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William H. Sewell, Jr.

Interviewed by Elliott Shore
June 23, 1995

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Telefax (609) 924-8399 Telephone (609) 734-8000 Telex 229 734 IASUP

Interview with William Sewell, Jr.

June 23, 1995 in Chicago, Illinois

interviewed by Elliott Shore

Shore: Good morning, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss your years at the Institute with you. You came as a five-year member in 1975 from the University of Chicago. Was that your first contact with the Institute?

Sewell: No. I was actually a visiting member in 1971-2. So I was already acquainted with Carl Kaysen and with Cliff and they were acquainted with me. I am sure that if I hadn't been there, it would never had occurred to them to invite me because I was a young person without much name recognition at that point. I think Quentin also had been at the Institute as a member.

Shore: He had been a member two years after that, in 1973-4.

Sewell: Yes, that sounds right.

Shore: Did they discuss then the possibility that you would come back?

Sewell: To me it came out of the blue. I got a call from Cliff Geertz when he was in Chicago once and said "I've got something that I want to talk to you about." So he came up to my office and then said that they would be

interested in my coming to the Institute for three years, which was the original proposal. I was sort of astounded at that. So no, there was no prior discussion. I think, as I understand it, what these long-term positions came out of was the Bellah affair. Of course, they had wanted to appoint Bellah to get another Professor, and after appointing Hirschman, they weren't going to make any other appointments but they would use the money that was available for a professorial appointment to bring in a couple of younger people who would be around for a longer time. The initial proposal for both of us was for three years.

Shore: Was that explicitly said that this was because of the Bellah affair?

Sewell: I think that was explicit. Yes, that they were really not in the position to appoint anybody full-time for the time being. But that they wanted to have more continuity than they would with just two professors. I am not sure who it was actually who told me that, whether it was Cliff or Carl later.

Shore: Was this in any sense a try-out for a professorship, or that it might lead to a professorship?

Sewell: In my case it was explicitly excluded. I was just looking over the letter and the letter says you have this appointment and you can leave anytime you want if you find some other place you would like to go to. So that

it is open from that point of view, but you should recognize that this should not be seen as a step to a possible full-time position here. I suspect that the same thing was said to Quentin, although he was later talked to about a possible professorial appointment.

Shore: But that was in the School of Historical Studies.

Sewell: It may have been in Historical Studies.

Shore: And that was, I think, a lot later.

Sewell: Yes.

Shore: So you left Chicago in 1971 to come here and then left again in '75?

Sewell: I left in '71 to be a visiting member for a year the way anybody does. And had a wonderful time that year. I had just finished my dissertation so I was pretty fresh and pretty exhausted because I had been teaching here for three years as an instructor and trying to finish up my dissertation at the same time, so it came at a terrific time for me.

Shore: And what were you working on then?

Sewell: I was working on a revision of my dissertation, which, partly thanks to my later stay at the Institute, never got turned into a book! It is on the working class of Marseilles in the 19th century.

Shore: And you used some of that material in the book that you did at the Institute?

Sewell: I used some of that in the book, and I've published four

articles that came out of that. And then there was a subsequent book on social mobility and migration in Marseilles that was based on that material. But the core part of the dissertation never got published.

Shore: Were you the youngest person there in 1971?

Sewell: There were other people who were about the same age. The Historical Studies School had at that time what was called the Herodotus Fellow...

Shore: They still do.

Sewell: ...which was for someone who was under thirty-five, so that there was a guy there who was just about my age. But the group in the Social Science School was fairly gerontological. There was one other person, Richard Fox, an anthropologist, who was probably in his mid-thirties, since he is a few years older than I. But after that, it was mostly Reinhard Bendix and David Riesman.

Shore: The senior social scientists.

Sewell: Gershenkron, Louis Dumont. So the seniors were very senior at that point.

Shore: Did you have more to do with the School of Historical Studies in that first stay than you did the second time around?

Sewell: No, I wouldn't say so. I would say that at all times I had a lot more to do with the School of Social Science than with the School of Historical Studies. Although it was true early on, and I think even more true in my later

years, that a half to a third of the people in Historical Studies organized their extra-curricular intellectual life around the Social Science seminar. A number of them were involved in smaller, pick-up seminar groups. So that in those years at least, between 1975 and 1980, it was a period of truce and limited cooperation between the Schools.

Shore: And in 1971 as well?

Sewell: 1971 was before the Bellah affair so there were no particular hostilities going on at that point. Although I don't remember an enormous amount of intellectual contact with the people in the Historical Studies school. But during those years between '75 and '80, there was really a lot of contact and a number of people, I would say, spiritually moved lock, stock and barrel into the Social Science luncheon seminar and the tables of the social scientists. These were mostly people who were modernists, people working on modern history as opposed to the ancient history types. Although there were even a few of them who were somewhat involved.

Shore: They were joined by John Elliott and Felix Gilbert?

Sewell: John Elliott, Felix Gilbert and also Irving Lavin, who, at that point at least, was quite closely involved with the social scientists.

Shore: Quentin Skinner, in our interview, talked about crossing a line. That there seemed to be a line drawn between the

two Schools. But you are describing a more fluid kind of relationship.

Sewell: Yes. I would say that there was, as I understood it, considerable hostility from the days of the Bellah affair between the faculties of the two Schools. But Gilbert, Lavin and John Elliott were friends of the Social Science School, I guess you would say. They were kind of interstitial figures in this respect. I mean obviously they were located in the Historical Studies School, but they were kind of a dissenting group in a way or a moderate group or something within the Historical Studies School. And they had really quite active social relations, personal relations and intellectual relations with people in Social Sciences. On the other hand, the medievalists and the ancient folks were, I think, pretty hard-core opponents of the Social Science school right along.

Shore: Did that manifest itself in the day-to-day life of the place or did it affect the lives of the visiting members?

Sewell: I don't know how much it affected the lives of the visiting members. I suspect, that if you were a medievalist, that you might have felt some pressures from them not to hang around too much with the social scientists. But for the most part it manifested itself in daily life in the sense that there was one particular table at lunch that we used to call the pipesmokers'

table. Kenneth Setton and Cherniss, Habicht, Clagget -- that whole group -- and then there would be a few people each year who would spend some time with them at that table, I imagine, harrumphing their way through lunch. So there was that kind of a manifestation of a group of people who were making a statement of solidarity by sitting together at the lunch tables and not mixing all that much with others. But, you see, one of the things about the Historical Studies School is that it had an individual scholar-in-the-study ethos. Consequently, they didn't have alternative activities really. The art historians did: there was always an art history seminar. But as I say, the relations between the art historians and the social scientists were generally pretty loose and there was quite a bit of flow back and forth there. But the Historical Studies School didn't have its own seminar. They expected you to sit in your office and struggle with your work. So there is a sense that if you wanted any kind of collegial intellectual action, the obvious place to go was the Social Science luncheon, because that met every week and there were both historians and social scientists involved. My sense is not that there were two competing sets of activities, that were parallel activities. I don't think the historians were pulled between one School and the other because the historians weren't trying to keep them in

seminars of their own, they didn't do seminars.

Shore: So there is a different ethos there... It isn't quite collaborative scholarship in the School of Social Science, though?

Sewell: No, no, not at all. By social scientists' standards, it is a fairly individualist, a kind of artisanal style of research rather than industrialized research. It certainly is not an ethos of joint research. I would guess that a very small number of joint articles and projects came out of the Social Science School. But there was an ethos of sharing of ideas and quite intensive discussion, both in formal settings and in much more informal settings, such as coffee in the morning, tea in the afternoon and lunch. Sometimes there were days when you spent more time talking than writing or reading. And that was really, for me at least, quite exciting.

Shore: Not to stay too long with the School of Historical Studies, but in some sense I think that the School of Social Science can better be understood in relation to the School of Historical Studies. It sounds like the historians may have seen it almost as a challenge or a different way of working with which they were not comfortable and therefore they needed to make this statement? I am groping for a way to understand why this antagonism developed, if the antagonism is not just

because of Bellah. Is it about two different ways of doing work?

Sewell: Well, it certainly is partly about two different ways of doing work. The Historical Studies School as it existed when I was first there in 71-72 was -- I came from a history department and I didn't recognize it as history the way it was practiced in most history departments -- very philological in style. I would say a very conservative style of scholarship. My sense is, I can't talk to this, I am sure that Carl Kaysen could, probably in great detail, but my sense is that part of the reason the Social Science School was founded in the first place is that the evolution of the School of Historical Studies was towards a very conservative philological style of scholarship that didn't allow for the new styles of historical work. Interpretive work, quantitative methods were simply beyond the pale as far as the historians in Historical Studies were concerned. And even modern history...

