Introduction

This book outlines and gives examples of a new approach to research in the human sciences. It puts into practice the recommendation of C. Wright Mills, for what he called the exercise of the sociological imagination. But I would call it instead the interdisciplinary, human imagination. Here I develop and elaborate ideas that were proposed in an early form in my *Microsociology* (1990) and in Suzanne Retzinger's *Violent Emotions* (1991). These books focused on a substantive topic: emotions and social bonds in their interrelationship. This book continues with that topic, but codifies the methodological dimension.

My goal is to describe an approach to all human research that allows the interpenetration of theory, method, and data in such a way that each equally casts light on the other, generating a theory that is based directly on observations of actual human behavior, both inner experience and outer conduct. This introduction and the first two chapters emphasize methodology, of relating the smallest parts to the largest wholes. The later chapters apply this approach to verbatim human expressions.

When part/whole methods are applied to verbatim texts, the intricate filigree of even the simplist human transactions are revealed. Inevitably, crucial aspects of this filigree are emotions and bond-oriented behavior. One important goal of the substantive chapters is to show that understanding the intricacy of human expressions is not a luxury, but an elementary requirement of human science. It is clear that societies (and the human relationships which constitute them) ride upon extraordinarily complex processes. Because emotional transactions are a vital part of human existence, and are usually omitted, the substantive chapters emphasize them, and their relation to behavior which is oriented toward maintaining the social bond. The part/whole method helps us to understand the relationship between human experience and the largest social structures.

At the heart of my method is what I call part/whole morphology. I borrow the idea of morphology from botany, where it has long formed

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the intrinsic method of that discipline. In botanical research, the study of single cases (single specimens of plants) is just as important as making comparisons between plants. Morphology is based equally on single cases and comparative study. By microscopic study of the smallest details of a single plant, the botanist learns how it works as a system, even if no other specimens are available. To the extent that other specimens are available, microanalysis and comparative study can be interwoven, each illuminating the other. Botany is the study of both individual and groups of plants.

Although not discussed as such, botanical morphology employs what I call part/whole analysis, since it is concerned with relating the *least parts*, the tiniest details of an individual plant, with the *greatest wholes*, the structure and process of plant communities, and their relationship to their environment. The phrase "least parts and greatest wholes" is due to the philosopher Spinoza, who proposed that human understanding requires relating the least parts to the greatest wholes (Sacksteder 1991). Spinoza's proposition forms the basis of this book. As Spinoza implied and as recent research demonstrates, human beings and human relationships are so complex as to require part/whole analysis, even in cases of simple, everyday interaction.

One area in which the many-layered complexity of human activities has become quite clear is ordinary language. The failure of automated computer translation of foreign languages, and of paraphrasing meaning within a language, has strong implications for the human sciences. Typically a computer program will offer fifty to a hundred paraphrases of the meaning of a sentence, none of which is correct, and many of which are ludicrous. For example, a computer program failed to provide a correct paraphrase of the aphorism "Time flies like an arrow." One of the many paraphrases produced was "Time flies (insects) as you would an arrow." Understandably, the program mistook a noun (time) for a verb, and a verb (flies) for a noun.

From a logical point of view, an ordinary language is a mess, since its main terms, the most frequently used words, always have a multitude of meanings. How do human beings ever interpret the meaning of a text or an utterance correctly (i.e. consensually)? The implication is that humans have within them computing equipment infinitely more sophisticated than the most sophisticated computers. To correctly understand ordinary language, humans must have access to part/whole algorithms that allow them to understand the particular meanings of words (and when face to face, of gestures) in *context*: that is, the meaning of an expression produced by a particular person in a particular dialogue, in a particular relationship, in a particular culture, at a particular time in history. All understanding requires a high order

of what George Steiner (1975) called "interpretive decipherment." Like the Rosetta Stone, ordinary language is always a problem of creative cryptography, needing vastly more intelligence than the solution of intricate puzzles like the Rubik Cube.

