266). Encysted in these "little languages" are guidelines for making appropriate sense of different situations that the inhabitants of a given universe of discourse may encounter in their lives. Drawing on this common stock of meanings, metaphors and precepts, individuals can converse with each other, share the same sense of past and present, bring about an anticipated future, and in the process of doing so regenerate their world as an objectively meaningful whole. Because of all the incessant transmutations this world may appear chaotic to a casual observer, but it has a definite structure, and it has a structure precisely because it is continuously processed, acted out, communicated from one individual to another. This is what Dewey ([1916] 1966:4) seems to have sought to express in a passage quoted again and again by interactionist sociologists: "Society not only exists by transmission, by communication, but it may be fairly said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication"; and what Park ([1927] 1955:15) was trying to say when he urged that "in a study of a social group . . . the point of departure is, properly, not structure, but activity." The message here is not that structure is a fiction but that it should be grasped as an actual occasion or event (dis)continuously produced by conscious human beings in concrete situations.

It would be wrong to infer from our previous discussion that structure makes an appearance in interactionist theory as a dependent variable only. There is a parallel and equally important, from the interactionist standpoint, flow of determination from society to individual, from situation to definition (Kon and Shalin, 1969) without which "the dynamics of remaining the same" (Hughes) would remain a mystery. Indeed, most interactions seem to follow patterns fairly independent from individual whims. The question is why do individuals converge around certain perspectives and definitions rather than fly apart on separate tangents? This is primarily due to the fact that once defined and collectively established, interactions form what Dewey ([1929] 1958:271–2) called "relatively closed fields" or "fields of interaction" which possess a measure of autonomy and a

force of their own, felt by everyone drawn into these fields. The social world is comprised by interactional fields, strong and weak, that invoke in the minds of the participants certain meanings and suggest, with various degrees of urgency, appropriate lines of action. Actions do not unfold in a vacuum, they are guided and, in many cases, plainly coerced by the field, so that "anything changes according to the interacting field it enters" (Dewey [1929] 1958:285). The coercive power of the field is most evident in the early years of our lives, when we are forced to make do with a world that is already there, predetermined by others, organized into stable networks of interactions. "The child," wrote Thomas (1923:42), "is always born into a group of people among whom all the general types of situation which may arise have already been defined and corresponding rules of conduct developed, and where he has not the slightest chance of making his definitions and following his wishes without interference." What we see, think, and claim as our own at this stage of our development is determined by the situation, which clues us to the appropriate definitions and modes of conduct. Our mind at this point is little more than the functional ability to survey the larger social act in which we are imperatively implicated, and our self is a reflection of a part we are assigned to play in this act. In due course we acquire a measure of autonomy and learn to take a critical attitude toward oneself, yet our rationality remains commensurate with, and will always be judged by, our ability to act with reference to a larger social act. This ability to weave one's action into a collective act or to place oneself in the perspective of "the generalized other" is what interactionists called "mind". From the ontogenetical standpoint, the mind is primarily a way of looking at the world in the terms supplied by others, participating in the universe of discourse already in place, and acting as a member of a team. The locus of the mind is individual, but its content is not—it is social through and through, and as such, it assures mind's special role as an agent of social control: ". . . The mind that appears *in* individuals is not as such individual mind. . . . *Mind* as a concrete thing is precisely the power to understand things . . . in terms of the use to which they are turned in joint or shared situations. *And mind in this sense is the method of social control*" (Dewey, [1929] 1958:219 and [1916] 1966:33). "Mind is coterminous with the group"; it comes into existence when "the behavior of the group as a whole enters into the separate individual" (Mead, 1982:162, 168). Acting rationally, with reference to one's self, the individual acts responsibly and with reference to

society. He surely imposes on the world the categories of his mind and perceives the situation in terms of his self, but since his self and the categories of his mind, just as those of other individuals, have the same social source, the outcome turns out to be orderly rather than chaotic. And should the individual disregard the operative interactional field and choose the self uncalled for by the situation, he will be promptly, and more or less painfully, reminded of its force. A new girl quickly learns that the conventions of polite society are out of place in the taxi-dance hall (Cressey, 1932:38–9). A member of the youth gang has to forgo contacts with girls after the drubbing from the leader (Thrasher, 1927:292). And Dollard (1937:49) is forcefully reminded about the realities of caste in the deep South when he seeks contacts with blacks. As these examples show, when the individual's definition of the situation comes into conflict with a collectively established one, the mechanisms of social control come into play. Interactionist theory, thus, clearly recognized the role of "the community as a defining agency" (Thomas, 1923:43–4) and the fact that the matrices of meaning in terms of which we define our world are publicly enforced.