Shore: But they were even two or three modernists, they were Renaissance and after, I would guess -- not really modernists-- or four, if you count Morton White, also someone who is in the modern period.

Sewell: Yes, but notice two of those were Renaissance. So my comparison with a normal history department in the U.S. would have about half of the people working on American

history, which means necessarily modern, and then the half of the remainder are modern Europeanists and then there are other that work on modern Japan or China. So that the people working on this kind of philological style model are a small minority in history departments but were the dominant group in the School of Historical Studies.

Shore: So you are suggesting that perhaps Kaysen was asked to set up this School for this very purpose?

Sewell: I don't know if he was asked to or he was frustrated by the kind of conservatism of the Historical Studies School. The intellectual conservatism -- I don't think it is a political question, really. And he just felt that somehow they needed to enliven and open the style of work on historical and social questions. But that is speculative, I don't really know that.

Shore: Let's leave that topic for now. I had a question about leaving Chicago for a three-year period. Was that a problem? Did you have to leave?

Sewell: I did have to leave, it was quite complicated, actually. As I said, I was originally invited for a three-year term and so I went to my chair and said that I had gotten this nice proposal, that I liked Chicago very much and what I would prefer to do would be to get a leave for three years. This chairman was not someone who had a great deal of sympathy with me, nor I with him for that matter.

Shore: You were in the history department at that time?

Sewell: I was in the history department at that time. I don't remember if he turned down right away any request for a three-year leave but pretty quickly it turned into a question of whether I could get a two-year leave and that I would take a two-year appointment and then return. And that hung on for three or four weeks before finally he decided that no more than a one-year leave could be granted. So I then called Carl Kaysen and told him that that was the case and I didn't know what to do, I was really in a pickle, so Carl said: "Let's make it five years." At that point I thought, it is a risk, obviously, leaving a good place -- I didn't have tenure -- that was part of the reason about the hesitation of giving me an extended leave. Carl upped the ante to five years and at that point I thought it would be crazy not to take it. This is something that doesn't come along more than once in a life, normally. So I took it, but it was complicated to do partly because I had this jerk as the chair of the department. He was not sympathetic to my work.

Shore: Was he also not sympathetic to the School?

Sewell: Well, he's a medievalist, actually. He was later a member of the Historical Studies School. He may have been a member at an earlier time of Historical Studies. So it was possible that that was going on, but I don't

think so. I think this had to do with more local antagonisms. He and I didn't see eye to eye. It was a very divided department at that point and I was on a different side on most issues. So, I think in a way, he was happy to get rid of me.

Shore: You state in Work and Revolution in France, that the writing of that book was not the reason you came to the Institute. Did you have some other project in mind or did you just decide you were going to find something while you were there?

Sewell: No, the project I had in mind actually was doing a very thorough revision of my dissertation. At that point I had just finished my third or fourth year in a tenure track so I was gearing up to get that book published. So what I thought I would do was publish an extensively revised version of my dissertation, that that would be the first project and that it would take a year or two and then I would go on to something else. I had already been working on cultural interpretations of the French Revolution, so that was what I had thought of as the next project. But what actually happened was, when I came that first year, that it was absolutely fabulous.

Shore: The first year that you came back?

Sewell: Yes, '75-'76. That was the year that Cliff Geertz had brought in a number of people doing symbolic anthropology.

Shore: The Rosaldos were there.

Sewell: The Rosaldos, Victor Turner, David Sapir, an anthropologist who teaches at Virginia, Keith Basso and his then-wife Ellen Basso was teaching at the Princeton Department, so she was involved. Then there were other anthropologists from Princeton and also a number of historians from Princeton who were involved in this tremendous ferment of cross-fertilization between anthropology and history. Once I had experienced about a month or so of that ferment, I decided that what I should really do is to take advantage of the fact that all of these people are here and work on what's really the second project. And that is what turned into Work and Revolution.

Shore: You let yourself get caught up in the place?

Sewell: Yes, I let myself get caught up in the place. In the tremendous ferment and intensity of the discussions in the symbolic anthropology seminar. So I produced a paper for that seminar, the paper that overflowed all of its bounds, and eventually became, five years later, Work and Revolution.

Shore: This is a question that I've asked a number of people, and it seems to be a constant theme, and it sounds like we are getting close to it now: The time in a scholar's career that it makes sense to come to the Institute. I've heard different things from different people, and

one is that what you did is a very dangerous thing to do. That it is a lot better to come with something you are writing and then partake but not let yourself get drawn into it because you can end up getting too much drawn into it. Could you speak to that?

Sewell: Had I had just another one-year visiting position, or even a two-year visiting position, I am sure that what I would have done was to finish that book, because I would have had to have done it to get tenure. I would certainly have participated in the symbols seminar, as we called it, but I couldn't have thrown myself into that style of work nearly as fully. It was really only because I knew that it was five years before I had to pay the piper that I was willing to throw myself into it as fully as possible. I guess my sense is that any time that you can get a year off and be at the Institute and just be away from all of the pressures of daily life at your job is a good time. My sense was that in some ways the best time is relatively early in a project . Once you are really launched into your writing, you can continue that writing over the course of a couple of summers. What you could really do exceptionally well at the Institute was undertake a new project -- it might be good for inventing a project -- but the best would be if you had an inkling, and maybe more than an inkling of a new project and it was a chance to really think

expansively about a project. That is in effect what I ended up doing. But I saw a number of other people really do the same thing. I also saw people invent projects there. Renato Rosaldo, for example, was revising his dissertation at that point, so he was at the same stage on the career ladder that I was, beginning to feel the fire at his back. What he did in his year at the Institute in '75-'76 was very thoroughly rethink what that project was going to be. He turned it into a profoundly historical project rather than a purely synchronic, typical anthropological field study project. That was, I think, tremendously productive for him, so he got quite a bit of writing done and he rethought the project, so that by the time he got back to Stanford with another two or three years to go to finish the book, he knew what that book was going to be. So I think for him, it came at exactly the right time.

Shore: So for a young scholar that sounds like a good moment. For an older scholar who is further along, is it the same kind of process? Because I have seen people coming to the Institute defending their intellectual position as well as those who are willing to dive in. And it seems to me that it takes an enormous amount of intellectual courage to do what you did. Maybe there is no perfect time?

Sewell: Different people have such different styles. It is nice

as a place where you can do a write-up. But if you are doing a write-up, you are really impervious to influence. You have to be at that point. So it is a very convenient time to get that done. But I think it is a much less productive point in a project to be there than at a point when you are open. If you are open to suggestion and to reconceptualizing aspects of your project, it is a tremendously invigorating experience. It may slow up your work, of course.

Shore: But if you have the luxury of some more time... So a longer than one-year stint would always be something worth having?

Sewell: Well, it would always be terrific, but it doesn't happen.

Shore: I guess it is harder now to get away for longer.

Sewell: It is for various reasons. The universities are probably tighter and tougher about that. It also tends to be much more difficult because almost everybody has a working spouse at this point. In some ways, the late 70s was where that was beginning to be a serious problem. In '71-'72, it wasn't. It was basically men who were at the Institute, with very few exceptions, and their wives came along.

Shore: Was that a problem for you in '75-'76? Were you already married?

Sewell: I was married before I came in '71. My wife wasn't working at that point, in '75-'76. She was an A.B.D.

thinking about actually writing a dissertation which she wound up never writing. An A.B.D. in political theory, and she had worked at N.O.R.C. in sociological research, so she had a considerable intellectual investment in the sort of thing that was going on at the Institute. She became a member of seminars and intellectual participant in a way that did not lead to a career but meant a few very good years for her. So in her case it wasn't difficult. They were very good years for us, the years at the Institute.

Shore: Did you live in the housing or in a house?

Sewell: We lived at the house at the end of Olden Lane, the farm house as it was then called. Since then I think it has become some kind of administrative offices.

Shore: I think it might be where the School of Classical Studies in Athens is now.

Sewell: I think that is right.

Shore: Although there is a faculty member who lives in a house down there too.

Sewell: Yes, there are two houses down there. Ours was the one that looks more like a farm house, that is right at the end of the lane.

Shore: Could we talk a little bit about what you mentioned before we began the interview as the ancillary social life in Princeton, obviously different than living in a big city?