The extraordinary intelligence that humans show in deciphering language and other cultural puzzles occurs with lightning-like rapidity and effortlessness, and often, but not always, accuracy. Even a five-year old can do it, but makes more errors than adults. (When she was five, my daughter dragged her feet about visiting my friend Dennis because she thought he would examine her teeth.) Adults also make errors, but much of the time their interpretations are consensual, or else society would be impossible. Loan companies survive when most of the understandings they enter into with their customers are mutually understood.

The rapidity and effortlessness with which people sometimes understand each other pose a profound problem for the human sciences, because it has come to be taken for granted, not only by the participants, but also by researchers. The design of most studies of human beings assumes that the words and sentences used by the researchers and their subjects are largely unambiguous, and also assumes that their subjects' intelligence is not extraordinary. This assumption is particularly marked in the construction of scales, but is also central to all experiments and most interviews. Even qualitative studies make this assumption, if somewhat more cautiously.

The problem is that humans are capable of not understanding or misunderstanding standardized research situations, or of using them to their own ends, concealment, getting the researcher's sympathy, etc. Similarly, it is all too easy for the researcher to misunderstand or not understand their subjects' responses. Understanding the meaning of human expressions is a complex and intricate process, but it can be understood if part/whole methods are applied. The nearer we take as our data *verbatim* records of human expressions, the closer we can come to understanding our subjects. Verbatim records include transcriptions based on mechanical recording of interaction and all written materials.

It is now taken for granted that the "two cultures" of science and humane letters are so separated that there is no way of connecting them. This assumption pervades both cultures. Here is an example from psychology (Maher 1991, p. 72):

> [One approach to psychology] is to assert that individual behavior cannot be predicted, but only "understood" after it occurs. This solution puts [psychology] firmly into the area of hermeneutics, i.e. the humane study of texts . . . Close examination shows us clearly

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that *this approach is indistinguishable from that of the biographer writing as a contributor to nonfiction literature* . . . (emphasis added)

The purpose of this book is to show that it is possible to integrate hermeneutics with prediction, that they need not be mutually exclusive. Part/whole morphology, as outlined here, combines the interpretation of texts with the use of explicit theory and method. Contrary to what Maher said, this method is quite distinguishable from the current beliefs and practices in both the scientific and humanistic camps.

There is a powerful claim that science and humanistic interpretation can be combined in an extraordinary work of the literary imagination by Nuttall (1983). He distinguishes between two types of interpretation of texts. The first he calls "opaque," which involves the separation of the interpreter from the characters represented in the text: "In the opening of *King Lear* folk-tale elements proper to narrative are infiltrated by a finer-grained dramatic mode" (p. 80). In the second mode, which Nuttall calls "transparent", the interpreter projects life into the characters: "Cordelia cannot bear to have her love for her father made the subject of a partly mercenary game" (p. 80). Nuttall has two complaints about the formalized interpretations in the "opaque mode" which parallel my discussion here. Firstly, no matter how formalized, opaque language must smuggle in transparent interpretations, otherwise it would be meaningless (pp. 84–87). This is an extraordinarily important point, as much for the quantitative social scientist as for the literary critic. There is no way that we can *not* endow survey subjects or literary characters with life, if we are to understand the meaning of their expressions. Otherwise, the ambiguity of human expressions would not allow *any* interpretation of meaning. Secondly, opaque interpretation is necessarily narrow and partial, since it rules out the other mode. On the other hand, transparent language does not rule out formal analysis, but can easily include both. This latter point that Nuttall made is quite parallel to my assertion that science and hermeneutics can be combined.

The intensive study of single cases, when accompanied by comparative study of cases, enables the researcher to understand human behavior in all of its complexity. When Durkheim, the founder of modern sociology, borrowed what he thought was the morphological method from botany, he left out exactly half of it, the systematic study of single cases. Seeking to demonstrate that social processes exert an autonomous influence on human actions, he focused entirely on the comparative part of morphology, shearing away a vital part of an organic approach to knowledge and discovery. The division between sociology and psychology that Durkheim proposed in his early work

is leading to impasse. This division, which was necessary in order to found sociology, has frozen into rigid separation, with tragic consequences for both disciplines.

