

Charles Cooley:

Traveler in the Inner and Social Worlds¹

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As a sociologist Charles Horton Cooley was and is something of an anomaly. He was more inspired by literature than by academic sociology, and while his intellectual fecundity was acknowledged by his contemporaries and he participated in the organizational life of the discipline, he did not train many graduate students or found a school. Although accounts of the trajectory of symbolic interactionism, largely emanating from the Chicago school tradition, acknowledge Cooley as an original expositor of the social self, they favor George Herbert Mead's formulation as more developed than Cooley's (Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1970; Colomy and Brown 1995; Prus, 1996; Joas, 1993, p. 23). Elsewhere (Jacobs, forthcoming) I demur and suggest that it is Cooley's non-conformity to academic style, and his more literary approach to sociology that led to these assessments. In all of these respects Cooley's nonconformity resembles Georg Simmel's, and, in a similar manner, he "maintained a studied ambivalence toward the canons and claims of 'objective' scholarship" (Levine, 1971, p. xii).

Why then speak about Cooley as an exemplar of the ideas of Paulo Freire? Cooley was a shy and sometimes reclusive man; he also was a deeply engaged one, but he was not engaged as an activist. As he put it, "To know men perhaps the surest way is to have simple and necessary relations with them..." (*Journal* V. 16 [9/19/02 – 6/17/03], p. 30). Cooley was engaged in knowing "men" and in knowing himself. In this respect, he was engaged in a way Freire professed to be but only as part of his larger agenda of societal transformation. Cooley was more modest and also devoted to the process of inner work and self-reflection and observation. Freire underscores the fact that, among the "un-completed beings" the human being "is the only one to treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of his reflection" (1970, p. 87). However, as Tamdgidi tells us in this volume, Freire offered little to guide the liberatory path in this direction. This is Cooley's strong suit: engaging in the reflexive analysis of the self as social actor is action essential to the process of social change. Perhaps Freire's fear of "solipsism" or "subjectivist immobility" (1970, p. 35) belies a tropism of the left that has proven fatal for its mission to change society, for how can we effect social change if we do not know and change ourselves? I am suggesting that Cooley's anomalism is exemplary. It offers us leads on how and why there is no *essential* conflict between the individual and society, inner and outer, the spiritual and material, and values and facts. His ideas concerning the social as a foundation of his qualitative methodology are echoed in his faith in the vitalization of democracy via communication and the nourishment of difference (Jacobs, forthcoming), which also make these ideas relevant to the Freirean project. Moreover, Cooley's genuine appreciation of the human condition, which he witnessed daily and documented in a personal journal kept for more than forty years and which is reflected in his published writing, is striking in its drive and capacity to get to the heart of what makes people what

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they are, chiefly through observing his place in all of this and in his reflections on his own self and its development. This is what drove Cooley to advocate a radical qualitative methodology for sociology, of which I will say more, and to take a literary approach both in analyzing society and the self that both constitutes and is constituted by it and dwells within it.

What I will attempt to do here is discuss his methodology, actually his epistemology underlying a qualitative sociology, his work on his personal evolution, and then illustrate these matters by drawing examples from his “laboratory,” that is, his journal, with selections from it concerning a trip made in 1904 to New York’s Lower East Side Jewish community, the death of his daughter, and his own impending death in 1929. These mark Cooley as an ethnographer, and more trenchantly, an intellectual whose practice routinely comprised linking his intellect, his inner self and the world.

COOLEY’S METHOD AND THE ESSAY TRADITION

Cooley’s intellectual practice is in large part constituted through the essay tradition begun by Montaigne (1580), the instrumentality of Cooley’s aestheticism shaping his writing style and substance. The essay is a genre of fragmentary writing which is autoreferential (i.e., autobiographical in tone) and polysemic, or plurally constituted, so that a multiplicity of meanings decenters the critical-intellectual vantage point. This makes the essay appear more diffuse and simultaneously oriented to a variety of texts. From an historical perspective, in the development of modernity, which the essay genre shares in, the essay is a less formal writing genre, and within academic scientific and social scientific circles, less theoretically and methodologically rigorous.

These features contribute to the perception of Cooley in his own time and ours as stylistically removed from the epicenter of academic sociology. Cooley’s unconventional approach to the stance of sociology as a research discipline demonstrates how he simultaneously can be viewed as an acute thinker, and, paradoxically, as a diffuse one, or one bereft of theoretical and/or methodological acuity. Such is the case with a comment made in 1958 by a sociologist (Gutman, p.253) surveying Cooley’s thought whilst remarking on “his limited capacities as a theoretician,” citing his preference for concrete experiences, as opposed to being a “virtuoso of abstraction” such as Talcott Parsons, whose perspective was then nearly hegemonic and was regarded as stellar. Bordering on condescension, he says Cooley “fill[s] in the conceptual ‘boxes’ with images of specific events or persons” (p. 254) as opposed to abstract concepts. It is interesting that Cooley’s use of analogies, allegories and other literary techniques (here his concepts may more resemble what literary folks call “tropes” than “theory”) is mistaken for a kind of atheoretical literalism, as though Cooley cannot see the forest for the trees. Might this actually reflect the commentator’s own limitations in assessing Cooley’s style? Nonetheless the same commentator understands that, “almost no sociologist uses the man of letters as his reference group in the way that Cooley compared himself with Goethe, Emerson and Thoreau” (254). While Gutman’s commentary is directed toward Cooley’s substantive and theoretical work, it might as easily be targeted at Cooley’s methodological grounding.

COOLEY AND PASCAL SPEAK ACROSS THE AGES

Such a slanted perception of Cooley’s aesthetically based thinking as the one above can be explained as a response to his explicit skepticism about scientism in sociology and his subscription to a widely divergent set of principles. In his essay “The Roots of Social Knowledge” (1926 in 1930, pp. 289-309), the essayistic-aesthetic approach, using the dramaturgical metaphor, underlies an epistemological distinction between the physical/natural sciences and the social sciences. Here Cooley abjures the positivist sensibility so tightly embraced by Durkheim (viz. social facts as measurable things). Interestingly, Durkheim held a jaundiced view of pragmatism which typified the attitude of European sociologists and philosophers for some time. As Joas points out, Habermas’s spare appreciation of the pragmatists’ criticism of positivism provides further substantiation of the affinities of critical approaches such as Habermas’s (and by substitution, Freire’s) with those such as Cooley’s (Joas, 1993, pp. 8 – 10, 44, 116, 125 – 153).

To begin with Cooley sets up a dichotomy between the natural and social sciences as divergent sensibilities “spatial” versus “social” science:

we may, then, distinguish two sorts of knowledge: one, the development of sense contacts into knowledge of

things, including its refinement into mensurative science. This I call spatial or material knowledge. The second is developed from contact with the minds of other men, through communication, which sets going a process of thought and sentiment similar to theirs and enables us to understand them by sharing their states of mind. This I call personal or social knowledge. It might also be described as sympathetic, or, in its more active forms, as dramatic, since it is apt to consist of a visualization of behavior accompanied by imagination of corresponding mental processes (1926 in 1930, p. 290).