To summarize, interactionist theory entails a dialectical circle: man is an author of his social world, but he is also a product of society. From the interactionist standpoint it is equally correct to say, "the self defines the situation" and "the situation provides the individual with a self." At any given moment the self is the expression of the entire situation (interactional field) in which the individual is acting, while the situation is the reflection of the totality of selves engaged in an interactional encounter. The two are locked together in the process of mutual adjustment in the course of which both emerge as objective, determined realities. This mutual adjustment is not a mechanical process. Individuals are the ones who do the choosing, who have to identify with the self called for by the situation. As parts of different fields they can always gear their actions to alternative selves. Still, the actions of individuals, like the actions of physical particles, are non-random, though marked by a degree of indeterminacy; structured, though the underlying pattern may be illusive; predictable, though predictions must be expressed in probabilistic terms.

It would be wrong to look for a full-fledged theory of social structure in early social interactionism. Many pertinent questions (e.g., why some transactions evolve into strong interactional fields whereas others remain weak; how the "little languages" are integrated into the general universe of discourse; what determines the choice of identity in the situation where interactional fields put conflicting claims

on the individual) remained in it unanswered. And one can still feel skeptical as to whether interactionist theory explains satisfactorily "the dynamics of remaining the same," given the diversity of social fields and degrees of freedom assigned to the movement of individuals. Despite these weaknesses, original interactionist theory had important strengths that made it superior to contemporary formulations. Social interactionists diverged from the classical approaches in making the order appear simultaneously as the explanandum and the explanans, rather than as something that must be either taken for granted or treated as perennially problematic. They offered a new perspective on social structure as fluid and stable at the same time, an emergent process that functions simultaneously as an antecedent and an outcome of social interaction. Interactionist theory transcended the dichotomy of realism and nominalism by bringing man and society into one continuum and presenting each as an aspect of the same process of production of social reality as objective and meaningful. The individual appears in this theory as both the actor and the author of the social script, a constituent of many interactional fields, none of which can claim his undivided allegiance. A self-conscious being, he can refuse to act as his allegedly natural determinations dictate, cross the borderlines separating one class from another, and show oneself as an "instance of a different kind". Society as a whole transpires here as a universe of interferentially overlapping fields, coalescing around symbols and meanings and exerting various pressures on individuals caught in their gravitational pull. When the borderlines separating these interactional fields are strictly policed, they behave like "bodies," revealing their "corpuscular" properties, which happens when the borderlines separating different fields are strictly policed. On other occasions their "wave-like" properties are more in evidence, as crisscrossing identifications whittle away at their thingness, making the fields appear as fuzzy, gaseous, easily penetrable formations. But the important thing for social interactionists is that society is both a body and a field, a structure and a process, and that in order to understand it as a living reality researchers should seek to involve themselves in situations where it is made to happen by self-conscious human beings.

KNOWING AS PARTICIPATION: THE METHODOLOGY OF INTERACTIONIST RESEARCH

Studying society-in-the-making meant more than describing it in scientific terms; it also

meant understanding—better still—experiencing it, if possible by direct immersion in the mundane world of everyday life where it is routinely generated by the participants in social intercourse. To accomplish this feat, interactionists had to assume a role markedly different from that of a classical scientific observer—they had to become participant observers. Participant observation as a method of sociological research raised a host of methodological problems unknown to classical sociology. In dealing with these problems interactionists drew heavily on pragmatist epistemology that did away with the notion of a "world complete in itself, to which thought comes as a passive mirror, adding nothing to fact" (James, [1909] 1970:80) and that explicitly recognized that "knowing is not the act of an outside spectator but of a participant inside the natural and social scene" (Dewey, [1929] 1960:196).