Sewell: One of the things that is fun about the Institute is that it is like summer camp. Everybody arrives and they are in a new location, they don't have their usual friends and contacts. So people tended to make friends very rapidly. Part of the role that Ellen and I, my wife and I, assumed, because it was something that we liked to do, was that we were the party-masters for the Social Science School. Part of this arose out of this extraordinary first year, the anthropologists' year. It is well-known that anthropologists are better at parties than sociologists or historians or folks like that. Victor Turner was also there. Victor Turner was one of the ultimate party boys. Loved parties, loved to dance, to sing...he had a lot of parties, we had a lot of parties, the Rosaldos had a lot of parties. So part of what made that year really so successful intellectually was that we spent a lot of time with each other in the evenings, having big dinners together and at dancing parties, so there was a lot of social life in that first year. After that, there weren't many visitors whom we could count on, like Victor Turner or the Rosaldos, to have parties in a consistent way. So partly because of that, because we were there and we had this bigger house and a nice yard around it, we took on that role. The party to end all parties that first year was a lamb roast that Renato and I organized in the yard behind our house. And that was

terrifically successful. So we had another two lamb roasts at least during the time I was there. The other big party incident was about March or April of that first '75-'76 year. There were a number of historians who were involved, some of them -- I am trying to remember who exactly was involved in the symbols seminar. I think Robert Darnton came fairly regularly but I don't think Lawrence Stone came to the symbols semianr. The luncheon seminar was dominated by symbolic anthropology, and a number of people from the Princeton history department came to that regularly, almost every Thursday, to the luncheon seminar: Lawrence Stone, Gerry Siegel, Bob Darnton -- this was before Natalie was in town -- Ted Rabb came most of the time, I am sure there were also others whom I am just forgetting right now. This was a time when a number of historians were beginning to get interested in cultural questions -- especially some of the Princeton historians. Also, of course, the Davis Center was another place where a number of people from the Institute went. I can't remember what they were working on that year, but again there were a number of people who were interested in cultural questions -- Robert Bezucha was there -- I just can't remember who the other people were who were there. Any way, there were a number of people interested in cultural stuff.

Shore: But there was a really different flavor there at the

Davis Center as opposed to the Thursday Seminar, or was it the Wednesday seminar? Everyone has a different recollection.

Sewell: I am not sure either. It was some time near the middle of the week!

Shore: And the Davis Center Seminar was always on Friday?

Sewell: Yes Friday mornings, as I recall.

Shore: Did those discussions continue on Friday from Thursday or Wednesday? Did that ever happen?

Sewell: Yes, they did to some extent. It varied from year to year. It depended on the flavor of the Davis Center group and it depended on the people at the Institute. But in that year there was a lot of flow back and forth. Symbolic anthropology questions got posed very frequently at the Davis Center discussions and in the luncheon seminar and in the symbols seminar. So at one point late in the year, probably March or April, we actually had a day-long conference on history and anthropology, which was a kind of love fest. It included some people from the Historical Studies School. I remember that there was a talk or a paper by Ralph Giesey, who was at the Historical Studies School that year. Bob Darnton gave a talk, I gave a talk, Keith Basso did. I don't exactly remember who the set of speakers were. But there was this very intense, day-long thing. This was at the early and heavy stage of the romance between history and

anthropology. And then, at the end of the day, we had a party out at our place that included dancing and drinking and a continuation of the conversations. So there was this tremendous intensity of social life, particularly in that year; then, those of us who had been there that year and remembered, tried to replicate in some years with varying degrees of success.

Shore: And these people remained, many of them, your intellectual colleagues later in your career?

Sewell: Yes. Renato Rosaldo and I are still close colleagues. Another person whom I haven't mentioned who was there this year -- it was partly a question of who happened to be there -- was somebody whom I brought on my coattails when I accepted the position. William Reddy, he did French social history at that time, worked on factory workers. He is now working on the bourgeoisie. He had just finished his Ph.D., didn't have a job -- this was 1975, when jobs were almost as scarce as they are now -- so I managed to wrangle a one-year membership for Reddy. And he became very close friends with the Rosaldos, threw himself utterly into the symbols seminar. He also scrapped his thesis and wrote a quite different book that really was conceptualized in the course of that seminar. There was a whole set of friendships that were made. In my case, I had a strong relationship with Reddy already, but it was a kind of mentor/student relationship, and it

became a much more equal relationship in the course of that year.

Shore: It sounds like what you are describing in some ways revolves around Cliff and his work. Or was it more diffuse at that point. Was he articulating something that was in the air?

Sewell: Cliff was certainly the leading figure. He was the one who brought together this set of people to make up the symbols seminar. He already had established a strong intellectual relationship with Bob Darnton -- they had been teaching a course together on culture and history or anthropology and history in the Princeton department.

Shore: I think they still do.

Sewell: I think that has been an annual affair or virtually annual for a long time. In a way, it was an expansion of the networks that Cliff had already established. But I don't think he had anticipated, at the time that he called together this group of cultural anthropologists, that there would be such a strong historical component to what went on. And indeed, I am not sure he quite got it.

Shore: Could you explain that?

Sewell: One way of talking about it was Cliff's relationship with the two Rosaldos. Shelley Rosaldo and Renato Rosaldo. Both of them were working on this group of headhunters in Northern Luzon. Shelley was doing a piece that was clearly symbolic anthropology, with kind of linguistic

overtones, whereas Renato, who, during the course of the year, moved more and more in the direction of trying to work out a kind of ethno-history of the Ilongots. Both of the Rosaldos had the sense that Cliff was much more excited about Shelley's work than Renato's work. Shelley published in his series -- he didn't ask Renato to publish in his series. Interestingly enough -- I may be wrong, it may be my own historical bias -- but I think in the end Renato's book probably had more impact than Shelley's, partly because it was one of the opening salvos by an anthropologist doing a really seriously historical work. My sense was that, at that point at least, Cliff hadn't quite figured out what the historical dimension of culture was. Or how one would deal with that.

Shore: Although he had helped to allow this to happen?

Sewell: He had helped to allow it to happen, he participated fully in the discussions that went that way, but it wasn't his style of thinking. And indeed the historical work that he did, that he was actually working on to some extent at that time and then published later, the Negara book -- which is a wonderful book, I teach it regularly -- but it is a very synchronic book. I think, at least up to that time, and to some extent really, to the present, his style of cultural analysis remains quite synchronic. And it is developing a fully diachronic

style of cultural analysis that was the unintended outcome of this group. There was a lot in addition to that that went on. But that was the peculiar signature.

Shore: So you were moving towards each other from different poles?

Sewell: There were moments when it really appeared that we were actually crossing. I remember at one point having a conversation with Renato -- I was asking him about anthropological stuff to read and so he gave me ideas about what to read but he said, "I'm not interested in reading that. Tell me some good narrative histories to read." Narrative histories? Give me a break! Why would you want to read narrative histories?

Shore: Did people have identity crises?

Sewell: Identity crisis in some sense, I suppose. I guess in a way I had already been through a kind of identity crisis, I had already gotten fully convinced that a deeply anthropological approach to history was necessary. It was beginning to happen in '71 but it actually happened in a big way back at Chicago, teaching a course with a friend of mine, Ronald Inden, who does ancient Indian history. We taught a seminar together. Two years running after I came back. '72-'73 and '73-'74. He was an acolyte of David Schneider, the anthropologist, and it was really the intensive contact with him that got me deeply involved in anthropological questions.

Shore: So you were ready when you got back.

Sewell: I was definitely ready when I got there.

Shore: You said you brought someone in 1975. So you had some input on the selection of members in the first year or really more in subsequent years?

Sewell: I had no formal input that first year. It is just when I was negotiating, I knew they were always looking for good young people and I thought, and I think that my sense has been borne out by his subsequent work, that Reddy was really a terrific person who would be a real addition to the group. There was a kind of senatorial courtesy in a way, sort of each person could choose someone. At that point at least, it was a less formalized procedure. So they were happy to hear about somebody who was young and interesting and would fit into the group.

Shore: In the subsequent selections, was it a consensus of everybody on who would be come? Did you look for a certain kind of diversity among people? Can you talk a little bit about how you went about it?

Sewell: It became more formalized over time, but it was already getting somewhat formalized by the time I was there. There were really two categories of people each year: the people who were involved in the focus and then other folks. So it was an attempt to combine enough people to be the core for a group for a seminar and, at the same

time, some range and diversity so that we had people from different disciplines and who did different kinds of work.

Shore: All with more or less the same intellectual focus or did you look for people who would be irritants, somebody who would come in and say "that's no good, you have to think about it this way." Did you go looking for that or did that kind of trouble come your way?

Sewell: That kind of trouble usually did come our way and I think that in a way it didn't matter whether you were looking for an irritant or not, it always turned out that there would be one. Sometimes everybody was an irritant and the little seminars exploded. Other years they worked really very nicely.

Shore: Were you looking for someone who was interested in anthropology and history -- I don't mean those two specific disciplines necessarily -- but people who were willing to cross boundaries?