Cooley's dichotomy derives from the essay tradition, particularly his reading of Blaise Pascal's opening distinction in the aphoristic *Pensees*, between the "intuitive" and "geometric" or mathematical minds (Jacobs, 1979). The mathematical mind rests on palpable ("exact and plain") principles removed from ordinary life, whereas the intuitive mind rests on principles which, "found in common use, ...are before the eyes of everybody" (Pascal, 1958, p. 1). How well this complements Cooley's aestheticism, for the reader can easily see which sensibility is preferred and where he or she is being led.

When it comes to the gulf between those who reason mathematically and those who think intuitively, Pascal says that intuitive minds "cannot turn their attention to the principles of mathematics," and mathematicians cannot think intuitively because "they do not see what is before them" (Pascal, 1959, p. 1). For intuitive minds "accustomed to judge at a single glance," principles are "felt rather than seen." Moreover, the principles "are so fine and numerous that a very delicate and very clear sense is needed to perceive them." To understand and derive them mathematically "would be an endless matter" (Pascal, 1959, p. 2). In his journal in 1920 Cooley copies passages in French from the *Pensees*, including, "*Il faut tout d'un coup voir la chose d'un seul regard, et non pas par progrès de raisonnement, au moins jusque un certain degré. Etaines il est rare que les géomètres soient fins, et que les fins soient géomètre*" [We must see the matter at once, at one glance, and not by a process of reasoning, at least to a certain degree. And thus it is rare that mathematicians are intuitive, and that men of intuition are mathematicians.] (*Journal*, v.22 (April 20, 1919 - May 25, 1925) 7/30/20, p. 30; see Pascal, 1958, p. 2). This passage lies at the heart of Pascal's ruminations on the mathematical-intuitive distinction.

In "The Roots of Social Knowledge" Cooley makes a nearly direct transplantation of Pascal's distinction as his own categorization, including the dictum that the plethora of intuitive principles are felt rather than seen, into his own social psychological methodological credo, namely that the social research process—observation—implemented through *sympathetic* (implying feeling as well as cognition) introspection, is the very same faculty serving as a foundation for social interaction among selves. Cooley notes as well the observational faculty's distance from natural (mensurative) science's hallmarks of precision, prediction and control:

The social processes of actual life can be embraced only by a mind working at large, participating through intellect and sympathy with many currents of human force, and bringing them to an imaginative synthesis. This can hardly be done with much precision, nor done at all except by infusing technical methods with a total and creative spirit.

The human mind participates in social processes in a way that it does not in any other processes. It is itself a sample, a phase, of those processes, and is capable, under favorable circumstances, of so far identifying itself with the general movement of a group as to achieve a remarkably just anticipation of what the group will do. Prediction of this sort is largely intuitive rather than intellectual... (1926 in 1930, p.308).

But how does the human mind participate? Again, the comparison between social and spatial science is invoked: while spatial knowledge is mensurative, social science is "dramatic," that is, resting on the observer's capacity to replicate the configurations of thought and conduct of the observed.

Social knowledge is based on "the inter-communicating behavior of men and experience of the processes of mind that go with it" (p. 294). Thus "human knowledge is both behavioristic and sympathetic: the perception and imagination of the external trait is accompanied by sympathy with the feeling, sentiment, or idea that goes with it" (1929 in 1930, p. 295). Social science knowledge therefore rests upon "sympathetic introspection, or the understanding of another's consciousness by the aid of your own" and thereby gives "full play to the mental-social complex" (1929 in 1930, p. 300).

Pascal serves as a perfect foil for Cooley in turning the tables on mathematical or quantitative claims to exclusive certainty. The mathematical-intuitive mind distinction is Cooley's lever enabling him to deny foundationalism—the

monopolization of truth by the scientific or any vantage point—when he states that spatial knowledge’s affinity for measurement is no guarantee of absolute truth since “this sort of knowledge consists essentially in the measurement of one material thing in terms of another, man, with his senses and his reason, serving only as a mediator between them” (1926 in 1930, p. 291). In this case measurement is contingent upon group consensus as is the body of hypotheses and theory arising out of it. Thus, “what we judge to be true...is largely a social matter....yet it is far from infallible” with assent “induced by conforming influences not wholly different from those operating in religion or politics” (1926 in 1930, pp. 291-292). As he says in his journal a few pages after pronouncing “I would like to make a connecting link between science and poetry,”

Verification is simply the consensus of competent minds. What minds are competent depends largely on the nature of the matter. If it is one of the senses all sane men may agree. If it is a remoter induction only expert judgments are competent. And as we get into social and moral questions the organization of the competent mind must match that of the phenomena to be judged. There is no line of division between things universally admitted to be verifiable, and those, like conscience or aesthetic judgments, commonly held unverifiable (*Journal*, V. 16 (9/19/02-6/17/03), pp. 18, 23-24).

Thus “there are no yardsticks in social knowledge, no elementary perceptions of distinctively social facts that are so alike in all men, and can be so precisely communicated, that they supply an unquestionable means of description and measurement.” As such, “While spatial knowledge is precise and communicable, and hence cumulative, the dramatic and intuitive perceptions that underlie social knowledge are so individual that we cannot expect that men will be able to build them up into an increasing structure of ascertained truth.” Hence, “I do not look for any rapid growth of science that is profound, as regards its penetration into human life, and at the same time exact and indisputable” (1926 in 1930, pp. 297, 296). As for quantitative reasoning in social science, Cooley states:

While I ascribe the utmost importance to precision in preparing the data for social science, I do not think its true aim is to bring society within the sphere of arithmetic. Exact prediction and mechanical control for the social world I believe to be a false ideal inconsiderately borrowed from the provinces of physical science (1918, p. 398).

This is a radical statement considering the scientific pretensions of many in the social sciences of his and our own times. Abjuring “ascertained truth” and the cumulateness of social science might indeed be perceived as professionally heretical or at least eccentric by many social scientists (Ilter, 1995).

Cooley’s notion of sociology as systematic autobiography thus is his shorthand for the transposition of the essayists’ conversational yardstick onto sociological methodology. Viewing sympathetic introspection as constitutive of the self, social interaction and social scientific understanding (i.e., *verstehen*), anchors Cooley’s deconstruction, demystification and revelation of the presuppositions of the sciences as perspectively spatial or social. Scientific objectivity is a chimera replaceable by the recognition “that all knowledge is subjective...in the sense...that...it is...a construct of mind” rendering even the “so-called physical sciences...after all, part of the social heritage and creatures of the mental-social complex” (Cooley, 1930, p. 297).

Cooley’s relativization of scientific methodology anticipates Kuhn’s (1962) discussion of “normal” science and the essentially *social* processes and practices underlying the scientific cultural consensual templates Kuhn calls “paradigms.” It also reflects the pragmatic philosophical premise shared by Cooley, that truth is public, consensually and linguistically constituted. Lack of familiarity with the essayistic basis of Cooley’s thinking might make him appear “quirky” and, moreover, serve to alienate him from the central aims and ambitions of the fashionable sociological community in his and even our own day.

