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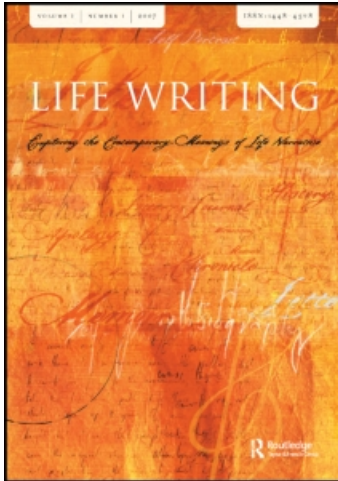
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To the letter: Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant* and writing a life, sociologically

Liz Stanley

Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* emphasises the importance of people representing their own lives, in written autobiographical life histories and more particularly in letter-writing and correspondences. Some of the canonical and disciplining processes that led to this book 'disappearing' from the key texts of sociology are outlined. However, the emphasis is on Thomas and Znaniecki's conceptualisation of the self around ideas about 'social becoming' as revealed by the relational and sequential nature of writing, over time, in letters and correspondences. Life writing, and in particular epistolarity, is central to their project, because the new ways in which people represent themselves and their lives in circumstances of social change and mass migration provide an index to the times and so make available in representational form what 'self' is and becomes under such conditions. Thomas and Znaniecki's notion of self is not inner-reflecting, but rather a socially-embedded, relational, situational and temporally-located self which reflects on the outer world of happenings and situations so as to re-engage with these. For them, it is less that people 'construct a self', in the sense of self-making, and more that a self is constructed and eventuates in situational, relational and responsive ways, with the representational forms of life writing providing the key to analysing this.

Keywords epistolarity; letters; self and society; W. I. Thomas; Florian Znaniecki; *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*

... life-records have a marked superiority over any other kinds of materials. We are safe in saying that personal life-records, as complete as possible, constitute the *perfect* type of sociological material ... (Thomas and Znaniecki emphasis original 1832)

On a Lost History

'Lost histories' exist across all the academic disciplines, a product of the canonical and disciplining processes prototypically at work (de Certeau, Trouillot), with traces of these appearing in palimpsest forms in once seismic theoretical and methodological debates and fierce controversies between competing schools and 'isms'. One of the founding classics of sociology, W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's (1918–1920, republished 1958) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, provides an intriguing glimpse of a lost disciplinary past centrally connected with life writing.

The Polish Peasant insisted on the importance of people representing and reflecting on their own lives and relationships, in written autobiographical life histories and more particular in letter-writing and correspondences with other people in their social networks; and it championed the view that an interacting, interpreting and self-reflecting self must central to a sociological view of social life. This guided its theoretical framework and analysis of empirical data, its rejection of both biological and psychological reductionisms, and its avoidance of seeing people's lives as determined by 'objective' conditions while not treating them as overly agentic either. *The Polish Peasant* was also distinctive in providing readers with the data its analyses worked from, in the form of over 750 letters in 50 family series, together with a life history some hundreds of pages long, third person newspaper files and third person reports from Polish-American welfare organisations.

That paradox, a 'neglected classic' and 'more revered and referred to than read' (Bulmer 50), few people now have read *The Polish Peasant* or realise its earlier influence in sociology and also anthropology, history and social psychology from its 1918 initial publication up to the early 1940s.¹ However, as the founding work of biographical sociology it is of considerably more than antiquarian interest, with three aspects in particular resonating with today's intellectual climate. Its methodological approach of working with 'naturally-occurring' sources of life writings still runs against the grain of structural and objectivist stances in the social sciences. Its insistence that sociology as a discipline must recognise the indissoluble nature of subjective and objective, self and society, individual and collectivity, action and structure, remains an anti-binary clarion-call. And its central engagement with letter-writing and epistolarity make it still highly distinctive, given the subsequent disciplinary emphasis on what Tilly (1984) has referred to as 'big structures, large processes, huge comparisons'.