One of the signal weaknesses of Durkheim's comparative approach, which continues to haunt modern social science, is the lack of temporal data showing the time order of events, and therefore the possibility of infering causation. In his powerful study comparing suicide rates in different societies and in different social strata, Durkheim was forced to speculate on the causation of suicide, since he had no data which showed the temporal development of behavior. This is the key weakness of all "structural" analyses: the absence of process data.

The combination of single case and comparative study in botanical morphology enabled researchers to understand both structure and process, by observing both the single plant as a system, and also the system of many plants as a functioning community. The most important aspect of this approach is more subtle, however: one understands the single plant in the *context* of knowing a great deal about the plant community, and the plant community in the context of knowing a great deal about the single specimen. Morphology offers a methodological solution to the most intractable problem in the human sciences, the relationship between the individual and the group. In this book I use discourse analysis to explore single cases of social interaction, and show how it may be used in conjunction with social system analysis to understand these cases in the context of other similar cases.

I use the term discourse in an extremely broad way, to include not only spoken language, the usual sense of the word, but also any record of communicative expressions. I resort to this unusual definition to avoid ponderous terms like communication or social interaction. The reader should keep in mind the broad way that I use discourse, which includes written texts of any kind. My emphasis on verbatim discourse proposes that we allow the actual voices of our subjects to be heard in our studies, voices which have almost disappeared from the human sciences.

In my approach to morphology, I suggest that the basic molecule of social behavior is what I call the *exchange*: one action (usually discourse) by one person, and the response of another person. In much of social interaction, such exchanges are usually quite brief, as little as one transcripted line for each participant. Exchanges are small systems made up of least parts and larger wholes, at various levels.

We can think of each exchange as involving a part/whole ladder of levels. An exchange between a particular mother and daughter, for example, is made up of still smaller parts: the words

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and gestures (level 1) of each of the component expressions. And each exchange (level 2) is also itself a part of still larger wholes: the conversation (level 3) of which the exchange is but a part; all conversations between the two participants (their whole relationship, level 4), all relationships of their social type (the mother–daughter relationship in that particular society, level 5) etc.

By taking into account the parts and wholes of specific episodes of discourse, and the relation of those episodes to the larger social and cultural wholes of which they are a part, many of the most recalcitrant problems that face the human sciences may be confronted directly. My approach combines elements that are usually pursued separately, attempting to present human experience as a whole rather than as separated parts (such as data) and separated wholes (such as theory).

Basing this approach on the exchange does not eliminate levels of subjective experience which underlie outer behavior. In order to understand the meaning of an exchange, a researcher must make inferences about the motives, intentions, and feelings of the partici-pants, as they themselves do, because they too are parts of the whole, even though only inferential. In this respect the researcher has a great advantage over the participants; he or she has the time and inclination to subject the exchange to microscopic examination. Because of many years of such minute examination of verbatim excerpts of dialogue, it seems to me that most human interaction is so complex that its participants understand only a tiny fraction of their own motives, intentions and feelings. In an earlier publication (Scheff 1990, 100) I referred to both inner and outer levels of dialogue as the ''message stack'':

1. Words
2. Gestures
3. Implicature (Unstated implications of words and gestures).
4. Feelings.

All interpretations of meaning require analysis of these four levels, but usually leave out explicit references to the lower three levels, depending almost entirely on the verbal components. Even studies which include nonverbal gestures seldom explicitly refer to the lower two levels. Part/whole morphology of discourse integrates inner experience with outer conduct.

The new approach subsumes and clarifies knotty theoretical pro-blems. Many critics have complained that Parsonian theory over-emphasizes social control as a determinant of behavior, the hypothetical grid of norms and sanctions which actors take into account in constructing their behavior. In the abbreviated part/whole

ladder implied above, Level 5 implicates such a grid, but only as one part of complex structure in which the exchange is embedded. Part/whole analysis assimilates most of the current theoretical proposals in the human sciences, theories like social control and rational choice, but locates them within a much larger matrix. Of course actors sometimes deliberately or even rationally compare their options in coming to a decision, as rational choice theory would have it. But sometimes they don't. Both alternatives can easily be included in part/whole analysis.

