

# The legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology

A collection of original essays in  
Honour of the Chicago School of  
Sociology During the First Half of  
the 20th Century

Disorganization  
The Polish Peasant  
Succession  
The City  
Isolation  
The Jackroller  
Urban Areas  
Analytic Inductivism  
Taxi Dance Hall  
Life History  
Comparative method  
pragmatism  
Race  
Class  
Tank Town  
Survey  
Simmel  
Anthropology  
The Gang  
ethnography  
Definition of the Situation  
Official Records  
Assimilation  
looking glass self  
The Professional Thief  
Community Profile  
Demographics  
Gold Coast  
Natural Areas  
Understanding

Edited by

Christopher Hart

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“The moral of today’s story is that ‘Chicago’ was never the unified chapel of the original myth, a unified school of thought. It was, instead, a vigorous and energetic school of activity, a group of sociologists who collaborated in the day-to-day work of making sociology in an American university and did that very well. But we cannot make an inferential jump from that pragmatic collaboration to a ‘tradition’, a coherent body of theory. The real legacy of Chicago is the mixture of things that characterised the school of activity at every period: open, whether through choice or necessity, to a variety of ways of doing sociology, eclectic because circumstances pushed it to be.”

Howard S. Becker *The Chicago School, So Called*

Christopher Hart, senior lecturer at the University of Chester, England, has written widely on topics across the social sciences, arts and humanities. His most recent book is *A Collection of Essays in Honour of Talcott Parsons* (Midrash, 2009)

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edited by *Christopher Hart*

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The chapters in this volume have their origins in the conference *The Legacy of the Chicago School*, held from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 at the magnificent Britannia Hotel Manchester, England. The conference organizers were, Dr Dave Francis, Manchester Metropolitan University, England, Dr Chris Hart, University of Chester, England and Dr Pete Martin, University of Manchester, England. The papers presented at the conference were: *The Chicago School and the Emergence of Global Society: The Insights of Roderick D. McKenzie*, Dennis W. MacDonald, (Chair) Department of Sociology, Saint Anselm College, Manchester, USA; *'Ahead of its Time?': The Legacy and Relevance of W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki (1918-20) The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Brian Roberts, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, Wales; *Playing Chicago Against Chicago: The Natural History of Public Problems*, Cédric Terzi, Daniel Cefaï and Louis Quéré, Faculté des sciences économiques, et sociales de l'Université de Fribourg (Suisse), Paris; *Preschooling – Recovering the Early Sociological Tradition at the University of Chicago (1892–1918)*, Rainer Egloff, Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter Collegium Helveticum, in gemeinsamer Trägerschaft von Universität, Zürich, Switzerland; *Sociology and Social Work: an Unresolved Legacy of the First Chicago School*, Ian F. Shaw, University of York, England; *The Theoretical Metaphors of Human Ecology*, Svetlana Bankovskaya, The Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Moscow; *Blumer's Dilemma Revisited: Causality and Analytic Induction*, Martyn Hammersley, The Open University, England; *"All Life is Experimentation": The Chicago School and the Experimenting Society*, Matthias Gross, Department of Urban and Environmental Sociology, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, Permoserstr. Leipzig, Germany; *James Carey and the Legacy of Chicago School of Sociology on Communication and Media Studies*, Filipa Brito Subtil, Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal; *The Ethnographic Mosaic: Critically Locating Clifford Shaw's Research Method of the Young Person's 'own story' in Contemporary Reflexive Sociological Interpretation*, Shane Blackman, Canterbury Christ Church University, England; *Mind, Self and Society: Have we Utilised the Full Radical Potential of G.H. Mead's Thought?* Julie Kirby, Faculty of Health, Edge Hill University, Lancashire, England; *The Use of Cartography in the Chicago School of Sociology*, A. Javier Treviño, (Chair) Department of Sociology, Wheaton College, Norton, MA, USA; *The LA School of Urban Studies: Students of Legacy or Claimants of Inheritance of the Chicago School*, Nikita A. Kharlamov, Moscow Higher School of Economics; *Ernest Burgess: Exploring Urban Marginality*, Roger Salerno, (Chair, Sociology/Anthropology) Pace University, New York City, USA; *The Chicago School as the First "school" of Empirical Sociology: a Standard Bearer?* Martin Bulmer, University of Surrey, England; and *Everett Hughes and the Art of Comparison: A Chicago Method*, Howard S. Becker, San Francisco, USA. Not all of the papers presented have been published here and nor were all the papers submitted for consideration