The Polish Peasant was produced during the early period of Chicago School Sociology, between 1892 when the department was founded and 1918. Over this time, Chicago sociology was dominated intellectually by W. I. Thomas, Robert Park and Albion Small, well before the work of philosopher George Herbert Mead and the ideas of symbolic interactionism were promoted by Herbert Blumer and *post hoc* depicted as central (Bulmer, Deegan). Chicago sociology's concerns were broadly pragmatist,² which was not 'owned' by Pierce, James, Dewey and Mead, but rather a fluid and emergent set of ideas. These were contributed to by,

among others, Chicago's sociologists, among whom should be counted the women and men engaged in practical sociology and empirical research through Hull House.³ The boundaries between 'formal sociology' at Chicago and research and 'reform activities' at Hull House were complex and overlapping, one instance being that Helen Clever, heiress to the money underpinning Hull House's work, financed over a period of years the research by Thomas which eventuated in *The Polish Peasant*.⁴ Academic disciplines are complex entities, encompassing centres and peripheries, warring claimants to canonical status, divergent methodologies, conflicting theories and concepts. When once important components of disciplinary pasts 'vanish', this is usually connected with disciplining—as well as disciplinary—activities, which involve 'vanishing' in the active sense. The case of *The Polish Peasant* bears this out.

A review of the methodology of *The Polish Peasant* was commissioned by the US Social Science Research Council from Herbert Blumer⁵ and a conference in 1938 discussed this, involving key figures from sociology, anthropology, history and social psychology. It was followed by a set of reviews commissioned by the same body to further explore the influence of biographical approaches (Allport, Blumer *Critiques*, Gottschalk, Kluckhohn and Angell).⁶ On one level a confirmation of the book's importance, the review and conference proceedings stringently critiqued its methodology, particularly its use of letters, and gave little space to what even critics saw as its important substantive and theoretical contributions.⁷ One result was that later readers came to *The Polish Peasant* via this widely available (and re-published—see Blumer *Transaction Edition*) work, which emphasised only perceived weaknesses, rather than by reading the book itself.⁸

As its first volumes were published, a scandal erupted. In 1918, Thomas was arrested but not charged after a police raid found him in a hotel room with a woman not his wife and he was dismissed from his Chicago position.⁹ The publisher then refused to publish further volumes and when the book finally appeared with another publisher it was in a different format. Thomas' next book, *Old World Traits Transplanted*, appeared under the names of Robert Park and Herbert Miller to secure publication, with his authorship not publicly reassigned until the 1960s, and he never gained another permanent university post. In the 1938 conference proceedings, Thomas spoke infrequently, conceded every criticism made, downplayed or denied complimentary remarks or defences from other participants, and failed to mention his subsequent work which repaired under-explored aspects in *The Polish Peasant*. Reading the proceedings with hindsight, it is difficult not to see Thomas' stance as retreatism or defeatism.

However, in spite of Blumer's critique and Thomas' professional marginality, in 1938 *The Polish Peasant* was still highly influential in sociology and cognate disciplines and applied areas such as social and community work. But alongside this, a different style of sociology was gaining ascendancy in the US and elsewhere, positivist and structural in its concerns and with antithetical ideas about selves and society to those enshrined in *The Polish Peasant*. Signs of this

appear in the editorial material surrounding Blumer's critique and the 1938 conference proceedings, which emphasise the SSRC's brief in advancing ideas about scientific rigour. The champions of such were particularly successful during World War II, when sociology took a strongly positivist turn as part of securing state funding (Gouldner).

To the Letter: The Self, Writing a Life, Relationally and Sequentially

Thomas and Znaniecki emphasise that *The Polish Peasant* is not a monograph on Polish peasant society and immigration to the US, but a programmatic work establishing an independent and fully-articulated sociology discipline, with a distinctive social theory symbiotically connected to systematic empirical research, and an equally distinctive methodology linking these to enable defensible generalisations to be made about what it calls 'social becoming' (vii–viii). Its *Methodological Note* (1–86), the *Introductions* to its composing *Parts*, and the detailed *Introduction* to Part VI, the *Life-Record of An Immigrant* (1831–1914), all position sociology as a discipline in its own right which combines social theory and empirical investigation, reacting against the overly abstract concerns of disciplinary forebears (19). *The Polish Peasant* proclaims that:

The fundamental methodological principle [of sociology] ... is therefore the following one: *The cause of a social or individual phenomenon is never another social or individual phenomenon alone, but always a combination of a social and an individual phenomenon.* (44, emphasis original)

Thomas and Znaniecki define sociology as fundamentally 'about' researching and theorising social life as a whole, focusing on neither the personal (or sub-personal) level, nor structures, but their intermeshing. It also insists on the importance of people's self-representations and particularly life writing as the means of accessing this.