Rationalist epistemology failed, according to pragmatists, and it failed on more than one count. First, it was built on the erroneous premise that "the processes of search, investigation, reflection, involved in knowledge . . . must be outside of what is known, so as not to interact in any way with the object to be known" (Dewey, [1929] 1960:23). Second, rationalists were mistaken in their belief that the knower could approach his object without preconceptions and biases: every research endeavor is rooted in some "practical interests," "aesthetic" attitudes and theoretical presuppositions which represent "irreducible ultimate factors in determining the way our knowledge grows" (James, [1890] 1950, II:345). Third, pragmatists rejected the rationalist view of "verification as a process of comparing ready-made ideas with ready-made facts," supplanting it with a notion that "both idea and 'facts' are flexible, and verification is the process of mutual adjustment, of organic interaction" (Dewey, [1890] 1969:87). Fourth, pragmatists criticized the tendency of classical rationalism to "conceive a concrete situation by singling out some salient or important feature in it, and [then] reducing the originally rich phenomenon to the naked suggestions of that name abstractly taken, treating it as a case of 'nothing but' that concept" (James, [1909] 1970:249). Fifth, and finally, pragmatist epistemology diverged from the traditional one in its deliberate blurring of the borderline between scientific and common sense knowledge, i.e., "theoretic knowledge, which is knowledge about things, as distinguished from living or sympathetic acquaintance with them" (James, [1909] 1967:249–50). This formulation, prompted by the special needs of human sciences, encouraged intimate familiarity with social reality and direct understanding of human

conduct in terms of an individual's own experience.

Pragmatist epistemology had a direct impact on the methodology of interactionist research. It looms large in Park's renunciation of the tendency "to substitute for the flux of events and the changing character of things a logical formula," as well as in his commitment to "personal and first-hand involvement with the world" ([1940] 1955:74, 72); it is echoed in Znaniecki's attacks on the rationalist premise that "knowledge reproduces reality in its preexisting determination" (1919:232); it is unmistakable in Cooley's critique of abstract and statistical reasoning and his desire to "illuminate the concrete object" (1927:145–6); it is behind Thomas's argument that "we must put ourselves in the position of the subject [because] the environment by which he is influenced and to which he adopts himself, is *his* world, not the objective world of science—is nature and society as he sees them, not as the scientist sees them" ([1918–20] 1966:23); and last, but not least, pragmatist epistemology is firmly entrenched in the research practice of the second generation of social interactionists who took for granted that "in order to get knowledge [of society], one must participate significantly in the collective life. This means that one must come into human contact with people and this in turn means intimacy, sharing, and mutual identification" (Dollard, 1937:29). The term "participant observation," it should be noted, was not in use by interactionists until the mid-20's when Lindeman introduced it as a method of grasping social reality in terms of the meaning it has for the participants (1924:177–200). However, the idea behind it had been in circulation for more than a decade, since at least the time when Cooley ([1909] 1962:7) identified the manner in which the sociologist ought to proceed in his research as "*sympathetic introspection*," or "putting himself into intimate contact with various sorts of persons and allowing them to awake in himself a life similar to their own, which he afterwards, to the best of his ability, recalls and describes." Participant observation shared with life history and documentary analysis—two other principal methods of interactionist research—the goal of recovering the meaning that social reality has for those participating in its production.³ It carried this goal one step further, to the point of actually "observing human intelligence trying to make sense out of

the experience" (Dollard, 1937:19). Observing human intelligence at work implied several things: it meant studying people *in situ*, in their natural habitat; it required the readiness on the part of the researcher to enter personal relations with the subjects, to share their problems, feelings and thoughts; most importantly, it implied that the research act can affect the course of events under study. The participant mode of observing reality violated the canons of classical methodology, in that it blurred the line between the knower and the known and thus risked contaminating the natural purity of things themselves. For the interactionist researcher the transaction between the knower and the known (and the resultant complementarity effect) was not only normal but also unavoidable. It fully accorded with the pragmatist thesis that empirical knowledge presupposes the "common system of the knowing and the known," and it was a direct realization of the pragmatist ideal of "unfractured observation" (Dewey and Bentley, 1949:104).