In terms of methodology, the approach outlined here is addressed first to what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) call the "dual crisis" in qualitative methods, a crisis of *representation* and a crisis of *legitimation*. The crisis in representation involves the tangle of thorny issues that have arisen in the last twenty years about how to portray the Other in our research, another person, race, gender, or class than one's own. This issue has surfaced with intense criticism of conventional descriptions of the Other in anthropological writing, and also in postmodernist approaches. The issue is related to a classic tradition in philosophy, the problem of Other Minds. How can we be sure that we understand the thoughts and feelings of a person other than ourselves? The first crisis in qualitative methods concerns the formats we use to depict the minds and behavior of our subjects.

Denzin and Lincoln specify the problem of representation in terms of production and ordering of text and context (578): ". . . (ethnographers) must take steps to ensure that the words they put in subjects' mouths were in fact spoken by those subjects . . . But more important, the ethnographer must take care when changing contexts and reordering events . . ."

The crisis of legitimation, as Denzin and Lincoln present it, overlaps with the crisis of representation, in that both involve the truth of our representations of the other, but the crisis of representation goes further, by referring to: ". . . the claim any text makes to being accurate, true, and complete. Is a text, that is, faithful to the context and the individuals it is supposed to represent?" (578)

Although Denzin and Lincoln do not use these terms, probably because they equate them with positivism, the crisis of representation appears to be closely related to the issue of validity, and the crisis of legitimation to the issue of reliability. What is the most valid method of representing our subjects, and how can we demonstrate that the results of this method are reliable? The present volume outlines an approach to this exact problem, reporting and relating text and context in a way that offers a measure of both validity and reliability.

The crisis of representation can be confronted by reporting verbatim the exact dialogue of the participants in a specific encounter. Where

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possible the dialogue should be a transcript based on mechanical recording on audiotape or film. In this way, one can be sure that the actual words and gestures are being represented. This method is also applicable to written texts, such as the telegrams (chapter 5) between the heads of state immediately prior to the onset of the First World War. Written texts omit nonverbal components, but if sufficient attention is paid to both text and context, one can understand both surface and subsurface meanings in dialogue. Since the researcher is presenting the raw data and the method of analysis, the reader is empowered to confirm or criticize the interpretation, giving rise to a measure of reliability.

This method can also be used with dialogue as remembered by a participant or researcher. With this type of data, of course, the warrant of validity and reliability is less certain, since discourse that is filtered through the memory and perceptions of the reporter is subject to many kinds of distortion. Nevertheless, since this approach injects the remembered voices of named persons into an investigation, it offers an approximation of the least parts of a relationship. I have found this method to be of great help in teaching; many of my courses on social relationships begin with role-playing of dialogue as remembered by the students.

The analysis of a specific exchange (for example, the quarrels with parents, in chapter 8) usually catches the student's attention, since it suggests new features of which the student was unaware. It would not be an exaggeration to say that many students are astounded when they discover their own contributions to the problems they have with parents and lovers. In the context of similar exchanges of other students in quarrels with their parents, each single case takes on a heightened interest. By using both a single case and a comparative approach, the morphological method, each student can better understand her own quarrel in the context of the other students' quarrels, and vice versa (for example, those students who found new awareness through analysis of their own quarrel usually showed more sympathy with other students' parental quarrels).

Remembered dialogue can be useful in teaching and research, but the strongest warrant for validity and reliability can be obtained through the use of verbatim reproductions of social interaction or written materials. Verbatim records catch more of the least parts than field notes or verbal transcriptions of interviews, especially the gestural parts. Giving the reader access to the raw data, the exact voices of the participants, and the theory and method being used by the researcher, the reader is empowered to test the validity and reliability of the author's interpretations of the data. Just as important,

the social reality under study comes vividly alive for the reader. This method can be applied in such a way as to combine the advantages of the three most important current approaches in social science: eye-witness qualitative methods, quantitative methods, and theoretical analysis.