COOLEY’S JOURNALING OF HIS INNER WORK

What integrates and unifies our understanding of Cooley’s intellectual practice is familiarity with the most significant part of his intellectual back region, his journal. My work on Cooley’s journal has given me a longer view and more breadth of perspective in understanding the themes of his life and work (Jacobs, 1976). Thus, themes such as Cooley’s identity passage from the oratorical to the authorial self, style in writing, representative men and inner work,

provide a larger matrix from which we can more accurately and clearly perceive Cooley's intellectual process.

The last theme, inner work, is a reminder that, throughout his adult life Cooley maintained an abiding interest in his spiritual development. Intellectuals may or may not seek to integrate their spirituality into their professional life, and I would hazard a guess that a considerable proportion does, depending upon how one defines and contextualizes "spiritual." In nineteenth and early twentieth century sociology in the United States there certainly was a predilection to do so. Many of the first generation of U.S. sociologists (the generation preceding Cooley—Ward, Giddings, Small, Sumner, Vincent, Hayes, etc.—came from backgrounds where either their parents or they were ministers, and their reformism can be seen as "a direct outgrowth of religious antecedents in their personal lives" (Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954, p. 3).¹ Strictly speaking, this is not the case for Cooley, whose father, Thomas M. Cooley, was an eminent jurist, a founder of the University of Michigan law school and the first chairperson of the federal Interstate Commerce Commission. Moreover Cooley was not obviously a reformist, but to a certain extent the Hinkles' generalization does hold true for him because he sees in his unpublished and published work a connection between the social and the spiritual or religious spheres. Interestingly, Cooley's was a kind of spirituality less tied to organized religion and/or the social gospel, and more toward personal evolution, so it is both interesting and curious as to how he ties it in with his sociological ideas. Throughout his personal journal there are abundant thoughts about the connections and tensions between the mundane pursuits of career, reputation, fame and business success and the "larger," i.e., spiritual, life and aims. As a young sociologist at age 31, avoiding the mention of class, Cooley spells out some of the connections between the societal and spiritual realms, implying that reaching the spiritual summit is an affordable luxury:

To forget self and live the larger life is to be free, free, that is, from the racking passions of the lower self, free to go onward into that self that is joyful, boundless and without remorse. To gain this freedom the principal means is the control and mortification of sensual needs and personal ambitions. But this may be carried to an extreme that is anti-social—e.g. monasticism; so the freedom of the soul may be a luxury not to be indulged. But as society progresses there arises a social freedom a greater economic plenty and a decline of war and other forms of hostility—which permits a more general and beneficent development of moral freedom of the soul. There is a freedom of institutions which is not the freedom of the soul but is a necessary foundation (*Journal V. 12* [5/2/1897 - 7/31/1898], p. 80).

His credo is: "Following my thought, I incline to see every person as a part of myself, as a phase of that 'we' which all express" (*Journal V. 19* [2/16/1908 - 1/1/1910], p. 23). Thus we need to imagine Cooley's life as a whole in order to comprehend his intellect. I say "imagine" because there is no one true depiction of his, or anyone else's life.

Cooley's diary-keeping hews to a venerable literary tradition abounding with commentary on his reading, art and music, and all sorts of observations of his inner life, his family, friends, colleagues, fellow sociologists, professional and university life and travels to meetings and conventions, local townspeople (mostly in Ann Arbor and its surrounding communities), and travels to urban centers near and far. It is, as I have called it, the back region of his theory building (Jacobs, 1976). His journal writing is the textual trace of Cooley's self and its vicissitudes. The above quoted commentary by Cooley on his own method does not do justice to the consistency and richness of his journal, which, among other things, provides him with what we now call "fieldnotes" on what he calls commonplace facts. One scholar has tellingly described his journal "even by nineteenth-century standards...a remarkably introspective record of a man in conversation with himself" (Winterer, 1994, p. 20).

For the more than forty years he kept his journal, that is, for two thirds of his life, 1882–1929, we have a record of Cooley's inner world and the work that he did on his inner life. The aspect of inner work is not segregated from his published work and appears in one form or another throughout his writing. Here I will discuss this work in relation to the key theme of this paper—Cooley's engagement with the world. As he puts it, "Outside and inside in human life mutually complement and interpret each other" (*Journal V. 22* [4/20/19 – 5/25/25], 7/30/22, p. 81). In an early undated volume of the journal, perhaps before the age of eighteen, Cooley posts the task of arriving at self knowledge, which he defines as the "comprehension of my thoughts and feelings in their relation to my whole character and its development." By this he refers to "the ability to measure the deep currents of my life and to regard each experience in its connection with these currents" (*Journal Undated*, p.12). From the outset he states that "Gradually a determined man brings his outer life into accord with his inner," thus emphasizing his praxis of monitoring and maintaining the linkage

1. I use the terms spirituality and religion interchangeably here, and while there are many who might object to this, Cooley's own practice and usage does not rigidly separate the two although he surely recognizes and remarks on the difference between normative and institutional religious practices, and personal spiritual development.

between inner and outer (*Journal* 1889 – 1891, pp. 55 – 56). His “project is not to be a scholar, a teacher, a writer, but to be myself,” because one who knows a trade or profession and not oneself merely “is a fragment, significant only as part of an institution” (*Journal* V. 10, [7/21/1895 – 4/26/1896], p. 44; *Journal* V. 11 [5/7/1896 – 3/21/1897] 3/21/1897, p. 83).

Much of this inner work involved pondering the “higher life” and transcendent reality, but, most significantly, it entailed disentangling and unencumbering himself from the meshes of the looking glass self, that is, observing his feelings of pride and vanity and the blows to his composure dealt by dwelling on his imagination of others’ perceptions of him. All of this comprised his laboratory work whereby, through sympathetic introspection, the linchpin of his qualitative methodology, he gathered the data culminating in his monumental theorizing about the looking glass self in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (Cooley, 1902 rev. ed. 1922, pp. 168 – 263). Consider this rumination of January 24, 1898:

It is true, as Thomas [Kempis] says, that when we lose peace there is a reason for it in our attitude toward men and circumstance. We want something that depends upon other persons; and so have to busy our imaginations with their states of mind. In this way we are degraded and miserable. If one wishes to have ~~an inner~~ higher life he must cut off his lower aims [Cooley’s strike-through] (*Journal* V.12 [5/2/1897 – 7/31/1898], p. 67).