Sewell: For the most part we were looking for people who were interested in crossing boundaries. It didn't have to be those boundaries. The ethos of the School, the whole point in a way of the School, is to be a School of Social Science that is not bound by disciplines and defined by disciplines. So we were looking for people who did innovative work that crossed boundaries of some kind or another. Somebody who was just doing straight-on

sociology or anthropology or whatever was not likely to be invited. A few people -- somebody distinguished who was doing that kind of work -- who applied might get invited in a given year. The other thing that changed over the course of time, while I was there even, and I think this process had probably begun before I was there, were the solicited applications and the over-the-transom applications. Early on I would say probably most of the people who came were solicited in one way or another. There was a kind of senatorial courtesy, as I've said, so if I had some person who I would very much like to have there I could pretty much make that happen. Certainly Cliff or Albert could do that with one or two people each in a given year. Quentin also, if there was someone he really wanted, that would be done. And then for forming these particular intellectual focuses in a given year, you had to engage in solicitation in order to get the right group of people assembled. Occasionally then, someone would apply who would also fit in that group and that was fine.

Shore: Did everybody know the people who were coming?

Sewell: It was unusual for anybody to apply who none of us knew at all. There certainly were some cases of that. Whether there were people who actually got invited whom none of us knew... -- certainly if we didn't know them by reputation, it wasn't likely that they would get there.

But certainly, over time, we got a higher proportion of people who knew about us and were applying. When your time comes, you apply for various fellowships and this was one of the fellowships that one applied for.

Shore: And there was a chance you would get in if you either fit into the category...

Sewell: Or even if you didn't and what you were doing looked interesting or maybe appealed particularly to one of the people. For instance, Steve Holmes was somebody who at that point had just finished his dissertation, didn't have a job, that was in '76 or '77. Jobs were hard to come by, especially in philosophy, which was his field at the time. So his was a purely over the transom affair, nobody knew who he was but we read his proposal and he submitted an article or something and we decided well, this guy is really good.

End of Cassette 1, side one.

Start of Cassette 1, side two.

Shore: So particularly young people?

Sewell: Yes, I was saying that it was probably particularly young people who were unknown. Somebody who was a fresh Ph.D. people at the Institute are not likely to know. Anybody who has been around any of our professions at least for eight or ten or fifteen years, you have probably run into

at a meeting and have read their work.

Shore: What is surprising to me is how many of these "young people" are now well known when I look at the lists of the people who were there. So you were obviously choosing on a good principle.

Sewell: Yes, I think we probably chose well. In some cases I think the year there helped them to be as good as they are, too. I think unquestionably in Bill Reddy's case. He was a very intelligent person, he doubtless would have had a fine career, but I think it would not have been quite as...

Shore: It would not have started so well?

Sewell: Well, it might have started quicker if he hadn't been there! But I think he would have published a revised dissertation, which would have been a perfectly fine first book, but not something exciting. What he published turned out to be a really pathbreaking work. I am not sure that would have happened had he not had that time for reflection and for recasting his whole view of the world at the time he was at the Institute.

Shore: Do you think there is an identifiable Institute Social Science School out there, composed of folks like you and the Rosaldos, William Reddy and the others that you are talking about? Could you see an intellectual focus that has been developed because of the existence of the School?

Sewell: As usually happens in these cases, there is simultaneous invention going on at a lot of places at once. I do think that the Social Science School was one of the nodes. This was already beginning before the years I was there and went on after that time for a while at least. I think the kind of interpretative/linguistic turn in the social sciences -- that the Institute for Advanced Study contributed to that in really significant ways. Virtually everybody who came there, whatever their perspective on social science was before they came, came out of there at least with a new appreciation of cultural and symbolic approaches. So, yes, I think it really did affect the course of social science. But then of course that was going on in a lot of other locations as well.

Shore: The people who may have turned out to be irritants, were they people sort of watching this come about with dismay, seeing these kinds of cross-disciplinary ideas as dangerous? Can you speak about or remember any years when seminars exploded, as you said, and was that at all useful?

Sewell: When there was a full explosion, I think it probably wasn't very useful, that it exploded. The irritants, I guess some of the irritants were people who, to some degree, were dragging their feet, they were a little suspicious of some of these changes. However, if they simply thought -- thinking about things from a cultural

anthropological perspective, say for historians or sociologists -- if they thought that was completely useless, then they just walled themselves off in their offices and added nothing really to the discussions. But people whose initial perspective was different from that, but who engaged in the discussions, they could be really quite useful. Herb Gintis, for example, is somebody of whom that was true.

Shore: Who was sort of dipping his feet in these waters?

Sewell: Yes, he was probably already beginning to dip his feet in these waters, but he was a marxist economist and cultural anthropology and interpretive stuff wasn't his style at the time that he came. But he was a full participant in the discussions about that kind of thing.

Shore: It is interesting that you bring up the name of an economist, because it is the question now at the Institute about trying to replace someone like Albert Hirschman, wondering if that is possible. Were the economists always a separate group or did they also partake in ways the historians and the anthropologists did and I guess some sociologists and political scientists seemed to be more ready or appeared to be more ready to do?

Sewell: I would say it varied a lot from year to year and from economist to economist. There was one year when there was a focus on new approaches to economics. That was I

think in '77-'78, I believe. A lot of that appeared to the rest of us as being economics as usual. On the other hand, there were certainly some people there who were full participants in that kind of broader, social science school type discussions. There was someone who I think was Albert's assistant, a guy named Persio Arrida, a Brazilian economist, who was already fairly predisposed to this kind of social science. He was interested at that time at least in the invention of the assembly line as a kind of cultural innovation. Then there was another Brazilian who was a member, Antonio Castro, and Castro was an economic historian, a marxist economic historian, he also was a full participant in all of this stuff. But some of the others were more straight line economists and didn't get involved. Bob Cooter was also quite involved in that. He is somebody who has become a kind of law and economics person since that time. And he never really deviated from solid micro-economics, but he was a full participant in the discussions in the way that some of them simply weren't interested.

Shore: So they could be participants but one might not see that affect their work.

Sewell: Right. You might or you might not.

Shore: Because in a way you are not the typical person to be at the Institute. Your interest in quantitative methods seems to make you at first blush not the perfect person

to want to do these kinds of things. So were you a link to some of these economists, did you make it easier for them to think about this?

Sewell: I suppose to some degree, although it is partly the genius of Albert. He is a very odd kind of economist. He is a full-blush economist. He knows the economics, but at the same time he has a much wider definition of what an economist might be interested in. So of course he tended to pick people who had historical or interpretative or at least some kind of off-beat interest as economists. So in some ways, they were very much pre-selected by Albert to fit in. He didn't pick them so that they would fit in with the others, he picked them because he thought they were interesting. But they turned out to be the kinds of people who would fit in to this broader discussion. My graduate training was in economic history, I took my general exams in graduate school in economic history and had taken a number of economics courses so I probably had more familiarity with that style of thinking than most people at the Institute. So I probably talked to them more than most people did.

Shore: While were are on economics, can we talk a little bit about Albert, his style, the way he interacted, the way he was at the meetings in which members were chosen. What did he bring to the School?

Sewell: I would say that in my years there, particularly the

first few years, Cliff was the dominant figure. He was the primus inter pares. Albert was fairly new to the Institute at the time, he had come just a year or two before I did.

Shore: I think he came in '75-'76 as well.

Sewell: It may have been '75-'76. So he was also relatively new to the system. Also I think it is the case that Cliff had a much more programmatic sense of what the School ought to become, what its role in the social sciences was. Albert has always been a bit of a lone wolf, somebody whose career didn't match the ordinary patterns. He had had both a policy career and an academic career. He was certainly a full participant in the discussions but, unlike Cliff, he didn't have a sense of what the School ought to be, what its role in the social sciences ought to be. My memory at least was that he was less likely to formulate what the focus should be in a given year.

Shore: Was that usually Cliff's idea?

Sewell: During the time I was there. They talked about it, Cliff consulted with me and with Quentin when he was there, but my sense is that the initiative more often came from Cliff than from Albert.

Shore: Sounds like a good combination, in a way. Someone with a program, and then someone with the intellectual curiosity -- not that Cliff didn't have the intellectual

curiosity! -- intellectual curiosity in general.

Sewell: Yes. Right. They were a very compatible team. I don't know what the teams are like in subsequent times, but they were extremely compatible.

Shore: And you and Quentin were seen as colleagues or slightly junior colleagues?

Sewell: We were certainly junior colleagues, but with respect to the discussions about who was going to be in in a given year, we were certainly full participants. If we said that we thought so and so's work wasn't up to it, that was the end of it, they were gone. We were certainly junior and we knew that we did not have the kind of long-term investment in the place that they did. They knew that as well.