## CHAPTER 10

### Communication: an Inheritance of the Chicago School of Social Thought

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#### Introduction

From its founders at the end of the nineteenth century to its major figures in the early years of the twentieth, the Chicago School of Social Thought is an essential point of reference, by reason of its work on human ecology, the city, immigration, ethnic relations, delinquency, social control and the human self – work which is today regarded as part of the sociological canon. In this chapter we argue that these thinkers were pioneers, undertaking research of major significance on the topics of communication and the media in society, helping to make them a focus of attention for social theory and sociology. It is true that the thought of one of the leading thinkers of the Chicago School, the social psychologist G. H. Mead, on the communicative nature of the human self and on social interaction led to sociological approaches, such as symbolic interactionism, which grant crucial importance to communicative processes. It was also incorporated into major contemporary theoretical edifices, the leading example of which is the work of Habermas (1987 [1981]). But recognition of Mead's theories is not enough for a proper understanding of the enormous and in many respects distinctive contribution made by thinkers such as Small, Dewey, Mead, Thomas and Znaniecki, Park and Burgess to social scientific research on communication. It was above all researchers in the field of

communication research who investigated this legacy. They identified gaps in this area which social theory and sociology, however, still need to address. This chapter has two main objectives. First, to examine the work done in the Chicago School of Social Thought on two fundamental aspects of the study of communication and modern information media. Focusing specifically on the work of Small, Dewey, Mead, Thomas and Znaniecki, and Park and Burgess, we aim to explore their profound insights, on the one hand, into the connections between communication and social interaction, and on the other, the relations between communication, culture and democracy. Secondly, to show how, following a time, from the interwar period until the end of the 1960s, in which its theoretical contribution to the study of communication, democracy and the media suffered some neglect, this legacy was a source of inspiration for a hermeneutic approach to communication, as an alternative to positivist, utilitarian and functional approaches. To provide a closer focus for this approach, the article offers the specific example of the ritual or cultural theory of communication associated with the influential work of James W. Carey. The debate on these key issues, which relate more particularly to the intellectual history of communication research, is viewed here as an integral part of the tensions in the social sciences generally over how social life is made possible by communication, and how communication can be a support for common public life and democracy.

#### The Contributions of Albion Small and George Vincent to Early Sociological Thought on Communication and the Press in the USA

In the United States, it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that any signs of reflection on communication appeared, as precursors of later research work. Until then, references to communication in the young American nation had been limited to intellectually stimulating meditations which produced a random literature focused on topics such as the press, freedom of expression, censorship, the public, the telegraph, advertising, and the economic power of the newspapers (Lang, 1989:369; Carey, 1997 [1996]:20).

At the turn of the century, some of the founders of sociology in the United States developed original thinking within their discipline on both the role of communication in society and the emergence of the mass media. This took place during a period of profound social upheaval – roughly between 1890 and the First World War. It was a period which saw the closing of the frontier, the end of agriculture as the dominant form of living, the huge growth of cities, the creation and growth of electricity grids, expanding industrialization, the maturing of industrial capitalism and the growth of international trade and communications, the expansion of the national press, and the powerful emergence of marketing and advertising.

As in Europe, the final decade of the nineteenth century is a key period in the development of the social sciences in the US, and for the institutionalization of sociology and anthropology in American universities. Albion Small (1854-

1926), the founder of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Chicago, in 1892, was one of the main driving forces in this new field of study, in which William Sumner (1840-1910) and Edward Ross (1866-1951), professors of sociology at the universities of Yale and Wisconsin respectively, were also dedicated participants. The precursors of sociology in the US came together in their research on communication and the press under the intellectual and cultural influence of turn-of-the-century German political economy.<sup>122</sup> Political economists Albert Schäffle, Karl Knies and Karl Bücher developed a conception of communication as a binding force in society, and of the press as a social and cultural form of circulation of symbols and of transmission of ideas and information which actively incorporated the context of expanding industrial capitalism and the growth of trade. In sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies examined in depth the role of journalism in forming public opinion, and Max Weber highlighted the importance of the social scientific study of the press (Hardt, 2001:43-168; Simonson and Peters, 2008; Pietilä, 2008:205-223).