All of the elements comprising the looking glass self are explicitly or implicitly evident here, including the part played by imagination.¹ It is important to understand, however, that Cooley’s insight into the self thus does not simply derive from academic sociology or even philosophy, but from his spiritual practice and his familiarity with both eastern and western hermetic schools. Thus, one’s preoccupation with, and even torment over others’ views and judgments, which we too often confine to teenage insecurity, always stays with us and is explicitly recognized by certain schools as an obstacle to liberation of the self. G.I. Gurdjieff called this particular demon “considering.”² As Cooley says, it is through finding one’s way through the “chagrins” of suffering over not having attained the ideals of others, that one “learns to define himself” (*Journal* V. 15 [12/24/01 – 9/12/02] 6/18/01, p. 49). Such intentional suffering is not masochism; it is the work of evolving, of developing character and consciousness. Regarding this theme of development, Cooley informs us: “There is always a part of us which we do not understand; and that is apt to be the most important part of all” (*Journal* V. [2/16/08 – 1/1/10] 8/2/08, p. 16). We only come to see that part through special effort, that is, by self-observation, meditation, contemplation or the performance of spiritual exercises designed to aid us in self-remembering.

Closely connected to the matter of preoccupation of one’s image in the minds of others is Cooley’s interest in the issue of pride and vanity, (“forms of self-approval that strike us as disagreeable or egotistical”) which follows his discussion of the looking glass self in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1909 rev. ed. 1922, pp. 230 – 237). Pride and vanity represent the eclipse of being by (the preoccupation with) seeming. Consequently, “A man may be very self-conceited and yet not know his own good qualities. Self-knowledge, whether of good or bad, is equally hard to acquire” (*Journal* V. 11 [5/7/1896 – 3/21/1897], p. 18). While pride is a form of self-approval characterizing “the more rigid or self-sufficient sort of minds,” the “proud man is not *immediately* dependent upon what others think” (1909 rev. ed. 1922, p. 232). The word vanity, on the other hand, “indicates a weak or hollow appearance of worth put on in the endeavor to impress others, or the state of feeling that goes with it” (p. 234). The vain person is preoccupied with his own image in another’s mind and is “frequently tortured by groundless imaginings that some one has misunderstood him, slighted him, insulted him, or otherwise mistreated his social effigy” (p. 235). This sub-theme of the looking glass self derives from Cooley’s inner work and his reading of the essay tradition, especially the French moralists such as La Rochefoucauld, and his observations of the life around him. It is integral to his thinking on the self, as is attested to by

1. That is, one’s imagination of one’s appearance to another, the imagination of the other’s judgment of that appearance, and the resulting self feeling.

2. C.S. Nott, a student of Gurdjieff, recalls the following reply by Gurdjieff to a question concerning what he meant by “considering” at a meeting: “I will give you a simple example. Although I am accustomed to sitting with my legs crossed under me, I consider the opinion of the people here and sit as they do, with my legs down. This is external considering. . . .As regards inner considering. Someone looks at me, as I think, disapprovingly. This starts corresponding associations in my feelings; if I am too weak to refrain from reacting, I am annoyed with him. I consider internally, and show that I am annoyed. This is how we usually live; we manifest outside what we feel inside. . . .But why should I be annoyed or hurt if someone looks at me disapprovingly? or if he doesn’t look at me, doesn’t notice me? It may be that he himself is the slave of someone else’s opinion; perhaps he is an automaton, a parrot repeating someone else’s words” (Nott, 1961, pp. 37 – 38). I mention Gurdjieff, not because Cooley knew him or knew of him, but because of the identical conceptions they had of vanity and staking one’s self-esteem on the perceived judgments of others comprising the focus for work on oneself.

the following journal entry containing an observation of his infant daughter “M” (Margaret) cueing a cogitation on vanity:

M., one month old, has begun to stare at the eyes of her mother and nurse. The latter has glasses which she sometimes wears: these are said to be an object of particular interest to the baby.

One thing about nursing a project and saying nothing to anyone about it, keeping it hid and private, is that it becomes identified with one’s feeling of self-reverence and independence....

Vanity—pride—self-reverence are forms of self-valuation, the first having most immediate regard to what others think, the second also being based on opinion but stabler, depending more on the actual possession of the thing prized. The third rests upon a private judgment and is more truly individual than either of the others....Vanity is vulgar and weak, pride strong but not truly noble, self-reverence the very kernel of lofty character....

The Self is very much indeed like a musical instrument upon which we do not know how to play. We want to give forth music; it is life and joy to do so; but another must draw the bow (*Journal V.* 12 [5/2/1897 – 7/31/1898] 8/29/1897, p. 31).

Evidently the issue of development of the self is dialectically connected to the one of development of character and consciousness. Inasmuch as the difference between self-reverence and pride verges on hair splitting Cooley succumbs to his own vanity (the “project” in the quote will be his much celebrated *Human Nature and the Social Order*). Cooley conceives of his project in terms similar to the way creative writers refer to the gestation and birth of their work. However, to recognize that the intimate record of his journal also reveals the faults of the man certainly does not gain-say the existential or intellectual results of that work. Moreover, Cooley was not an outwardly vain person. Quite the opposite, he was shy and self-effacing, but he recognized, as certain mystical traditions do, that vanity is the fellow traveler of the human self. Like Thoreau, whom he admired, Cooley hearkens to the beat of a different drummer, as revealed in his summary judgment on the issue of vanity as it bears on the social self:

Vanity is a partly social passion. One strives for the show of a social self, rather than for the real thing. He wants to be something in another’s mind for the sake of that being. It is selfish in that the self is willing to impose itself on the world at a false valuation. The truly social mind is one who values others’ judgments, but values truth and reality more. He needs to be and cannot for a moment be satisfied with seeming. His sympathy can work without recognition. The vain man may be described as pseudo-social (*Journal V.* 11 [5/7/1896 – 3/21/1897] 4/1/1897, p.78).

How to *be* is critical for Cooley. The above hints at the transcendental priorities which enable him to establish a kind of aesthetic and intellectual, indeed, an emotional distance from his subject, society grounded in social interaction, for in the frequent practice of observing oneself and society one acquires the ability to observe non-judgmentally, and hence at the proper distance. The difference between being and seeming is underscored in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902 rev. ed. 1922, p. 236), in commentary on the “self-respecting man” who values others’ judgments, “will not submit to influences not in line with his development” and “always feels the need to *be*, and cannot be guilty of that separation between being and seeming that constitutes affectation.” As I discuss elsewhere, in contrast to the positivist apotheosis of transcendental reason, or scientific rationality, Cooley posits an aesthetic arbiter of valuation (Jacobs, forthcoming). He espouses the “higher” spiritual values counterpoised against vanity and pride in the person, and societally, against institutions. This prioritization runs throughout his work and energizes, for example, his approach to pecuniary valuation or economic sociology. But let us return to Cooley’s engagement with the social process and his look at the life around him.

Cooley is an omnivorous observer remarking and commenting on everything he comes across. Among his observations, a trip to New York’s Jewish community on the Lower East Side in 1904, his descriptions of events closer to home including the death of his daughter Margaret in childbirth, and his thoughts on his own impending death, traverse Cooley’s outward gaze to the social world and back to his personal and inner life. They offer the rare opportunity to view the ingredients of this sententious sociologist’s intellect from the standpoint of one who sees, feels, thinks and writes deeply. Although they are not strictly speaking, ethnographic fieldnotes, since they are not portions of extended

or prolonged work on field sites, they are close in character to these in their immediacy and in the format of journal entries.