Shore: Were you trying also -- this is a little bit off the topic -- you were trying to get some younger folks there? Were you also looking to get either ethnic minorities or women to come? Was that an issue yet in that period?

Sewell: Certainly women, that was certainly an issue, from the first year I was there it was an issue. I think there was complete agreement that that was something we should do. I don't remember any kind of struggles about getting women in. Both Albert and Cliff agreed that we should particularly try to recruit excellent women. How successful we were in that? Reasonably so, I would say.

Certainly there were more men than women in those years, but there were always women.

Shore: So it was a conscious effort on your part?

Sewell: It was certainly a conscious effort on all of our parts to get more women involved in the dialogue. Have more representation of women. Ethnic minorities was kind of less self-conscious, I would guess. It was certainly an issue. There wasn't a huge amount of recruiting that went on, but when a talented minority person appeared, we snapped them up.

Shore: We have been circling around Cliff. Why don't we go right to him. I don't know how to go about this -- I know that he feels that the School is one of the crowning achievements of his career. Could you see how that worked out in practice. Let's have a little conversation about Cliff.

Sewell: Where to begin on that? The first thing to say about Cliff is that his intellectual presence in those years in the School was really predominant. In ways that were both good and bad, and the bad was mostly not Cliff's doing, but the doing of the members. He was a kind of superstar and there was a certain amount of adulation of Cliff. Cliff actually doesn't like adulation very much, so people who tended to treat him in that way in fact didn't have very smooth relations with him. But nevertheless, there was a kind of hanging on his words.

Shore: Even as early as '71 or more in the five-year period that you were there?

Sewell: More in the five-year period, partly I think that was because most of the people who were there in '71 were themselves so elderly and distinguished that Cliff was the young guy on the block! Whereas later on there were people -- in a way, this was particularly a problem for the anthropologists, because having Cliff as a patron in one's career could make a huge difference in anthropology. He was, certainly at that time, the most influential anthropologist. Period. I think that is less true now, for whatever reasons, but those were the glory years of Cliff's influence. I am wandering here.

Shore: That's ok. I am not asking you focussed questions. I guess he is such a big topic, its hard to get around him. Let's pick up on that one "negative" side, not of Cliff's making. I remember when I came to the Institute in '85, that, for the first few years, it seemed that the Thursday luncheon talks revolved around Cliff's work. Quentin Skinner remarked that that wasn't the case when...

Sewell: I don't think it was.

Shore: He wasn't yet this figure that the members were turning him into by the time I got there.

Sewell: I think that's probably true.

Shore: So that his work was on the table, still, it was open.

Not that it wasn't on the table later.

Sewell: Right, it was probably more in formation at that point. In the first year, it was particularly good that Victor Turner was there, because Victor Turner himself was a big name and a kind of alternative pole. They had a very interesting and...

Shore: Did they get along?

Sewell: It was a relationship with some tension, but I think they also had a lot of affection for each other and tremendous intellectual appreciation, obviously. But yes, I would say, that it certainly wasn't the case that the seminars revolved around Cliff's work. Indeed, I think he usually tended to give his paper -- if he gave one, he didn't give one every year, by any means -- tended to give his paper relatively late in the year. He certainly didn't want to be the person to kick off. No, I don't think that was happening. And I think even during the time that I was there, there was a kind of increasing tendency, as he became more and more famous, for people -- I said in some ways it is more of a problem for the anthropologists -- on the other hand, the anthropologists on the whole probably handled the problem better, because they had real substantial intellectual relationships with him. In some ways, the problem may have been more people who were intellectually distant from him, sometimes historians. People who came in Historical Studies who

would get kind of converted and were kind of hanging on Cliff's words in a way that I think was really counterproductive.

Shore: How did he handle that?

Sewell: It's a problem with fame. On the one hand one likes to have people hanging on one's words, right, it's hard to resist the charm of that. On the other hand, you know at the same time that it is happening, that it isn't good for you and it's not good for the discussions going on. So I think he was like almost anybody else, profoundly ambivalent about it.

Shore: And also, I would imagine, there were people who would come in who would want to shoot him down as well as the other side of that.

Sewell: The people with a chip on the shoulder?

Shore: Yes.

Sewell: One is as bad as the other.

Shore: There were enough in the middle that made things work?

Sewell: Yes, I think in most years, it actually worked quite well.

Shore: Let's move away from Cliff, then, he will come back in later.

Sewell: I am sure that later he will come into the discussion.

Shore: One thing that I have asked a number of people and have never gotten an answer to is that the mission of the School, as it was first enunciated was to work in a

collaborative manner with historians, but also to "focus on social change." Was that ever explicitly the point of what was happening?

Sewell: No, I don't think it was. Well, was it ever explicitly the point? Certainly there were a lot of people who were working on social change in one sense or another, and there were always historians among the mix of folks at the School.

Shore: But social change per se was...

Sewell: Was by no means always the key issue. That may in part have been the particular way that in the years that the School was launched, Carl Kaysen and Cliff must have drafted a document or something and that was the way they were conceptualizing what the School was going to do. In fact, I think what was going on at the Institute always did have this strong historical bent to it. So, in effect, questions of social change were always central. But it wasn't as if we kind of asked the question when we were recruiting people, deciding who was going to come: Does this person work on social change? And we certainly weren't trying to advance a theory of social change. It was more like a topic than it was a theory.

Shore: Let's talk about some other folks. You saw Carl Kaysen in the first flowering of the School and then, when you came back, that was the last year that he was present. Could you describe him in those two situations and your

relationship with him?

Sewell: I had really a terrific relationship with Kaysen. I liked him very much, in spite of the fact that our politics didn't entirely coincide, particularly in that first year, which was still a hot year in the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, we somehow hit it off extremely well. I know that I did him a favor in that year. The annual trustees or board meeting was taking place when I was there and he wanted to have a couple of people to represent the work that was going on at the School, and so he had me give a paper, a talk, on violence and social change to the Board.

Shore: Just to the Board?

Sewell: Just to the Board, thinking that I would represent the School well as a very young person who was doing interesting work. It came off very well, actually, so I think he felt particularly warm to me after that.

Shore: And he didn't let political differences stand in the way?

Sewell: Absolutely not. No. We talked about the Vietnam War, we knew we had differences, we would call each other on things in conversations, but nevertheless we really got along very well.

Shore: Was he an intellectual presence in the School?

Sewell: He was definitely an intellectual presence in the School. The seminar at that time was much smaller, it was also a by-invitation seminar. It was held in the seminar

room...

Shore: The small seminar, not the lunch seminar?

Sewell: There was no lunch seminar. There was a social science seminar and it included some people mainly from the history department at Princeton.

Shore: And where was it held, as you were saying?

Sewell: It was held in that little, long seminar room in the Historical Studies -- Social Science building, whatever it was called. That building. So that gives you a sense of what size it was.

Shore: In '71? That building wasn't there yet, was it?

Sewell: Yes it was. It has to have been because I had an office in it! I think it was the first year, actually. I think they were still putting some of those slates in at the time I arrived. So it was a relatively small seminar at that time and it was closed. The School itself was considerably smaller. But Carl was a regular participant in the seminar discussions. So he was certainly an intellectual presence in the School. When I returned, he was much less an intellectual presence. He had been terribly battered by the Bellah affair. I again saw quite a bit of him that year. My sense was that my invitation was as much Carl's doing as Cliff's. I assume they must have agreed on it, but I represented a little more the kind of more social sciency-edge of social science...

Shore: He can count!

Sewell: Yes! That's right, that's right.

Shore: A couple of people have mentioned that those early seminars, which would be in '71, were more like the Davis Center kinds of seminars and therefore the change to a public seminar was an attempt to lower the heat. I think Albert said that this was a way to have a more congenial atmosphere.

Sewell: I don't know when it happened actually, but by the time I was back in '75, it had already happened. It may have been the first year for all I know.

Shore: So they were like the Davis Center seminars?

Sewell: They were rather like the Davis Center. The level of heat, at least in '71-'72 was not as high as it tended to be in the Davis Center seminars, partly because it wasn't Lawrence Stone's particular playground.

Shore: Did he come in '71?

Sewell: Oh yes, he came quite regularly and he was his usual acerbic self, but he didn't own that seminar in the same kind of way. Cliff owned it.

Shore: And did Cliff act like he owned it or did he let things go?

Sewell: He was certainly not...

Shore: He didn't control it the way Lawrence did the Davis Center?

Sewell: By no means, by no means. No. That is just not

his...Lawrence is an organizer, Cliff is not really an organizer. Cliff has vision, but he is not an organizer. He also doesn't have the kind of social skills that Lawrence does. He is basically a relatively lonely person, I think, and doesn't find it easy to establish relations.

Shore: Even in a seminar atmosphere?