The theoretical framework of *The Polish Peasant* sees a basic temperament (a set of attitudes that 'add up') and character as an evolving entity, and it treats the self neither in terms of interiority nor of a fixed 'status' but always as a becoming. This involves a dynamic process involving people's responsiveness to what Thomas and Znaniecki call 'social organisation', that is, social groups and social situations and how the individual responds to them (1843–1907). 'The self' in this toolbox of ideas is a resolutely social one, conceived as self-reflecting bundles of characteristics and a broad temperament around which people are to varying degrees embedded in inter-connected social circles (primary groups, and a range of other social groups and institutions) and are, again to varying degrees, responsive to regulatory norms and expectations in these. Reductionist and static notions of self are eschewed: self is always in a state of becoming because receptive to (and thus in practice shaped by) social situations and relations; and what people learn is not 'habit' or fixed ways of behaving in society, but instead

‘rules for ...’ (1851–1853) how to interpret the emergent definition of the situation and respond to it.

The self in *The Polish Peasant* is reflective as well as responsive, including through life writing, because of the particular conditions of social change then ongoing, specifically world mass migrations. As early as 1912, Thomas was concerned with exploring change and migration by using ‘undersigned’ sources in which people represented their own lives in their own terms (Bulmer 51), rather than responding to the pre-conceived ideas of researchers in interviews, experiments or surveys. Writing a self—more precisely, writing, over time, the becoming of a life in letters—has characteristics which make it particularly suitable for the analysis Thomas and Znaniecki wanted to make, because it takes a responsive, dialogical and serial form. Sending and exchanging letters demonstrates a relationship in its written incarnation, for correspondences are part (and, when people migrate, sometimes the entirety) of a relationship, not a removed commentary on it. Such exchanges involve series, temporality and becoming—each consecutive letter is written and read at successive points in time, and the series as a whole enables something of the process of changes and becoming for the people involved to be grasped, through the content of what they write, but especially concerning the form and mode of what is written.

On life records more generally, Thomas and Znaniecki note that a series of data connects present behaviour by someone with their past behaviour and helps indicate the responses from others too (1832–1837). In particular, examining a series of letters enables a researcher to see how a social institution is experienced and interpreted by the letter-writers and their family. The ‘causes’ of social happenings, in the sense of how people understand these, can thereby be traced back through their temporal antecedents: correspondences show ‘social becoming’ because they enable the development of events and responses to be mapped out, at least in outline. And because letters emanate from members of a social circle, they indicate patterns of inter-relationships, rather than information about individuals, and their form and function is a product of social milieu and also ‘the changing times’ people are living in.

The analysis of letters in *The Polish Peasant* focuses on their ‘form and function’, rather than specific content. Exchanges of letters are seen to provide a rich index of change and social becoming because, for the peasant people concerned, writing letters was difficult, done in circumstances where there were no cultural traditions that favoured writing, there were other demands on their time, and there was generally either partial literacy or its complete absence. That people *did* write and read (or have written and read for them) many letters shows that this was ‘a social duty of a ceremonial function, and the traditional, fixed form of peasant letters is a sign of their social function’ (303). This new ‘social duty’ required people to write letters, when they did not previously: it was a product of change and the migratory movements of many people away from their families, something which had not occurred previously in Polish peasant society. And in circumstances of only functional literacy, some people wrote letters, but many more dictated them for others to write down,

with varying results and differential impacts on the recipient.¹⁰ Letter-writing, then, for Thomas and Znaniecki has specific functions in the context of the socio-economic changes occurring at the time of their investigation: it is part of this change and provides an index of it; and across correspondences, patterns of social disorganisation and then re-organisation can be discerned.