COOLEY AS URBAN ETHNOGRAPHER: THE LOWER EAST SIDE

The quintessential fragmentary journal is moving closer and closer to being a literary genre all its own.¹ Broadly speaking, it can be conceived as integral part of the essay tradition.² In one of the most interesting extended vignettes comprising six pages in his journal, Cooley describes a trip to New York City in September, 1904. Here his observations on the people he meets and some of the events he observed are vivid and sensitively drawn. On the other hand, the spaces—what is *not* said—are equally intriguing. For example, we are not told why he is traveling and under what or whose auspices, although at one point he mentions three names with their institutional affiliations, one of whom, Parmelee, is immediately recognizable as a sociologist, so it is probable that Cooley is in New York for a professional meeting.³ Although this material concerning his New York visit never explicitly makes its way into Cooley's published work, as part of his journal writing, it *is* significant.⁴

The entry opens as follows: "Sat. Sept. 9, 1904. New York. Visited two synagogues with Mr. Billikopf (Jacob). The old man rather earnest though barely reverent, conversation, apparently of a general character, going on all the time. The young perfunctory" (*Journal* V. 18 (9/9/1904 - 2/11/1908), p.1). This is followed by a more detailed "visit with a woman regarding a question of charity," referring to thoughts and doubts she had about taking her mother in to live with her family in a three room apartment. These are described as follows:

her mother had applied for some kind of aid to get support from her husband and children. This was one of the daughters. She explained her mother's case as due chiefly to change in environment. "In Europe the man is the only boss," etc. "You know how it 'tis in America." The wife wanted her own way. Her daughter would be willing to take her in but she (the mother) objected to the well-grounded criticism of her manners—spitting on the floor, etc., from her son in law. "Not his (the father's) fault, not her fault, not our fault."

The daughter had three children and another coming. They live in three small rooms, but decent, for which they pay \$18.00 a month. She was willing to take in her mother and her mother's child (own brother). B[il-ikopf] thought it not unlikely they were taking in a boarder" (pp. 1 - 2).

Cooley does not ask any questions—at least he does not report that he does—and he makes little commentary. One might ask what Cooley is referring to by the son-in-law's "well grounded criticism" of his mother-in-law's manners. Did she spit in front of him or behave vulgarly? There are no descriptions of the characters' appearance and dress. Beyond his agreement with the son-in-law's assessment, we do not hear about any feelings he has or judgments he made; nor is there any description of the neighborhood and environs. And preceding this, what is meant by his guide Jacob Billikopf's earnestness and irreverence? One is tempted to infer that Cooley is sketching in Jewish traits. Is the noted perfunctoriness of the young shorthand for youthful postures taken with adults, with visitors, or does it appear to be a typical ethnic pattern? All of these gaps perhaps are filled in by "head notes" or Cooley's recollection. Yet the impression of the synagogue ambiance is a rich one of a din of fast paced conversation, a focal point of lively interaction, as opposed to the demure and serious atmosphere associated with church settings.

The following day, Sunday, in the evening he attends Jewish vaudeville: "a song called 'Columbus mit sein gold-

1. See Fulwiler's anthology (1987) for an appreciation of the educational benefits of journal writing. These discussions especially Elbow and Close's, Berthoff's, Summerfield's, Lowenstein's, Allen and Fauth's and Kent's on the history of journals and the nascent intellectuality evoked and stimulated by journal writing among students, identify the core elements of the trajectory beginning with experience and ending with literacy, that is, with writing capturing that experience. I refer to literacy here in the sense of a developed faculty as opposed to the simplistic threshold capability to read and write.

2. Tyler (1986, p. 131) tells us that ethnographic writing itself is coming to be represented by this hallmark--fragmentariness--of the essay tradition: "A post-modern ethnography is fragmentary because it cannot be otherwise. Life in the field is itself fragmentary, not at all organized around familiar ethnographic categories..."

3. The entry reads: "9/12 Barnett, Johns Hopkins man, Estabrook, Cambridge, Parmelee, Yale." The latter is probably Maurice Parmelee, a well known sociologist at the time. Another person, Walling, is mentioned further on in the entry, but without any institutional or other identification.

4. Recently journals and fieldnotes have come into their own as a sub-genre of sociological writing, which is now commanding some attention. See, for example, Sanjek's anthology (Sanjek ed., 1990) devoted to the subject.

en[m?] Land' (Yiddish) was one of the features." He goes to the Subway tavern, an Italian *fiesta* on Elizabeth Street, and the Haymarket on 6th Avenue and 31st Street, "a large saloon and dance hall where prostitutes go to dance, drink and seek assignments. A few were handsome, one or two not very coarse looking." Apparently he is escorted by a Jewish graduate student and he notes: "Most of the Jewish young men and girls graduate first at the City College. 80% (?) of the students are Jews" (p. 2). On Monday he goes to the Yiddish theater and sees a pessimistic play about inter-marriage between a Jewish woman and gentile man which ends with the progeny of the marriage not recognizing his origins, snowballing his Jewish grandfather in the street and finally, the separation of the couple.

There are visits to an Italian settlement house and discussions with labor figures. The travel entry ends a week later on a Sunday with a conversation with a precocious eight year old boy, Isidor, who is described as follows:

Isidor says: my mother says ["I am 8, but I think I am 9 because I am so far ahead in school.[]"] He says he is a socialist and a free-thinker, and does not believe in God. He does not know whether he wants Debs to be elected because he does not know what kind of a man he is. He wants to read a book about him. The most determined individuality is expressed in all Isidor's conversation. He does not like his teacher, because, he says, she "picks out the wrong boy to hit." He is bent on judging everything for himself and withholds his decision in doubtful cases. He likes Longfellow and Stevenson, and especially the poet who wrote "Stitch, stitch, stitch" because he "recognizes what that woman would feel." He means to be a poet and makes little poems which he likes to say to himself" (p. 6).

There are two striking attributes of Cooley's notes: the awareness of multiple perspectives within the interactional field, and the striving for understanding of the perspective of the actors—empathy or sympathy. Completeness of detail for its own sake is not a signal feature of his observations, but the attempt to convey the perspective or point of view of those he observes is evident. Thus in the first example of the daughter pondering taking her mother in to live with her and her family we do not need a florid description of the emotions of the characters to imagine the agony each faces. The situation is described from the standpoint of the mother, daughter and son-in-law in spare terms capturing the conflicts in points of view and loyalties between the family of orientation and the family of procreation ("Not his...fault, not her fault, not our fault") as well as the cultural differences and the conflicts engendered by them between Europe and the United States.