Sewell: He was very good in seminars, but he wasn't controlling in seminars at all. If the discussions went off in some direction other than his, if anything, he would...he is also incredibly intellectually broad, so if things went off in an economic direction, he knows a lot of economics after all. He worked on economic questions. So if it went off in an economic direction, a direction of psychology -- he also knows that --so he was actually terrific in seminars, he was terrific in the small discussion kind of seminars. He didn't pontificate and he went with the flow and was willing to take the discussion on its own terms. Cliff was probably at his best in the relatively small seminar groups. He was really, really wonderful and I would say that one out of every two seminars he would come up with some comment that was so brilliant that you walked out of the seminar with your head spinning.

Shore: Were people writing these things down?

Sewell: Sometimes you were too stunned to write. Sometimes you

scribbled it down in the hope that you could recreate it afterwards. He was very spontaneous in seminars too. Very different from Lawrence who really was a kind of controlling presence at the Davis seminar. And Lawrence disciplined, Cliff didn't discipline. That wasn't his style.

Shore: We talked about this a little already, but, it sounds like '75 was the key year for you, at least. Were there these high points again later?

Sewell: Yes. There were ups and downs. Each year had its own very distinct personality. Everybody who was there in '75-'76 and was there through the years I was there always referred to it as the great year. Somehow everything worked in that year.

Shore: The lamb tasted better that year.

Sewell: That's right, that's right. In other years, let's see: there was one year when there was a history and sociology of science focus.

Shore: Tom Kuhn led that?

Sewell: Tom Kuhn supposedly was going to lead it, but he kind of checked out of it. He came to the seminars but he really kind of refused to lead it, and that was one of the seminars that just exploded.

Shore: Because there was no central figure?

Sewell: It's hard to say. People were coming from such diverse epistemological standpoints, actually, that it was often

difficult to really get a continuous discussion going. What you would hope would happen when people come from very different kinds of positions, is that they would learn to talk to each other. But what happened in that year is that they just didn't learn to talk to each other. So I guess I wouldn't say that that one exploded, it didn't really fully explode, it never took off. So that was, relatively speaking, one of the down years. The following year -- I am trying to remember what the focus was --

Shore: Maybe I can mention the names of some of the people who were there in certain years. 76-77, Michel Vovelle was there and then in the next year, 77-78 John Rawls, Charles Tilly, Natalie Davis.

Sewell: Charles Tilly didn't show, as I remember.

Shore: And in '78-'79, Joan Scott and Stephen Holmes. I guess that would not necessarily have been the year.

Sewell: '78-'79. The focus that year was economics. So this was this economics seminar that went on and I participated in that at least on a semi-regular basis. And that was a year when Cliff was not there. He was on leave that year.

Shore: That must have made an enormous difference.

Sewell: Yes it did make a difference, and everybody missed him, of course. It was in some ways more fun when he was around. On the other hand, I think that year was a very

good year for Albert. Because that year he became the dominant figure, he was the only professor that year. I think that when Cliff came back, they were on a much more equal footing.

Shore: So it worked for both of them.

Sewell: So I think it did actually work very well for both of them. That economics seminar was a kind of good discussion, but I don't think it actually took off all that well.

Shore: So there was a history and anthropology year, a year for sociology of science.

Sewell: It was supposed to be symbolic anthropology, but the historians colonized it.

Shore: And the economics year and you were there for two further years. One year was Svetlana Alpers and Robert Darnton.

Sewell: That was the final year I was there. That was on the sociology and history of art. And that one exploded.

Shore: Can you describe how?

Sewell: I was not actually involved in the core seminar that year, partly because art isn't my thing, partly because I was busily looking for a job that year and didn't have time to get involved. I think it was purely a matter of personality. It wasn't really so much that people didn't see eye to eye. But somehow people just disliked each other, took an immediate dislike to each other. It just never worked. A lot of very interesting people. Tim

Clark in particular, he was actually already a friend of mine when he came. Tremendously interesting.

Shore: It sounds like that although the small seminar could explode, there was always the luncheon seminar, so life continued.

Sewell: Yes.

Shore: And did the small seminar ever disband or break up early?

Sewell: I don't know whether it actually ever disbanded. Usually it went on.

Shore: Was it at someone's house or was it at the Institute?

Sewell: That varied. I guess usually it was at the Institute but sometimes it was at someone's house. The symbols seminar was actually at different peoples' houses, we kind of moved it around from one person's living room to another. I think that actually helped to make it more...it would kind of dissolve into a party at the end. People would have drinks and talk and stagger home. Nobody had to drive.

Shore: We wanted to go back to Carl Kaysen.

Sewell: Somehow our conversation drifted away from Kaysen. I said something about his role when I was there first, which was in his glory years, I suppose. When I returned, he was feeling terribly burned. It was really kind of a tragic situation. He had made the School and the School was now established, but in a way the only way it could be established was for him to leave. So he had

to then leave from this place and leave his progeny behind. That felt really very tragic to me that that had to be the case. But he did come to the luncheon seminars fairly often, but his participation was really quite subdued in various ways and he wasn't an intellectual presence in the School in the same way that he had been before. It was a loss to us. He is an incredibly intelligent person and very broad-ranging, so he was really a good participant in those discussions so I felt it very keenly in a personal sense that he had somehow had to be sacrificed to the process of establishing the School. And that, of course, was a direct outgrowth of the Bellah affair.

Shore: Did you ever talk to Cliff about this or Albert or was this just something that was not a discussion topic.

Sewell: About the Bellah affair?

Shore: Either the Bellah affair or about Carl's having to go and leave his progeny behind. And also what happened later to Carl. Whether you kept in touch.

Sewell: I've kept in touch not as well as I would have liked to. I visited him a couple of times in Cambridge and there is still that same good, warm feeling. But it is really a pity that he didn't get to stay on. He was a real director of the Institute. Harry Woolf, for all of his virtues, his main virtues were that he was able to keep the peace. But he was not the kind of presence that Carl

was. He didn't have that kind of intellectual vision that Carl did.

Shore: Do you think that that is one of the lasting effects of this controversy, the choice of Harry Woolf sounds like one of the lasting effects.

Sewell: Yes, that was certainly a lasting effect. They were looking for somebody who wasn't going to rock the boat, who would be able to keep peace and who some way or another would bridge fields and as somebody whose own professional work is in the history of science, it kind of includes both the historical and the scientific side of things. So that was a lasting effect. One of the other lasting effects was that I think it -- I don't know whether it is permanent or not because I don't know what the state of the directorship is now -- but I think it really crippled the directorship. It made the director more isolated, more intellectually isolated than the director had been before. I assume that Oppenheimer must have been a real intellectual presence and certainly Carl was an intellectual presence, in a way that Harry never was.

Shore: From the archives one sees that Oppenheimer's last years were also not happy ones.

Sewell: I gathered that that was the case.

Shore: So it seemed like a...

Sewell: cycle, recurring cycle.

Shore: And also if one goes back to the 30s, Flexner's last years weren't...

Sewell: Is that right? I see. So it may be inherent, structural somehow in the animal.

Shore: While we are on Harry Woolf. Did he have any connections with the seminars or did he help pick members, did he suggest anybody? Did he play a role in the Schools' life?

Sewell: Not in the Social Science School's life. He did occasionally come to the seminars, that was a completely open affair and various people came. Harry came.

Shore: Did he make interventions in the discussions?

Sewell: Oh sure. Yes. He would ask questions and be involved in discussions, but there wasn't the kind of intensive involvement that was there with Carl. Even Carl in his lame duck year was a much more active intellectual presence in the seminar than Harry was. The one thing that Harry was much more directly involved in was this group of people in the history of science, since that is also his field. He was a kind of full participant in that seminar.

Shore: But that seminar...

Sewell: But the seminar never really quite went anywhere. No fault of Harry's.

Shore: While we are talking about people, how about Quentin Skinner, who was in some ways your opposite number. Did

you have a lot of contact with him, did you talk about your similar roles in the School?

Sewell: Yes. We were pretty good friends in the time we were there and I regret that we haven't -- the Atlantic has been something of a barrier -- so I haven't seen much of him since that time.

Shore: Did you read each other's work or were you really so far apart?

Sewell: We had quite a bit in common intellectually. He was doing intellectual history and history of political theory but in a way that was more culturally broad and more open to social context than most people who did that kind of work. And I was more of a social historian, but on the other hand, Work and Revolution has extended discussions of Locke and Diderot and folks like that. So that I had real interests in political theory questions as well. So we had quite a lot of overlap intellectually. Did we read each other's work? Not in a lot of detail, I don't think, but we certainly saw quite a bit of each other and were intellectually involved with one another.