Criticism most often raised by the opponents of interactionist methodology concerns its logico-theoretical component. The charge is that interactionists immerse themselves in the research situation without spelling out in advance their theory and hypotheses, which makes systematic testing of their propositions impossible. The participatory nature of interactionist research, it is further argued, leaves too much room for subjectivism and error. The source of the problem, according to Huber (1973) and Lewis and Smith (1980), is the pragmatists' nonchalant attitude toward formal logic and conceptual reasoning, and their undue preoccupation with the exceptional, colorful and irregular. Whatever one can make of this criticism, we should flatly reject its implication that pragmatists and interactionists ignored the role of logic and theoretical reasoning. The hiatus between "the rational organization of reality and the irrational chaos of the real world taken in its historical concreteness" (Znaniecki, 1919:147) should not be taken to mean that the world of uncertainty cannot be dealt with rationally. What pragmatists and interactionists decried was the undisciplined use of abstract reasoning—the situation where, in the words of Rucker (1969:166), "fixed logics and formal systems of any sort become strait-jackets instead of tools for inquiry." The gist of the whole argument was that formal logic fully applies to the Platonic domain of the ideal being where genera and species comprise mutually exclusive classes and abide by the laws of identity, noncontradiction, and excluded middle. As long as we stay within this domain of pure rationality we can rely on these

³ All three methods were often used by social interactionists in conjuncture, as parts of the case study approach, whose qualitative emphasis contrasted with more quantitatively oriented modes of research.

laws, knowing that its objects (such as objects of mathematics) possess no other properties but those assigned to them. Following closely in the steps of formal logic, classical research methodology sought to minimize things' multiple determinations and to maximize their consistency by neutralizing their alternative manifestations. This is what typically happens in the experimental situation where the scientist, through a system of controls, strips a thing of its multiple identities and forces it to behave according to the class to which it has been squarely reduced. But rationality and logical consistency achieved *in vitro* is purchased at the price of suppressing indeterminacy—the generic feature of life *in vivo*. The moment we reach out into the empirical world we face a different situation where "other factors" are never equal, where things refuse to behave according to their a priori established class memberships and obey the laws of logic. Actual particulars, especially those in the social world, are distinguished by their "capacity to be several things at once" (Mead, 1932:49), something the law of identity expressly forbids. No impregnable boundary can hedge off individuals of one denomination from those in the next taxon; by taking the role of the other individuals can instantly change their class identity, which makes class attribution a risky undertaking. The traditional definition of class as a totality of things satisfying the idea of a class therefore needs to be qualified by the following propositions: a thing in itself is indeterminate, its identity as a class member is emergent, and it has no logical status apart from the inquirer and the process of inquiry where it is transformed into a definite self-same object. Such was the message pragmatists were trying to get across when they criticized formal logic and sought to amend it with what they variously described as the "logic of inquiry," "logic in use," "the logic of situations"—the logic whose purpose was to account for "the transformation of an indeterminate unsettled situation into a determinate unified existential situation" (Dewey, 1938:296). This was a seminal attempt, inconclusive as it might be, to come to grips with the fact that the laws of formal logic, like the laws of Euclidean geometry, are not the properties of things themselves but useful idealizations, that whatever rationality and consistency one finds in the world is of our own making, and that no matter how successful we are in transforming—theoretically and practically—the world of indeterminacy into the world of law, the gap between the immaculate rationalities of reason and empirical reality never disappears entirely.

Now, if we take a look from this vantage point at the interactionists' ambivalence about

formal theorizing, their unwillingness to spell out in advance all the hypotheses, and their desire to find things out in the situation, we can see a clear rationale for their position. Interactionists do not consider adjudication—a systematic reduction of things to logical categories—a technical problem, as classical scientists do, but see it as a substantive problem requiring direct and continuous examination. They do not abide by the principle of mutual exclusiveness which requires placing each thing in one taxon and disposing of the ambiguous objects by confining them to a residual box specially reserved for marginal cases. All social particulars, according to interactionists, are marginal and situationally emergent. Their identities inevitably spill over the classificatory borderlines. Attempts to reduce them squarely and irreversibly to preconceived categories are bound to backfire, particularly when we try to predict their behavior on the basis of such unambiguous class attributions. The way out of the predicament suggested by interactionist methodology is by mapping things simultaneously into various taxa and treating their identities as probabilities to be ascertained by direct observation in concrete situation. The interactionist strategy enables the researcher to track the situational reincarnation of things themselves as objects of different denominations, to observe *in vivo* their metamorphoses in space and time (or rather times). Abstractions, generalizations, conceptual reasoning all have their place in interactionist research, but used cautiously, with an eye to emergent transformations and situational inconsistencies that qualify the power and reach of theoretical propositions. Instead of forcing the individual to take an unambiguous stance, reducing him once and for all to taxon, and glossing over the discrepant information about each individual case, interactionists encourage individuals to show their many faces and selves. Their strategy is designed to maximize validity, even where this requires a sacrifice of reliability. Reliability, taken in its most common sense of reproducibility, is typically secured by the neutralization of the multiple determinations of things: the more thoroughly the thing is stripped of its multiple identities, the more reliably the measuring device yields the same result on successive occasions. But the more reliable the data, the less valid it is. For insofar as validity refers to things at large, it must square off with the objective indeterminacy of the situation, i.e., with all those "other factors" that have been factored out under the *ceteris paribus* clause and that immediately crowd in the moment we move from the experimental setting to the ecologically sound situation.