The apparent objectivity of a straightforward description of Isidor captures the richness of the subject and his world. The narrative is leavened by Cooley's matter-of-fact brief observational commentaries ("The most determined individuality is expressed in all Isidor's conversation....He is bent on judging everything for himself and withholds his decision in doubtful cases"). One comes away with a delicately crafted image of Isidor's precocity, but also of his childish qualities, especially in the concluding segment of the description where Cooley transcribes the following poem written by Isidor, followed by Cooley's coda:

As I (sic) walking in the street
I met my little friend
I says to him "Hello."
He says to me back "Hello;"
But he never knew who I am."

He asked my name. Perhaps he means to send me his first book of poems as I requested him to do (pp. 6 - 7).

The poem, awkwardly simple and childish, is redolent of the reality of a child's sense of the streets (for this is the likely setting of Isidor's poetic encounter with his friend) of the Lower East Side. Juxtaposed with the straightforward rendering of Isidor's opinions, preferences and observations ("she 'picks on the wrong boy to hit.'"), does one need more detail than is offered here? Cooley's descriptions induce lively, insightful images. How can an image be insightful? By parsimoniously conveying a rich sense of the subjective and intersubjective realities of the actors (i.e., presenting his characters simply and vividly), the richness of the subject matter itself preempts any need to resort to purple prose.

On the other hand, what is not conveyed here is how Cooley selects his subject matter, and, of course, an exhaus-

tive description of all that he sees. The images of Jews one receives is that they are struggling with their share of familial conflicts, a common theme emphasized among observers of immigrants, and that they are interested in education. Some of this verges on stereotypical “model minority” images even cultivated among Jews themselves, but Cooley gives few clues throughout his writing about his feelings about them. However, in his essay, “Genius, Fame and the Comparison of Races” (1897 in 1930) he cites research on British Jews comparing the well-to-do West End with poorer working class East End Jews which indicates that the former anthropometrically are on a par with Englishmen of the same class, whereas the latter “employed for the most part in sweat-shops upon the manufacture of cheap clothing [as were their brethren in the United States], averaged more than three inches less in stature, and were inferior also in the size of skull and in every particular covered by the measurements.” This, of course, implies the somatic differences are driven by social factors. On the whole this summary appears to be an objective “value free” assessment, but when we look at his comments on Jews and anti-Semitism in *Life and the Student* (1927, pp. 30-31), the work—his last book—with the greatest affinity to his journal writing, we find an ironic concluding paragraph that no doubt benefits from his New York experience which possibly served as the leavening for his later experiences with Jews:

What is peculiarly disgusting in the Jews is their proneness to the so-called Christian virtue—humility, long-suffering, family loyalty, succor to the weak and the likes—so repugnant to those sound principles of individual competition and the survival of the fittest by which we Christians are guided.

REMINISCENCES OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER’S GUIDE

A letter written in 1943 by Jacob Billikopf, Cooley’s guide on the Lower East Side, to Edward C. Jandy, Cooley’s biographer, is a significant coda providing insight into Cooley’s merits as an ethnographer. The letter (Billikopf, 1942) states that having learned of the publication of Jandy’s intellectual biography (1942), Billikopf ordered the book. As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago Billikopf read Cooley’s *Human Nature and the Social Order* and had met faculty “who were privileged to know this truly great man.” Upon graduation he became associated with the Industrial Removal Office in New York, “whose purpose was to direct immigrants, crowding the East Side, to the vast American hinterland.” At the time Billikopf lived at the University Settlement on the Lower East Side.

Billikopf recalls that during Cooley’s visit, “[p]resumably Cooley wanted to know how the Other Half, particularly recently arrived immigrants, were making adjustments to their new milieu—social, economic and political.” He remembers that “Mine was the privilege to act as Cooley’s guide, and to interpret to him the life of Jewish immigrants” and adds that “Many a time we would walk up and down stairs of the tenement houses, visiting any number of families, making inquiries which would be of particular interest to Cooley.” Thus Cooley did not merely interview immigrants in agency offices, or see them in courtrooms or official venues.

He remembers “as though it were yesterday, his saying to me not once but several times that it was truly wonderful how the immigrant families, with three, four and five children, living in two or three rooms, managed somehow or other to find accommodations for one or more landsleute [countrymen].” And continues

Cooley was deeply impressed with the type of service which the immigrants were extending to others less fortunate than themselves, and this is what he said—although I cannot reproduce his exact words: “In Ann Arbor we have large and spacious houses, small families; but when a relative comes to visit us we begin to wonder how long he will stay. An extra person or two forces a readjustment in our habits and modes of living; but here, in the fearfully crowded East Side, there is always room for relatives and landsleute.”

In addition, Billikopf relates how Cooley, about to return home, expressed a desire to purchase a samovar, “the only thing he wished to bring back home with him.” Knowing that he was a member of the Samovar Club at the University in Ann Arbor, “I can understand his eagerness to possess that...precious article” and so accompanied him to an antique shop on Allen Street (whose sign read “ANTIQUÉ ARTICLES MADE HERE”) which had a number of samovars for sale. He reminisces that, having prevented the shop owner from overcharging Cooley for a samovar, the former remarked to Billikopf in Yiddish that “I was not the kind of customer he craved to have in his store....This of course with a smile on his face.” Billikopf notes that Cooley was amused by the incident.

It is noteworthy that Cooley, so reputed to be shy, plunges into the milieu and walks up and down stairs to visit a good number of immigrant families in tenements, visits the Yiddish Theater and bars, walks the streets and immerses

himself in the yeasty atmosphere of the Lower East Side. This is an environment both geographically and socially distant from the one he inhabited. Moreover, his commentary on the folkways of immigrant adjustment and their willingness to accommodate “landsleute,” more than evincing simple appreciativeness, embodies the significance of a contrast with the folkways of his own people. Finally, Billikopf’s letter bears witness to the facts of Cooley’s curiosity, his analytic capacity in the field, and his empathic understanding—his *verstehen*.

FACING DEATH FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF THE LARGER LIFE

Society challenges us in various ways, but these limitations at the same time set the conditions and tasks for our spiritual work. However, one thing is certain: according to Cooley, one who lives the larger life is *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, a dweller in another dimension transcending the everyday world. As I said, for Cooley, work on himself (i.e., his inner work) induced a kind of role distance or detachment from the social, that is, the occupational, communal, familial and economic provinces he inhabited. It was an ingredient in his stance as a participant observer of his life and the life around him. Nowhere is this more poignantly the case than in his observations of the events and behavior connected with death of his daughter, and, lastly, his own approaching death. Here detachment does not obliterate feeling, but enables Cooley to better observe his own and others’ feelings and behavior. The power of his gaze and his effectiveness in incarnating it in writing draw us into the reality he lives and observes.