The many letters that resulted from peasant migrations, Thomas and Znaniecki suggest, are variations of one fundamental type, the 'bowing' letter, which has a largely formulaic composition (304–305). It starts with ritual greetings to the recipient. It provides information about the writer. It then 'bows' and presents greetings to family members back in Poland or, from the other side of the exchange, to absent family members abroad. It is a ceremonial expression that supports the continuation of relationships in changed social circumstances, so maintaining social bonds (303–315).

For Thomas and Znaniecki, the 'bowing' letter is of particular significance because it is the only kind of peasant letter that has an 'original function' (304)—that is, it has no parallel or analogue in face-to-face relationships. They suggest there are five types of familial letters, 'each of which is also and fundamentally a bowing letter' (305) and all of which are vicarious, substituting for aspects of face-to-face interaction between people. These are *ceremonial* letters, replacing speeches in family gatherings; *informing* letters, providing a narration of information to breach the separation and replace everyday conversation; *sentimental* letters, designed to revive emotional bonds outside of any ceremonial meeting; *literary* letters, acting as an entertainment for the recipient, with such things previously done in verses, songs and so on in social gatherings; and *business* letters, because peasants resort to letters only when distances are too great for an otherwise ubiquitous 'business in person' approach.

Peasant letters utilise traditional ways of writing, where formulaic phrases stand for complex sets of attitudes and the letter-exchanges are highly ritualised (306–308). At the same time, as Thomas and Znaniecki point out, this means that even small variations can indicate considerable feeling through minor divergences from the expected. This provides people with a very powerful way of expressing a range of emotions and 'messages' to the recipient. Family letters are the only type Thomas and Znaniecki consider in detail, although the existence of other forms are certainly acknowledged in comments such as 'Letters to strangers can perform all the functions of a family letter, but the essential one of maintaining solidarity ...' and 'Correspondences with a stranger can also help establish a connection ...' (306–308). But their emphasis is definitely upon family connections because family letters are seen to provide an index of the wider changes then occurring.

The actual correspondences between members of extended family groups appear in *The Polish Peasant* (316–1114), a total of 764 letters in 50 family series. Each family series has an introduction sketching out its main features and analytical interest, relating these letters to other families from the same village, and providing information necessary for the reader's understanding which is not

in a particular letter, such as factual information about the family group and about peasant society more generally. The letters overall are used to show the 'becoming' of people's attitudes and behaviours in situations of change over time. These situations are conditioned by the normal internal and external processes to which family organisation traditionally adapted itself, and also by the new changes and external influences it subsequently had to respond to. These include economic change, movement to cities and migration abroad, all major investigatory concerns that arise from Thomas and Znaniecki's analysis of the letters. Letters, they observe, do not display the analytical concerns of researchers, but rather, over time, correspondences indicate 'the dominant situation in which the group or family member finds itself, and the progressive disintegration of the family group' (316), with new forms of integration and organisation eventually arising out of this. For example, their introduction to the Osinski series (394–400) points out that these letters demonstrate the coexistence of old and new ways, with the family losing some functions but also gaining new adaptations.

Distinctively, Thomas and Znaniecki provide details of what they did with their data, working back and forth between their research materials and the different levels of analysis they engaged in, in their different kinds of introductions and footnotes. Blumer's critique focused on the fact that Thomas and Znaniecki did not work in the strictly inductivist way their *Methodological Note* suggested, and he emphasised that many footnoted interpretations cannot be made to 'stick' to the particular section of a letter they are attached to. However, the footnotes contain different kinds of comments, providing *factual information*, both background and foreground; *explanations of elliptical comments* or phrases; *accounts of general points* concerning the research materials; *interpretive commentaries*; and abstract statements from or about *social theory*. Contra Blumer, then, the footnotes are very mixed in character.