The introduction of the subjects' own voices as data systematically to be analyzed, directly in the final report, may overcome the relentless march of standardization, what Weber called routinization, into social science procedures. This trend has been noted in feminist scholarship (see particularly Krieger's [1991] forceful comments). Part/whole morphology incorporates the least parts, the clues to personal identity, into the ever larger wholes of sociological analysis.

Although my approach is a way of upgrading qualitative research by making it more objective and more systematic, in response to the crises of representation and legitimacy, it is also relevant to the practice of quantitative research. The success of a quantitative study does not depend entirely on technical questions such as research design, data gathering and analysis. It also depends on how accurate and how important the hypothesis that is being tested. Quantitative research is often of little importance because the hypotheses that are tested are too simple to catch human reality. They lack grounding in actual human behavior, what the French call *gout des terres*, the taste of the earth, the intricateness, ambiguity, and complexity of human experience. In these instances the skill and talent in conducting surveys or experiments is wasted, the hypotheses are too far afield to be worth testing.

The approach outlined here is one that attempts to generate increasingly accurate and general hypotheses by close examination of the actual reality of social life. By grounding investigation in examination of the "minute particulars" as Blake said, the least parts of single cases, and later in the comparison of these cases with one another in the context of larger wholes, one may generate hypotheses that are general and important. As pointed out, quantitative analysis leads to verification or disconfirmation of a hypothesis. But verification is the third step in part/whole morphology. Before taking the last step, it is usually necessary to take at least one of the earlier steps: exploration (conventional eyewitness field work using qualitative methods), and/or microanalysis of single specimens and comparison of specimens. Figure 1.1 can be used as a guide for beginning or expanding research in the human sciences.

In Elias's (1978) magisterial study of the civilizing process, he first analyzed excerpts from advice manuals from the same historical era in each of four European languages. These excerpts represent speci-

mens from the thirteenth century through the eighteenth. He also examined excerpts in the same four languages from the nineteenth century, showing a decided change in emotional content. His method involves both single cases and comparisons of cases in different languages and historical eras. For these reasons, his results are specific, general and important. But like literary analysts, his theory and method are not made explicit. Probably for that reason, his work has failed to have the impact it should have had.

In the approach advocated here, since verbatim texts are used, the researcher (and the reader) has the advantage of direct eye-witness observation of the behavior under consideration, as in the best qualitative methods. The researcher has access to features of the text which are often ignored by the participants, and to instant replay, which is also seldom available to the participants. If as suggested in the chapters that follow, the researcher provides the reader with a comprehensive description of the methods employed, the study, like quantitative methods, offers the reader exact definitions of concepts and procedures. Finally, as in the studies to be described below, if the study is either built on or generates general theoretical propositions, then it will have the advantage of being embedded in an abstract theoretical framework, which is the strength of current social science work in theory. Drawing on the strengths of these three areas, the studies presented in this book are therefore reminiscent of current research in the human sciences, because they combine some of the strongest elements in what is currently being done.

But in another way, all of the studies presented here will seem quite different than current studies, because each of them carries out the part/whole theme. As required by the part/whole paradigm, each study is multilevel and multidisciplinary. The studies involve microscopic examination of discourse, and understanding the results of microanalysis in the context of larger wholes, social institutions and cultural systems. The analysis of various levels also involves concepts and propositions from many disciplines, with emphasis on connecting social science propositions with concepts and propositions from history, political science, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. The method combines, therefore, what is often separated – for example, microlinguistic analysis of discourse, on the one hand, with social system analysis, on the other.

One feature of the studies presented here which may seem particularly strange and unusual is the pervasive focus on emotional elements in social interaction. Certain emotions, such as shame, pride, and anger, will be identified in virtually all of the episodes that are discussed. This focus does not mean that I think that all behavior is