In this fashion, Cooley’s description of the death of his second child, Margaret (b. Aug. 4, 1897), his second child, strangely evokes pathos in the way in which a death described in a novel by a dispassionate narrator might coolly convey it. The entry is bracketed between entries about proof reading the manuscript of his last book, *Life and the Student* (1927), which he was about to send it off to the publisher. The entry concerning Margaret’s death begins, “5/29[6] Margaret died yesterday morning about half past eleven” (*Journal* V. 23 (6/6/1925 - 10/4/1928), p. 20). Most of the following page consists of a description of Margaret’s stay in the hospital for childbirth, the cesarean section done to save the baby, and the medical complications leading to her death by eclampsia. This is followed by a description of Margaret:

M. was sweet, charming, above all, as she seemed to me gallant. She was not deeply sympathetic and tender—yet she loved children and quaint weak things, like kittens—you would hardly think of her as maternal. She was simple in intention, frank, loyal, witty—and gallant. She gave the impression of being rather slight to meet life, but that she would always meet it with a smile and a jaunty gesture. She was pretty, graceful and very “taking”: she had many friends among women and most men admired her. She had rather a brilliant mind, and much common-sense and practical wisdom, did most things quickly and well, as if by intuition. A beginning deafness which she feared would increase, gave a slightly pathetic touch” (p. 22).

This is immediately followed by a reflection—actually, an observational generalization—on being gratified by the responses of others to the bereaved and a reflection on his own behavior when encountering a bereaved person:

A bereaved man is gratified by any indication that his friends, or even his acquaintances, recognize and appreciate his grief. There is some tact and art in conveying this without being awkward or intrusive. I have never been able to do it with any grace, mainly, I fear, because I do not readily feel sympathy.

Note how he sympathetically introspects the feelings and behavior of those offering condolence by reminiscing about his experience of having done so, and thence, now on the other side of the fence, appreciating “the tact and art in conveying this.” He does not need to verbally wallow in his pain for us to plumb it. There is no description of any encounters Cooley has as a bereaved person with others, only a distillation of his experiences, but these are reflective. Earlier, he tersely describes his wife, Elsie, in response to Margaret’s death, as “the most stricken, but is very brave,” and his son-in-law, Jim, as “wonderful, considerate of every one, not at all broken” (p. 22). His description of his daughter’s dying and her personality does convey pathos, shall we say, *induces* this feeling in the reader, and his observations of his wife and son-in-law, now having triangulated the feelings of the bereaved, need no further description to convey the family’s shared sense of loss.

These observations are followed by a statement concerning Margaret’s cremation and burial, then a visit to the

hospital where Cooley, his son-in-law and daughter, Mary Elizabeth, see the baby for the first time: “It seemed a promising child, placid, poised and intelligent. There were a number of other babies of about the same age, some of them, I thought, with rather villainous physiognomies” (p. 23). He does not say if his pride compensates him for his grief.

Another entry, on June 6th follows announcing that Jim and his new granddaughter will come to live with him, and concludes with a philosophical reflection on the meaning of life and death: “An individual life is a process, a strangely intensified and integrated form of that which, in diffusion, is present all about us. There is perhaps nothing essentially mysterious about its beginning and close, any more than there is in the kindling burning and extinction of a fire” (p. 23). Strange, how such objectively conveys even greater pathos concerning the agony of our poor lives and the fleeting brevity of it all when they melt back into the firmament. Cooley’s shift from the events surrounding Margaret’s death to his philosophical contemplation of the life process conveys an aesthetic appreciation of this event, as, indeed, do Cooley’s writings in general. As John Dewey tells us, “[b]ecause the actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions, the experience of a living creature is capable of esthetic quality” (in McDermott (ed.), 1973, p.538). This is captured in Cooley’s rendition of his daughter’s death, its rippling out to the family and its universal significance.

The text concerning Margaret’s death is not stylistically different from the rest of the journal. The fragmented character of it, its shuttling back and forth between descriptions of events, family members’ responses to them and reflections upon their meaning, induce in the reader his/her reflections on the events presented and similar ones in our lives. This is the essence of the essay genre’s reflexive character. While it would seem that writing fieldnotes is the “natural” accompaniment to doing participant observation research, until recently little thought has been given to fieldnotes themselves as literary texts. In addition, they become a part of thought as much as they reflect and embody it; they objectify the author’s thought and thus are embodied by and incorporated into future thinking, whether it is confined to the informal mental process of the author or appears in writing.

In some sense this is attested to by the juxtaposition in the journal of all sorts of activities and reports of events such as the writing and preparation of Cooley’s last book, which is the most aphoristic and fragmented of all of his writing. As he puts it, “My MS Life and the Student is essentially an autobiography; a record, that is of spontaneous thoughts where unity and value, if any, is relative to my personality: that is the organizing principle” (*Journal V. 23* [6/6/1925 -10/2/1928], p. 33).¹

The last words in Cooley’s journal, penned a month before he died, following his return home from an operation for cancer, are written in the same spirit as that of his observations on Margaret’s death, and, indeed, as most of his other writing. They read as follows:

I look from my window out into the lovely April landscape, the busy men at work on the new building, the blood-roots in the garden below, and think: This is our world, the world of the social heritage and the cumulative achievements of men, of great traditions, of history, literature and arts, of great men, great hopes and great endeavors; the world which has been growing from immemorial time, and will continue to grow for unmeasured time to come

I think also: this is my world; the world in which from earliest childhood I have rejoiced to live and strive and have a part. Where I have learned and experimented and aspired, begotten children, formed and executed projects, failed and succeeded, made in the whole a helpful and honorable incarnation of myself. In this world I shall go on living; for the immediate future in my known works, and in the memories of men, for all time as an influence absorbed into the whole.

The change which is about to take place is this: that my organism, and my consciousness which is a part of it, will dissolve, losing that separate and precarious height of being attained and exhausted during the years of my life, “immerging [sic.] again into that holy silence and eternity out of which, as a man, I arose.” This is a notable change, but in so far as I have lived and do live as a man, in our world, in the great world, by no means a calamitous one; for what I care most about shall not die but live hopefully on (*Journal V. 24* (10/4/1928 - 4/7/1929), pp. 17 - 18).

1. He adds on August 26th that the materials in the MS “are capable of development into sociological studies having quite another kind of value, that springing from the general organism of thought,” implying the continuity and intertextual development of thought.

What is unique about Cooley's reflections upon his own death, and earlier, his health and the possibility of him dying, is that he is not explicitly preoccupied with them. The beginning of the journal volume (# 24), in the preceding October, notes he is in good health, as does a line in January 20th. The first inkling of something wrong is mentioned on February 15th where he states: "Indisposed for about 3 weeks: pulse 47. I have had a sort of break-down of the digestion, manifested by loss of appetite and inability to digest more than a very little of very mild food" (p. 15). On February 26th he mentions having had an X ray of his stomach with no pathological finding. On March 15th he is in the hospital: "I am reduced to about 112 lbs., am rather yellow with jaundice and quite weak, but do not feel properly sick." He mentions that the university staff have taken over his work (*Journal* V. 24 (10/4/1928 - 4/7/1929), p. 16).