"... The more precise and unambiguous the terms become, the less valuable they are" (Blumer, 1939:124)—this typical locution expresses the interactionists' awareness that validity is the price at which traditional researchers are able to purchase the reliability of their data.

Potentially more damaging to interactionist methodology is the charge that sympathetic understanding with its focus on the fleeting and the irregular leaves too much room for subjectivism. Again, let us not forget that interactionists were acutely aware of the problem. "Perception of social events based on participation is difficult to standardize; yet," Dollard (1937:19) hastened to add, "I believe that my experience can be repeated, that others can be trained to see what I have seen, and more, that the construct has predictive value." The key to this optimism is the pragmatist concept of meaning as a social and action-bound phenomenon. Participant observers are not out there hunting for obscure and hidden meanings invented by particular individuals—they are primarily interested in well established and collectively sanctioned definitions of the situation, in routine transactions that form enduring structural patterns. Nor do they rely on any sort of inner vision to divine the definition of the situation. When Cressey, the author of the taxi-dance hall study, raises the question, "What does this life mean for these girls? ... What does this dance hall mean in the lives of young boys, the older men, the European immigrants, and the youthful Filipinos?" (1932:15), he relies on the observation of their behavior as much as on their accounts of its meaning. Interactionists are not prepared to take rationalizations and verbally expressed attitudes of individuals as ultimate causes of their conduct. Attitudes and behavior are inextricably linked; one cannot be studied without the other; attitude-taking is itself a form of conduct that must be judged in context and compared to other forms of conduct. As participant observers, interactionists seek to establish "(1) What is the group doing? (2) What does the group think it is doing?" (Lindeman, 1924:190), and since the two things do not always coincide, interactionists are always on the alert for discrepancies, seek to diversify their local sources of information, and check their generalizations against the data from outside sources. The sociologist qua participant observer never submerges himself entirely in the community life he studies; he measures his involvement with detachment, sympathy with reflection, heart with reason, all of which makes the replication of interactionist research not nearly as outlandish as it may sound and assures a higher predictive value of interac-

tionist findings than most formal measurements could offer.

One more objection to interactionist methodology concerns its favoring of qualitative over quantitative data. Early interactionists often raised their voice against the spirit of quantification and the wisdom of emulating the physical sciences (Cooley, 1930:315; Ellwood, 1933:13; Znaniecki, [1934] 1968:viii; Thomas, [1918–20] 1966:14). The reason for this ambivalence was the familiar pragmatist reluctance to see a rich phenomenon reduced to a taxon. The act of measurement which "enables things qualitatively unlike and individual to be treated as if they were members of a comprehensive, homogeneous, or nonqualitative system" (Dewey, [1929] 1960:241), exacerbates the reductionist propensities of rationalism and breeds the "disdain for the particular, the personal, and the unwholesome" (James, [1909] 1967:309). However, pragmatists were no obscurantists; they understood the importance of measurement and quantification, as did interactionists. Opposing "the worship of statistical technique," interactionist sociologists repeatedly expressed their belief that "the method of statistics and of case study are not in conflict with each other; they are in fact mutually complementary" (Burgess, 1927:120; see also Lindeman, 1924:97; Park [1929] 1952:208, and Cooley, 1930:315). For the interactionist researcher the value of quantification is chiefly heuristic: it shows the relations worthy of further thought and examination. Much of his interpretative work is done within the situation where he settles down to observe and think. His research is literally a search of right questions to ask: "As I sat and listened," recalls Whyte ([1943] 1981:303), "I learned the answers to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interviewing basis." In other words, the interactionist avoids the premature closure of the theoretical process, remaining on the lookout for the unforeseen and serendipitous, ready to "discover [] new categories as emergencies of the group's changing activities" (Lindeman, 1924:192). What he loses in quantitative precision and reproducibility, he makes up for in the qualitative grasp of detail, in the breadth of theoretical possibilities, and above all in truthfulness to the objective indeterminacy of the situation.