So precisely how did Thomas and Znaniecki work their data, if not in a strictly inductivist way? They outline the process as starting with the general and specific and analysing this to reach generally applicable conclusions by comparison with like cases. They emphasise that this is not an individualist approach, but a matter of locating people in their social milieu:

The original object-matter of every science is constituted by particular data existing in a certain place, at a certain time, in certain special conditions, and it is the very task of science to reach, by a proper analysis of these data, generally applicable conclusions ... Every individual ... must be first taken and understood in connection with his [sic] particular social milieu (1911)

This gives rise, not to comparisons of individuals or specific events, but rather the construction of general 'types' (of persons, personalities, social milieu, social situations ...) and then comparisons of specific cases against the type (70–71). Thomas and Znaniecki's analysis of such a large and complicated set of research materials as these letter series was necessarily unfolding, cumulative

and emergent, because the data needed to be analysed and re-analysed over many re-readings. Their different kinds of footnotes seemingly represent different aspects or stages of their analysis, so that reaching a conclusion to an aspect of their unfolding analysis then led them to loop back and rework the content of earlier as well as later footnotes and also to reformulate their different kinds of introductory sections. The introductions and footnoting throughout the 2244 pages of *The Polish Peasant* should be seen in this light, as a series of iterative moves in working back and forth between detailed specificities and general types, then comparisons of these, with their analysis and interpretation a dynamic one rather than having a 'once and for all' character.

The Polish Peasant contains what is now called 'retrievable data'. Research accounts conventionally provide conclusions and arguments, and merely snippets of data are provided to support what are in effect closed texts. However, *The Polish Peasant* presents the data used and the majority of the detailed analytical work involved in unpacking themes, issues and meanings across this material. As a consequence, readers can themselves analyse this data and consequently accept or dispute interpretational comments by Thomas and Znaniecki. Their analysis can be interrogated from an opposing intellectual standpoint, in the way it was by Blumer, because it provides the detailed means to do so, not because it is more problematic than other research. But given the changed intellectual climate from around 1940, this feature of *The Polish Peasant* allowed a measuring-rod composed by the canons of 'big science' to be applied, with its analytical procedures found wanting when measured against them.¹¹ Succinctly, if it had been written conventionally, then its deemed-to-be problematic aspects would not have been known about, as with other research, which prototypically brackets the analytical processes involved.

Plummer has influentially championed life histories and the documents of life in sociology, but also comments negatively that letters contain shifting perspectives between writer and recipient and have a high 'dross rate' because they are 'not generally focused enough to be of analytic interest' (Plummer 55). In a similar vein, Brewer's interesting discussion of Adam Ferguson's letters sees these and other letters in terms of their 'privacy': letters open a window into people's private thoughts and feelings, but thinks this is a faulty one because of what he sees as their shaky factual accuracy, mundane content, and failure to focus on the analytical concerns of researchers. However, these characteristics make letters sociologically and in other ways interesting, as Thomas and Znaniecki's discussion of the perspective and partiality of letters emphasises (1831–1914). Their approach, like much current epistolary scholarship (Barton and Hall 1999, Decker 1998, Earle 1999, Montefiore and Hallett 2002, Stanley 2004), engages with the social and indexical properties of exchanges of letters in changing times because this provides a window on *the social*, not the personal. *The Polish Peasant* shares with such work a relational and dialogical approach to thinking about self in society, in which series and temporality are important to understanding the processes of personal and social becoming, and thus to

theorising and analysing change. Consequently, 'point of view' and the grounded particularities of how someone understands and writes about their interpretation of events, situations and circumstances, is a focus of analytic interest rather than disparaged by Thomas and Znaniecki.

The Relational and Situational Self

The idea of 'the self' in *The Polish Peasant* is relational, situational and sequential, with writing a life, seriality and temporality seen as essential for gauging the processes of social becoming. For Thomas and Znaniecki, the self is a supremely social self and has only residual interiority. However, *The Polish Peasant* did not disappear from the history of life writing and theorising the self because of high-minded debates over such conceptual matters. It was instead *vanished*, with some of the means by which its substantive and theoretical contributions were ignored and its methodological ones denigrated indicated earlier. As a consequence, a more inquiring eye should be cast on the view of Chicago sociology produced from 1940 on. This includes the 'translations' of Mead's posthumous work from notes by former students and Blumer's (*Symbolic Interactionism*) interpretation of Mead as central to Chicago sociology and interactionism, and it requires ignoring Mead's publications that do not fit the view of him as an abstract theoretician. Consequently Stevi Jackson's (this issue) engagement with 'the other Mead' is particularly welcomed.