Throughout, with the exception of the paragraphs quoted above, there is no preoccupation with his posterity and no evident melancholia. Also in the quote there is a clear absence of any apparent belief in an afterlife, at least in the customary sense of a "next world," which might appear to be surprising considering Cooley's spiritual practice. He is a man with no regrets who is satisfied with his life and accomplishments. Cooley, the expostulator of the tentative method, simply sees himself, if not a discoverer of, then "showing the way to new knowledge" (p. 3). Yet, juxtaposed with the understanding of Cooley's foreknowledge of his death, we are moved by its emotional understatedness and its simultaneous sense of the *scale* of his life, which at the beginning of his entry counterpoises thoughts about his impending death with an appreciation of nature and the gardeners at work in and with it. We are thus given a bird's eye view of the world he is about to leave almost from the vantage point of a Bruegel painting. As we move into the world where he has "learned and experimented and aspired, begotten children, formed and executed projects, failed and succeeded," he evaluates his impress upon it as remaining for awhile through his publication as well as the multifarious, although not necessarily commemorated effects and impresses he has made upon it. He feels confident that what he has cared for and has assisted in effecting will live on after his reabsorption into "that holy silence and eternity" from whence he came.

Throughout the journal entries quoted here the absence of hand-wringing emotion does not detract from the emotional tone of the situations described. A literary context has been presumed and established here. Recalling that Cooley is the principal reader of his journal, and clearly an adept writer, we can rest assured that his delicately crafted descriptions, shorn of, as his stylistic exemplar, Walter Pater called it, "surplusage," suffice to evoke in, although not bombard, the reader with emotion. Despite the fact that this is his personal journal there is posited a reader's personality alongside his, the author's, personality. He does not tell the reader what to feel but knows that his skilled writing will enable her/him to experience emotion, if not in the way he does, then in such a manner as to encourage the reader's own sense of pathos to be evoked. But this already moves us away from the posture of scientific objectivity into the realm of literary technique, that is, into the realm of art...and back to the spiritual as well.

BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN SCIENCE, LITERATURE, ART, SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

Once the underpinnings of scientific foundationalism are stripped away, what are we left with in the social sciences, and where does this place Cooley and his aesthetically based sociology? Cooley saw art as intrinsically democratic, and true democracy as true art. He abjured the distinction between fine and popular art (1918, pp. 410 – 412). We know too that Cooley conceived of science itself as an art. Thus Cooley explicitly blurs the boundaries dividing art from science, society and democracy. A recent essay reconceptualizing social science as a discursive practice and social structures as structures of language invented through speech acts, conceives of science as a "conversation that takes place over time" (Brown, 1992, p. 227). These are the exact terms of Cooley's own discourse. Similarly, an anthropologist's essay on post-modern ethnography terms this enterprise "in a word, poetry" (Tyler, 1986). Consider the following passage from Cooley's journal, musing on an art historian's description of art history as a continuing poem:

Is not science an art in this large sense, and the generalizations of science a kind of interpretive poem? The sciences are intellectual arts interpreting the world for the delight and edification of men somewhat as painting and sculpture do (*Journal*, V. 22 (4/20/19-5/25/25), p. 142).

This aesthetic interpretation of science was written twenty three years after the publication of Cooley's first book, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902, rev. ed., 1922, p. 21), where he states, "Visible society is, indeed, literally,

a work of art...”¹ Elsewhere, I discuss Cooley’s conception of society as a work of art, and social intelligence (discussed in *Social Process* (1918, pp. 351 - 362)) as dramatic and scenic (Jacobs, forthcoming). From this standpoint social science is an extension of social intelligence employing sympathetic introspection which works by a “dramatic method.” Here “the supreme aim of social science is to perceive the drama of life more adequately than can be done by ordinary observation....Or I may say that the constructive part of science is, in truth, a form of art” (1918, pp. 403 - 404). The thrust of the selections from Cooley’s journal is that they sparingly but powerfully convey the juice of the life portrayed. They are literature conveying the truth of the human condition.

To be sure, a few natural scientists might agree with Cooley’s statements calling science art, and its “creations” poetry, as a *metaphoric* description, but most sociologists would hesitate at calling society itself a work of art. Moreover, despite the occasional utterance of the commonplace truism by many denizens of the academy that they do not see their research and writing as work but fun, the view of science as a pleasurable, even passionate pastime aesthetically engaging both its practitioners and those witnessing its performance, is far afield from the more familiar, if not mundane, publicly uttered notion of science as hard work contributing to the cumulative discovery and accretion of truth, or even conceiving of social science as contributing to the solution of the social problems impeding human progress. Scientific work may, indeed, be described by its practitioners as perhaps a passionate undertaking but usually such passion is explained by its importance to human and social well-being, or to the cumulative contribution to truth. Cooley’s thinking here is more akin to postmodern views wherein “one reads and writes not in pursuit of truth or knowledge,” but “for the pleasure of the experience” (Rosenau, 1992, pp. 26). In other words, pleasure is what remains as the motivation for intellectual work once foundational pleading is removed. As Cooley proclaims, “Write only in joy...To be what you wish to write is the first thing, then to write it--just that and nothing else, in simplicity and patience [Cooley’s underlining]” (*Journal*, V. 16 (9/19/02-6/17/03), p. 82). His spiritual centeredness, however, parts ways with post-modernism.

Such an approach assumes art is to be part of, not separate from life, and this enables Cooley to visualize society as a work of art. In a fashion similar to John Dewey’s demurral of the separation between art and life and spirituality, the usual dichotomies of science versus art, art versus the practical, the spiritual versus the social, prove to be false to Cooley, and, ultimately should prove to be so to Freire (Joas, 1996, pp. 139-142). In accomplishing this crossing or blurring of boundaries Cooley perhaps is not seeking the grandiosity of climactic social change. Freire no doubt would agree with Cooley’s estimation that our “freedom is too commonly cold, harsh, and spiritually poor, and hence not really free” (1918, p. 418). And he might consider Cooley naïve in his belief that we have not yet witnessed a broad and rich development of popular art because “our democracy is as yet [an] immature and superficial” base to securely plant it in (1918, pp. 411 – 412). Superficial, yes, but our society manifests a rich surfeit of popular art and music, most vibrantly contributed by the subaltern people and cultures it exploits, marginalizes, and deprives of full social citizenship.

Let alone having grandiose pretensions to attaining, and aiding the subaltern masses to attain, elevated consciousness, Cooley is an exemplar of how one may work on oneself so that whatever designs one has for the society s/he lives in, at least one may walk in it *with* a conscience and consciousness. It was this aspect of this quiet and apparently shy, that is, this existentially *sly* man that showed through and enabled him to be an insightful, unobtrusive and compassionate traveler in different worlds.

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1. More recently Willis (2000, p. ix) has developed a nearly identical conception to Cooley’s by asking : “what happens if we understand the raw materials of everyday lived cultures as if they were living art forms?” Viewing art as meaning-making, Willis places art “at the heart of everyday human practices and interactions” that produce cultural forms (p. 3) thus making life and society themselves art. Here Willis wants “to reclaim art as a living, textual thing and as inherently social and democratic,” thus, in opposition to the prevailing individualistic view, collectively embedding creativity in cultural forms (pp. 3, 4).

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