Interactionist research posed a number of methodological problems that early interactionists failed to solve, or even address, some of which still remain unresolved. The most fundamental of these is the problem of determination. Interactionists distinguished between "the situation as it exists in verifiable, objective terms, and as it has seemed to exist in

terms of the interested persons" (Thomas and Thomas, 1928:572), but they gave few clues on how to navigate between these two forms of determinations, i.e., how the researcher's own explanatory terms are superadded to the native meanings, and vice versa, how native explanations are incorporated into the body of the researcher's theoretical propositions. Equally prone to confusion are the interactionists' philippics against overly precise concepts. Social reality is indeed too fuzzy to be subsumed under a neat label, but the solution is not fuzzy concepts and loose theorizing, as some interactionists seem to imply, but a judicious assigning of each individual case to several taxons, with conceptual categories kept sharply bounded and structural interconnections rendered explicit. The fact that social situations are uncertain and indeterminate does not mean that uncertainty cannot be patterned and indeterminacy described in structural terms. Also, interactionists might have underestimated what math and statistics could do for their cause. Perhaps traditional statistics (which is in effect the statistics of classical thermodynamics with its dubious assumption that every individual in the population is a thing with a clear-cut immutable identity) is of limited use from the interactionist standpoint, but if its general premises are any guide, the non-classical statistics of quantum mechanics may prove to be a valuable addition to the methodological arsenal of social interactionism. These drawbacks notwithstanding, interactionist methodology constituted an important advance in methodology of social research. Interactionist sociologists took seriously the objective indeterminacy of the social world to which they sought to adjust their research practice. This adjustment led to the recognition that no impregnable borders separate the knower from the known, that the research act inevitably leaves its mark on the object, and that the researcher must be prepared to become a participant in the social process he studies. Mindful of the emergent nature of social reality, interactionists avoided the irreversible reduction of individual identities to preconceived categories and encouraged the individual to manifest one's multiple selves, even when these are logically inconsistent and contradictory. They eschewed the premature closure of theoretical deliberations, measuring their preconceptions against the unfolding realities of the situation and allowing their propositions to be revised in the course of inquiry. Interactionists also recognized that the relationship between validity and reliability is that of uncertainty—the two cannot be maximized simultaneously with arbitrary precision—and committed themselves to validity as their basic

goal. This goal was best realized in the Chicago interactionists' ecological school of urban studies, where "ecological" meant not just describing city-scapes and local populations as they appear to an external observer, but maximizing the ecological validity of the findings by observing people across space and time, in their natural surroundings, making sense together of the world around them.

PROGRESS AS ONGOING RECONSTRUCTION: THE IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONISM

Fledgling immigrants from Europe and high society socialites, residents of exclusive neighborhoods and denizens of the slum, remnants of the old Southern nobility and the descendants of slaves, itinerant workers and gadflies of the artistic demimonde, members of organized crime families and pursuers of religious orthodoxy—such were the objects of early interactionist research. Inhabitants of the pluralistic universe called the United States, these people managed to carve it in a niche, a symbolic world of their own, reflecting their unique cultural, ethnic, class, professional, and religious background. The interest interactionists took in these people was more than academic. Nor was it spurred exclusively by their fascination with the contrasting life-styles and manners of defining the situation. Theirs was an interest (concern may be a better word) informed by the progressive spirit of the time and rooted in the profoundly democratic values inherited from American pragmatists.