Specifying origins and first causes for complex ideas provides a hostage to fortune, because other influences and multiple sources can often be found. This is so in case of the 'social self', which was not just a product of pragmatism, nor of Mead's work and interactionism, but had broader (and longer) origins. And while pragmatist philosophy is interesting in its own right, there is no need to position it as the source of interactionism, given there are perfectly good *sociological* roots for it (Atkinson and Housely).¹² The work of Thomas played a significant part in the origins of interactionism (recognising that *The Polish Peasant* is only part of this), as did, for instance, that of Dilthey and Simmel as well as Mead and the pragmatists. It is also worth noting that Thomas and Mead arrived in Chicago the same year, were friends, were both involved with Hull House, and mutually influenced each other (Deegan 105–141). There are, however, significant differences, in particular concerning their ideas about the self.

The view of the social, relational and situational self advanced by Thomas and Znaniecki avoids the pitfalls of over-voluntarism versus over-determinism just as satisfactorily as Mead's work. Indeed more so, because Mead's account is an abstract one, while *The Polish Peasant* has a theory *and practice* of agency which is neither determined not entirely voluntaristic, and which runs right the way through its theory, methodology and analysis of data. Moreover, unlike in much postmodernist-influenced theory, social change for Thomas and Znaniecki is in fact not 'flux', but an ordinary feature of social life to which people respond as

an everyday part of relationships and interactions (and doing so even when such change takes a more dramatic turn), as *The Polish Peasant* explores through its many pages. Its term ‘social becoming’ is a low key and appropriate term indicating the mundane qualities of the moment by moment quality of what social change usually is at the level of persons and their lives.

The social self of *The Polish Peasant* is not centrally concerned with reflexivity, particular in the strong ‘interiority’ sense assigned to this by some commentators. Mead’s notion of self as a reflecting back on self, even in the complex form of its temporal construction from particular locations and temporalities, is rather different from Thomas and Znaniecki’s fully social self resulting from external situational and interactional happenings rather than from an inner process of reflexivity. For Mead, mind and self interconnect through language and the self is a speaking subject, although not entirely conscious and voluntaristic because mind and self are not identical. Such concerns, however, are out with Thomas and Znaniecki’s (perhaps ironically, given Thomas’s later association with social psychology), for the ‘interior’ of the notion of self in *The Polish Peasant*, its attitudes, character and temperament, is seen as almost entirely porous to the social, to happenings, relationships, situations.

Thomas and Znaniecki’s self is not conceived as an inner-reflecting but rather as a socially-embedded, relational, situational and temporally-located being which reflects on the outer world of happenings and situations in order to re-engage with these. Succinctly, theirs is a less psychological and more fully social self than Mead’s. For Thomas and Znaniecki, it is less that people ‘construct a self’, in the sense of self-making, and more that a self is constructed and eventuates in situational, relational and responsive ways. The self for them is not fixed (through habits), but is a becoming over time and in a social context, as they discuss in detail (1831–1914). ‘Incoherence’ is not an option in this view of selves and society: they emphasise that ‘disorganisation’ and ‘reorganisation’ are both always present in social becoming, and it is not people who become ‘disorganised’ but social circumstances (1127). One result is that Thomas and Znaniecki’s view of self and becoming sees this as involving more conflict, more challenge from external factors. While Mead sees mind as an emergent process of language, Thomas sees ‘mind itself [as] the product of crisis’, with ‘the degree of progress of a people ... [having] a certain relation to the nature of the disturbances encountered ...’ (Thomas *Source Book* 17–18).