Shore: Did you play the roles of junior faculty in these meetings? Would you have to take the notes, or they were so informal that no...

Sewell: I think the School secretary took the notes, if I remember properly. I don't think there was much note

taking. No, our role in those was, in an informal sense obviously we were junior, and we didn't try to throw our weight around or something, and Quentin, as an Englishman, had a stronger sense of deference than I, I think, so he was more restrained, probably, than I was. But in any formal sense, we were all quite equal participants. We all read the dossiers, we all discussed who we thought would make a good fit in a given year, and I think our opinions were taken in a remarkably equal way. In that one thing that we did as a School, we didn't feel like junior faculty. And in fact, since we weren't being judged for possible tenure as it were, for possible appointments, meant that we didn't have to worry about that. So we could just say what we thought because we knew we were out of there after a while.

Shore: You are describing the perfect academic situation! Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to exist anymore. You brought up something else of interest that has come up in other discussions: the difference between Europeans and Americans. There are different styles. Did the presence of a fair number of Europeans affect the culture of the School?

Sewell: In my opinion in good ways. There were also almost always Latin Americans, since Albert worked on Latin America and had so many connections in Latin America that he really made it a policy to try to get Latin Americans

there. I think his assistant was always a Latin American and the assistants were full participants in the life of the School and the seminars. But there were also usually -- there may have been some years when there weren't Europeans -- but virtually always there were Europeans. I didn't feel it as much of a tension in the School. In a way, the style of the social science that the Social Science School at the Institute stood for was a more European-style social science.

Shore: There was Albert there too.

Sewell: And Albert is of course: is he European, is he Latin American, is he American? It is very hard to say. He is really all of those at once, so he is a nice bridging and interstitial figure.

Shore: So you learned to speak each other's language, in the sense...

Sewell: Yes, and usually it wasn't very difficult. In fact I would say it was much more difficult with the English than with the French or the Germans.

Shore: Would you like to elaborate on that?

Sewell: I think it really has to do with the profound salience of class in English society generally. So what it meant was that there was a higher component both of deference, reserve and also of resentment among the English. There would be people who on the one hand would be deferent, but on the other hand have a chip on their shoulder and

engage in hostile attacks. There was one year when there were three or four Englishmen there together and they absolutely couldn't get along with one another. The English were, in some ways, difficult, there was some kind of chip on the shoulder with the English that just wasn't present with the Germans or the French.

Shore: The year after, fewer English people were invited?

Sewell: There continued to be quite a few Englishmen. This was not true of Quentin, I hasten to say. Quentin's general sense of deference and decorum was very strongly there, but he was a terrific participant in all of the discussions.

Shore: He said to me that he actually learned to enjoy the American style of social science.

Sewell: I think he really quite took to it.

Shore: And brought it back to England with him.

Sewell: Yes that's right. I think he really quite took to it. The style, the openness of discussion -- the English style of discussion is a form of warfare, and you are trying to skewer your opponent -- and I think Quentin felt kind of liberated probably from that. On the other hand, people were trying to skewer Quentin because he is clearly someone of an upper middle class Oxbridge style, and then you get people like Barry Barnes, who is from a lower lower middle class Lancashire background: every time either Quentin or Lawrence Stone opened their

mouths, he wanted to go for the jugular. It just enraged him.

Shore: It is funny that Quentin also brought up Barry Barnes!

Sewell: Barry was one of the most difficult people.

Shore: He was an irritant, I suppose.

Sewell: He was an irritant.

Shore: Someone from the "strong" program?

Sewell: Yes there is the strong program and the weak program and I forget what they are, but they are positions in the sociology of science. He was an irritant, sometimes he was irritating in the sense of being a pain in the ass; on the other hand, he was very intellectually engaged, extremely intellectually engaged, extremely smart. So in some ways he was also an irritant in a very good way. I mean, he really provoked people to think and to argue. I had some very long, very productive arguments with Barry and I think a lot of people did.

Shore: Quentin also mentioned to me something that made him think the Institute was different from an English place or American scholars: this real sense of scholarship as a twenty-four hour a day vocation and he was very much taken by that here and took it up for himself, not that he wasn't already a serious scholar.

Sewell: Yes. He was already an obsessed scholar. But he probably felt guilty about it, so he came to the Institute!

Shore: Let's talk about another person who you mentioned in the preface to your book and was a real figure there still when I came. Peggy Clarke. How did she interact with people, did she set another kind of tone for the School?

Sewell: She was person with a very strong personality and fairly strong likes and dislikes.

End of Cassette one, side two.

Cassette two, side one.

Shore: We were talking about Peggy Clarke.

Sewell: What I was saying is -- this isn't just about Peggy Clarke, it is true generally of people who can be coded as secretaries -- there are some people who treat them with disdain. And if you treated Peggy with disdain you were in deep trouble. On the other hand, if you treated her as an interesting person, which she most certainly was -- she was just terrific -- she would do anything for you. She was also an incredibly sensible person and a very good organizer. I had a really very good relationship with her. I think, with the exception of these few jerks, who didn't treat her as if she were a human being, she actually tended to have very good relationships with the members.

Shore: I felt that there was an extraordinary esprit de corps among the staff in the School when I came in '85. They

really were part of the project. They wanted a lot of things to type, they wanted to be busy and they added to the sense that this is a vocation, we are all involved in something. And I wondered if that came from Peggy?

Sewell: Yes, I suspect so. I suspect it probably did. She was also an organizer, which was not true of anybody else in the School.

Shore: Let's switch from Peggy Clarke to a general question about the freedom the Institute provides. It can be something that I imagine can be frightening, its also liberating. I guess in your case it was extremely liberating.

Sewell: Yes, in my case it was very liberating. I think it partly was more liberating because I knew that there was a term to it. I knew I was going back to the ordinary academic trenches when I finished my five years and, as a consequence, I was able to throw myself into it, but I also knew that I had to get something finished by the time I was out of there. I think if you are actually a full-time professor at the Institute, it can be liberating, but I think it is also intimidating in various ways. You are a certified genius, and once you are a certified genius, then the stuff you produce isn't something that you managed to grasp out of the clutches of department meetings and reading dissertations and all of the other stuff, and teaching, and all of the other

stuff you have to do as an ordinary professor, and consequently, you have to be a genius, it has to be perfect. It is really quite interesting. Take the case of Cliff, who has been remarkably productive the whole time he has been there. But he was much less productive after he went to the Institute than he was before. In those years he was at the University of Chicago, he wrote four or five books. In the years since, it was two books a decade. So there is definitely a slower pace in spite of the fact that he had more time at his disposal. And I think that happened to a lot of people. Not to Albert, who was tremendously productive during the whole time that he was there and indeed after his retirement has continued to be quite productive. And I think also with Michael Walzer. Michael Walzer has been less productive. Joan I think has been quite productive. But I think it is actually in some ways difficult to sustain the pace partly because there is so much freedom, it means that you should actually be capable of getting this work perfect, and that is terribly intimidating. The other thing is I think that not teaching is a bad idea. I say this from personal experience, because I really felt the lack of teaching by the time I was gone from the Institute.

Shore: In terms of that you don't need to explain yourself to someone?

Sewell: It is partly that. There are a couple of things about teaching that I really didn't recognize how important they were until I went without it for five years and I recognized this by the third year or so but by then I had this huge project in front of me that I had to finish and I knew that if I didn't have my book done by 1980 I was dead meat and I would have to become an investment banker or a janitor.

Shore: But that is the kind of pressure that all University faculty live with.

Sewell: Exactly. If you are only writing and giving formal papers, you never have to speak or formulate thoughts in a systematic way that nevertheless leaves room for spontaneity. On the other hand, when you are in class, whether it is a lecture class or a discussion class, a seminar class, you are continually doing that. You have to think on your feet, you have to explain yourself and I must say, having to do that is extremely valuable intellectually. It knocks you off your tracks in a way that you don't tend to get knocked off your tracks when you are simply working on a great tome or a vast project.

Shore: But it sounds like in a year like 1975 you could get knocked off your tracks. Couldn't permanent faculty also get recharged in a way that one might get in a classroom?

Sewell: They could. And I think people probably do get recharged in that way. But there is also something about being in

a classroom and partly having the challenge of the students who come at you in a way that fellow faculty members really don't and people in seminars really don't. In part they are asking the naive question that makes you actually have to rethink the fundamental assumptions.

Shore: To pull you down to earth.

Sewell: Yes. Exactly. I really feel that teaching is an essential ingredient of the scholar's life.

Shore: And also committee meetings and fighting with University administrations?

Sewell: That I could do without. That is just a condition of being alive. And of course if you are a faculty member at the Institute you have your share of that too. In fact, the fights there are worse than anywhere else.