From the beginning pragmatists rejected the view of knowledge production as a purely intellectual endeavor propelled by man's desire to know things in general, *in abstracto*. The process of reasoning, according to Peirce (1931-58, VIII:198-200), is largely a matter of acquiring beliefs on which humans can act. In Dewey's view, "ideas are worthless except as they pass into actions which rearrange and reconstruct in some way, be it little or large, the world in which we live" ([1929] 1960:138). The whole project of pragmatism, with its emphasis on the indeterminate, practical, malleable nature of reality, can be seen as a philosophical justification for social reconstruction in the age obsessed with reform. Pragmatism took shape at the dawning of the Progressive era, when rapid social change threatened to disrupt the fabric of the American social order. The decline of rural life, the massive population movement from country to city, the appalling conditions in urban slums, the influx of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, the demise of entrepreneurial individualism, the rise of

giant corporations—these all too familiar symptoms of modernity set afoot a movement for social reform that was supported by a wide spectrum of social classes. Oscillating between the enthusiasm for social change and the fear of its consequences, progressive thinkers desperately searched for a middle path between *laissez faire* capitalism and socialism, for a program that would undermine the appeal of political radicalism without taking steam out of the reform movement. Pragmatists were at the forefront of this struggle for "a more balanced, a more equal, even, and equitable system of human liberties" (Dewey, 1946:113). Dewey was a recognized leader of this movement, whose crusade for progressive education in America left an indelible mark on the spirit of the epoch (Goldman, 1956; White, 1957; Graham, 1967; Marcell, 1974). Mead's involvement with progressive causes, although mainly on the local scene, was equally strong, as his leading role in the Education Association of Chicago, the Immigrants' Protective League, and other progressive organizations demonstrates (Rucker, 1969:21). Peirce and James did not take active part in the progressive movement (in part because of their early deaths), but Peirce's pronouncements on social issues were full of lofty idealism and vaguely progressive sentiments, while James stressed the connection between pragmatism and ameliorism and toward the end of his life came close to endorsing "the more or less socialistic future toward which mankind seems drifting" (James, [1910] 1962:488; Perry, 1964:242-52). As seen from the historical standpoint, the key issue of the time was social reconstruction, or rather organized reconstruction that "takes into account the intimate and organic union of the two things: of authority and freedom, of stability and change" (Dewey, 1946:95), as opposed to the catastrophic, revolutionary reconstruction. "That is the problem of society, is not it?", queried Mead (1936:361-2); "How can you present order and structure in society and yet bring about the changes that need to take place, are taking place? How can you bring those changes about in orderly fashion and yet preserve order? . . . That is the problem, to incorporate the methods of change into the order of society itself." Institutionalizing social change was the goal to which pragmatists committed themselves. In their efforts to make social change more rational and humane they turned to science for guidance. Not that pragmatists believed in ready-made answers which science could furnish for the modern predicament; they turned to science as a best available model of democracy in action, the model of a community based on rational discourse, where every member is a free par-

ticipant, each claim is open to experimental validation, and all solutions are subject to revision. Science clued pragmatists to their ideal of society as "universal discourse" (Mead, 1934:269) and individuals as "the constant makers of a continuously new society" (Dewey, [1929] 1962:143). The unity of scientific and social endeavors was endorsed by Peirce, who stressed that the very nature of science and logic "inexorably requires that our interests shall not be limited. They . . . must embrace the whole community. The community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond the ideological epoch, beyond all bonds" ([1931-58], VII:398). A community built on the principles of free rational discourse will be governed by the authority of the "public"—a body of individuals conscious of their interests, knowledgeable of the democratic process, and determined to have their voice heard (Dewey, [1927] 1954). Such a community would do away with the traditional opposition of the individual and society; it would make the individual a master of his own destiny, a true subject of the social process, and at the same time, a responsible social being and an agent of social control: ". . . The idea of democracy as opposed to any conception of aristocracy is that every individual must be consulted in such a way, actively or passively, that he himself becomes a part of the process of authority" (Dewey, 1946:35). The scientist's role in the process of social reconstruction was to educate people, to give them means for solving their problems, to alter their consciousness and thereby the very society that made this consciousness possible. Hence, the enormous emphasis on education and getting knowledge to the public characteristic of pragmatist thinkers.

It is not necessary to go over the long and by now well-known list of reform causes and associations with which interactionist sociologists identified themselves in the heyday of progressivism (see Faris, 1970; Carey, 1975; Coser, 1978). What is to be stressed is the lesser known fact of the long-standing collaboration between pragmatists and interactionists on the issues of reform. It is no accident that when Dewey contemplated launching a socialist weekly he turned to Park, then his student and a journalist of some renown, for collaboration. As Park's unpublished notes show, he was very much aware of the philosophical and ideological connection between pragmatism and the social survey movement:

There has grown up in this same period a school of philosophy which is intimately as-