Although they do not use the word itself, narration appears in Thomas and Znaniecki’s social theory in a particular way. They are not interested in narrative in the sense of the telling of stories *about* a life and a self. Instead their analysis is concerned with stories, primarily the written stories in Polish peasant letters and Wladek’s life history, because they *are* (part of) social life, not a proxy for or a commentary about it. Thomas and Znaniecki do not make any cod-materialist distinction between ‘words and things’; they reject treating words as a kind of *post hoc* report on social life, seeing them instead as a constitutive part of the action. They are thoroughgoing materialists, or rather thoroughgoing *sociologists*, for they are very clear that the social and the personal cannot be divorced

and that the social is detectable and traceable in ongoing, grounded and everyday social activities. Mead's version of the self is rightly seen by Jackson () as 'narrative construction and as lived and experienced'. However, Thomas and Znaniecki's self is much more a *narratable* self, one that is occasioned, situational and *produced*, rather than the result of interiority and tellings of the results of a self-reflective process. Mead's approach results in a version of the self which is perhaps more voluntaristic, around interiority and reflexivity. Thomas and Znaniecki's approach is less voluntaristic, more responsive, and while it retains some notion of an 'inner', it positions this as in effect residual to the social because almost entirely permeated by it.

Re-thinking Mead returns to cite his interesting theories of self and time and rightly emphasises these as still highly pertinent for contemporary thinking about selves and lives. Doing so regarding *The Polish Peasant* brings back to sight a lost or vanished opportunity, because sociology as it developed post-1940 could have been based on, or at least have contained within it, Thomas and Znaniecki's biographical sociology. *The Polish Peasant* still has considerable contemporary relevance, not least concerning the way it conceives the analytical relationship between social becoming, relationality and 'selves, writing'. In Thomas and Znaniecki's scheme of things, writing is perhaps not fundamental, but the new ways in which people represent themselves and their lives in circumstances of separation and radical change most certainly are. For them, the 'form and function' of representation in letters provides an index to the times and to social becoming, through its articulation in communicative relations between people separated by space and through time. Currently new forms of 'the letter', such as email and text, enable people to seemingly bridge space and time regarding different kinds and durations of separation in the contemporary world (Zuern). Clearly Thomas and Znaniecki were onto something very important about the nature of change and social becoming and how people respond to it, and 'the letter' remains absolutely central to this.

Notes

- [1] Fairchild's (524) review commented that 'this work is unique', while Faris (816) on the new edition suggested that it was 'a strong competitor for the position of the most valuable contribution to American sociological literature'.
- [2] Pragmatism was concerned with the practical consequences of action and so the primacy of social practice, and promoted the non-reification of theories and concepts for investigating this, which should instead be empirically grounded.
- [3] In part modelled on Toynbee Hall, but more radical, less religious and more women-friendly, Hull House was concurrently a settlement, a place for research and a locus of intellectual and reforming activity; see Deegan.
- [4] Mead and Thomas both lectured at Hull House, were close to Jane Addams and generally supported its women members; see Deegan 118–120.
- [5] Blumer's main criticisms were: the letters were not analysed inductively; the meanings of the letters come from the introductions and footnotes rather than being self-evident; 'the letters do not meet the methodological requirements' and

also did not meet 'the rigid application of scientific canons' regarding their representativeness, adequacy, reliability and validity, although taken as a whole and given their diverse origins they had considerable consistency (Blumer *Critiques* 35–37).

- [6] Indicatively, when Blumer's report and the conference proceedings were published in 1939, the focus moved from *The Polish Peasant* onto Blumer's critique; thus in the Allport and Gottschalk et al. reports, *The Polish Peasant* is viewed through this lens, while in 1979 it was Blumer's critique which was re-published in a series of 'social science classics' and not *The Polish Peasant* itself.
- [7] For an interesting contemporary commentary, see Moore.
- [8] For its publishing history, see Bulmer 238.
- [9] This was probably a political strike against Thomas and his then wife Helen Park, because of their friendship with Jane Addams and involvement with Hull House and pacifist activities. Addams, a key figure in US pacifism around World War One, was seen as tantamount to a traitor; Park's and Thomas' 'bohemian' marriage was also frowned upon.
- [10] Thomas and Znaniecki comment about a daughter and son of the Osinski family doing this for their mother Wiktorya (427), for instance.
- [11] As some commentators in the 1938 conference proceedings noted, Blumer's measures of scientific rigour were more stringently required of *The Polish Peasant* than was usually so of sociological research.
- [12] Consequently I am *not* proposing that Thomas should replace Mead as 'the leading figure', but emphasising the multi-appearance of these ideas.

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