Shore: I have another question related to that: the freedom that the annual member gets, how does it affect them? You described it for yourself. Have you seen people for whom this year of freedom was a terrible thing, who need the interruptions of teaching in order to write?

Sewell: I don't know if I've seen any cases where it was a terrible thing. Actually, I have a colleague in the history department here who was at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Science, a comparable place on the West Coast a few years ago and it was a terrible thing for him. He was depressed all year, he wasn't able to work. He works much better while he is teaching. It

was just a disaster, but I don't think I saw any cases of that the time I was there. There were people for whom it was nothing but a kind of office and free time, who really didn't participate in any meaningful way in the intellectual life of the place. That always happens and that is ok.

Shore: There was no peer pressure to be involved?

Sewell: There was a certain amount, but there was also a real ethos of freedom, that is what people were there for. You do it in a way that works for you. So if you want to be involved in a lot of discussions, then you are involved in discussions. If you don't, you don't.

Shore: I think we are getting near the end of our time. Let me ask you to go back to something that we started to talk about before: the lasting effects on the School from the Bellah affair. There are a few more things you would like to add.

Sewell: It seems to me that during the whole time that I was there, and I think there has been another affair not quite as deeply divisive but nevertheless difficult over Bruno Latour, there was a sense always that the School was embattled. It had to be seeking out allies and that was not present, or evident to me when I was there in '71-'72. It was a new school, but there was a sense then that this was a wonderful new venture that was being launched, it was going to work. There was always a sense

of embattlement during the time I was there later. And also clearly very bad relations between the permanent faculty, especially Cliff -- Albert was a late addition. Albert is probably as deeply involved with it now as anyone. Certainly Cliff's relations with the mathematicians and the troglodytes in the Historical Studies School were very bad. So you felt that, you really felt that.

Shore: Did that also cause a kind of camaraderie too? I could see where that could be a very useful kind of outside impetus.

Sewell: You mean within the School? I am not sure that it did. I don't know to what extent people who were just one-year visitors were aware of that. Everyone knew there had been the Bellah affair and people would occasionally ask about it or talk about it. But I am not sure that was felt all that deeply by the ordinary one-year visitors. I think it was more people who were there for a longer term, including Quentin and myself. We had to be aware of the larger politics.

Shore: So it was something that was always present, always dampening the atmosphere.

Sewell: Yes. It definitely was and clearly it has hung on.

Shore: Just to bring you up-to-date, but I am sure you know that Peter Galison, who was someone that they were considering, has decided not to come. So there is still

the question of the future of the School. Do you have thoughts about that?

Sewell: With Cliff retiring soon as well. Do I have thoughts about that? I hope it doesn't disappear. That for sure. I am not sure why it has been so difficult to make appointments. I think it has been difficult both for the Professors in the School to agree on who would be good appointments and then difficult to bring people. There were offers put out to a number of people who eventually decided not to come.

Shore: Is that because the society has changed? Because it is a tough time when your kids are young, or when they are old, or?

Sewell: I don't know why it has been so difficult to get people to come. In some ways it seems to be an incredibly attractive position. On the other hand I think being there is like being trapped in paradise and I am not sure that it is something someone fully rational, fully knowing the consequences, ought to do.

Shore: So the five-year plan is maybe the best compromise? One year may not be long enough, being there your whole career might be too dangerous, or is there no answer?

Sewell: I don't know. I don't think there is an answer. The five-year plan is not something that is going to happen again, I don't think. The settled architecture of the School is that you have permanent faculty. Whether that

was the best way to found the School in the first place, God only knows. But it certainly is the case that they have had difficulty getting people to accept and making their minds on candidates and when they do make up their minds on candidates, and the candidates are ready to come, in too many cases the candidates are shot down by the rest of the faculty. Obviously, the future of the School is still in doubt. I wish it well.

Shore: Is it mostly bound up with Cliff? Do you see that you need another person like Cliff who is known as someone who has put things together from various disciplines to make that conversation possible. Is that the kind of person you would recommend?

Sewell: If you could find another Cliff that would be great, but they don't come around very often. If you look at the way the other Schools have operated, they just tend to get people who they regard as exemplars of the best in scholarship and they don't worry too much how they are going to make a program, is my sense. And it might be that that would be a better way for the Social Science School to go. Actually try to be somewhat less programmatic.

Shore: Less of a School.

Sewell: Yes. In some ways it would be nice if it could be a School and really work. I am not sure it has ever really fully worked as a School. I think it did in the years

that I was there, for a variety of contingent reasons, partly because there was a truce between the Social Science School and the others. Partly because Albert was certainly a good influence. Partly because it was a very heady time in the social sciences. I think in some ways it worked very well as a school. But still there was this insecurity about whether it was for real or not.

Shore: And now that it is almost twenty-five years old?

Sewell: The insecurity is still there.

Shore: This leads into what I wanted to do to end the interview, which was to quote some things that you wrote back to you, I know that is not a nice thing to do, but I am going to do it. It is a fairly long quote. In the preface to the work that you did there, Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848, you describe your years at the Institute in this way: "I cannot imagine a more congenial place to have written it. The freedom and tranquility of the Institute have allowed me to give it my undivided attention and the flow of stimulation from the annually renewed community of scholars has kept me in touch with the best thinking in contemporary social science. In the insistently interdisciplinary atmosphere of the School of Social Science, I have had the privilege of exchanging ideas with anthropologists, political scientists, philosophers, sociologists, and economists -- not to

mention fellow historians -- and I believe that both my book and I have gained by these encounters.

Sewell: I think I have been tremendously privileged in being able to be there and still entirely stand by what I said, it still sounds exactly right. I think I got it right and expressed myself properly. I was someone who was interdisciplinary from the beginning. I started out as an undergraduate major in sociology, then did my graduate work in history, but, as I said, did economic history, so I had some training in economics, history and sociology and then got caught up in anthropology before I had my longer stint at the Institute. So I was already set up for that but there was something about the experience of those years that put my head beyond disciplines in a way that I think has been for me incredibly liberating and stimulating. So what that means is that I find I can engage in conversation, real conversation, real exchange, with people across a wide range of fields and perspectives and have a sense of where they are coming from and of places that they might go than people who have had a much more disciplinary-bound experience just don't have.

Shore: And you brought that with you to Michigan as well?

Sewell: Yes, certainly. I brought it with me to Arizona, but Arizona was not a place that had the richness of resources to put it into effect. At Michigan, certainly,

I was a kind of central figure in launching an interdisciplinary enterprise there that has been a very enlivening experience for all of the people who have been involved in it. The other respect in which I am interdisciplinary is that I currently have a joint appointment in history and political science at Chicago. My appointment at Michigan was in sociology and history. I still hang out with anthropologists as well so that I am just involved in such a wide set of discussions.

Shore: Do you see this as a trend that is going to continue in universities? The Institute helped you to think beyond disciplines. Is that going to continue to happen in the larger academic community?

Sewell: Well, I hope so. I think the years since I left the Institute are years in which this has happened on a massive scale. This is true in the humanities and in the social sciences, it is true across the humanities and the social sciences in a way that my Institute years prepared me for very nicely, and again, Cliff Geertz is one of the people who represents that nexus between the humanities and the social sciences best of all. But I think that that has been a very strong intellectual tendency in universities all across the United States in the last fifteen years or so.

Shore: But you still have to get a job in a certain field.

Sewell: You still have to get a job in a discipline. It is very

complicated for graduate students, obviously, because they find that where the intellectual action is is usually in some place that can't be located securely within a discipline. On the other hand, they have the disciplinary boundary questions to worry about. So they have to make themselves saleable as political scientists and sociologists and anthropologists or whatever. And I see no signs of the disciplines going away. Particularly for the key functions of graduate training, certifying, that is, granting Ph.D.'s, and secondly, of hiring. In some ways that is really very archaic, because the real lines of intellectual life in the contemporary academy just don't fit the lines of departments at all.

Shore: So it seems like, in a circular way, it's an argument for the Institute's importance as a place where that can happen easily, where it doesn't happen "in spite of."

Sewell: I wish it were possible to institutionalize this kind of interdisciplinary character of existing intellectual life in ways that bear more on graduate training and on tenuring than is currently the case.

Shore: Could that be a function of time? When the generation that has been trained this way takes over?

Sewell: I think the generation that went through that experience is now in power in most departments, but as I say, I really don't think it is going to happen. The disciplines are just so deeply entrenched that I don't --

geography has practically disappeared as a discipline, so some of them may go away, but I don't think you are going to find interdisciplinary formation for graduate training happening. It's too bad. It is just a kind of stickiness in the institutional structural of the American academy.

Shore: Thank you very much.

Sewell: Thank you. It has been great fun thinking and talking about all of this again.