Small was part of a vast intellectual movement of social reform in the US, the main concepts of which rest on the assumption that scientific theories are closely tied to the problems of public life. The social sciences should not be limited to drawing up abstract models of society. In particular, the task of sociology was to help to find practical solutions for the problems emerging as advanced industrial society took shape in the US. Sociology took on strong ethical and civic commitments, in order to help achieve a better and fairer society

The press, as the most influential link between communication and society, was torn between its cultural mission and private business interests. The press did not remain unaffected by the process through which the market became disembedded from other social institutions – the great transformation which constitutes the political and economic origins of our time, to quote Polanyi (1944) – until it becomes a world with claims to control the rest of society. The aim of achieving high advertising revenues and an ever-increasing number of readers generated increasing uneasiness and suspicion as to the true role of the press, giving rise to a wide-ranging debate on the economic and social aspects of the emerging media industry. Many scientific and literary journals took up the theme, in particular the *The American Journal of Sociology*, where Small and other pioneers of sociology published several articles on the press, public opinion, the effects on culture of the way reporting was being carried out, and the

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<sup>122</sup> Hanno Hardt's book, *Social Theories of the Press: constituents of communication research, 1840s to 1920s*, first published in 1979, continues to be the best-researched source on the relationships between communication, media and society in the work of the German academic political economists, which had a powerful impact on the early American sociologists (Hardt, 2001).

relationships between journalism, democracy and press ethics (Small, 1915; Ross, 1903a; 1903b; 1903c; 1904: 189-207; 1910: 303-311; 1917-1918:620-632) In *An Introduction to the Study of Society* (1894), which he wrote in collaboration with George Vincent, Small examines in depth, on the one hand the meaning of communication for human and social life and, on the other, the paths taken by the press at the end of the nineteenth century in the US. Small and Vincent drew up a communication model which extends the importance which Schäffle attributed to communication as the primordial element in social development, within an organismic understanding of the social environment. Under Schäffle influence, they defined communication as part of society's regulatory system, penetrating the social system and operating like the nerve fibres of the animal organism. This is how communication takes place between individuals, making each subject a part of multiple and distinct psycho-physical channels of the social nervous system. At the same time as they perform the function of mediation, individuals also operate as 'terminal cells' in the process of communication. The subject is a 'connecting cell' and also a 'terminal cell' for all the channels of communication which radiate into society, to adopt Small and Vincent's terminology.

To initiate the process of communicating, individuals arm themselves with a multiplicity of symbols. Symbols are the external expression of psychical phenomena essential to the preservation of ideas, customs and conventions, that is to say, to archive and disseminate human experience. Among the symbols used to communicate, Small and Vincent include language (oral, written and printed), vocal and instrumental music, gestures, drawings, photographs, and painting, with language being the most adaptable medium for circulating human experience (Small and Vincent, 1894: 219). It is through that multiplicity of symbols that the infrastructure of discussion, dissemination and transmission of knowledge and information in social life arises, producing society's general system of communication. The system incorporates various elements: the press, commerce, trade, public address, education, church and government. Each of these parts has a permanent relationship to the others. Through a number of examples, Small and Vincent demonstrate the role which each of these specific communication systems plays in society: the press is interwoven in all aspects of the psycho-physical communication apparatus, and its reach is almost as extensive as that of the mails; in business organizations, the communication process facilitates the coordination of production, transportation and exchange of wealth; in schools, communication processes are key elements in increasing and communicating knowledge; the church communicates 'peculiar psychical impulses' from a religious standpoint; and finally, government is described as 'the clearest and most complete example of a social communicating structure' (Small and Vincent, 1894:232). In the specific case of the press, Small and Vincent show how it is the prototype for the multiple possibilities of communication channels: the press is able to collect ideas, transform them into printed symbols and distribute them to all social groups. The press is a convergence of psycho-physical channels towards a

centre. In this centre there are devices for making symbols, which are then distributed by various means of transport between the various different segments of society.

Small and Vincent, for whom the press had the crucial function of disseminating knowledge in social and public systems of communication, were particularly interested in analysing the profound changes in the media in the second half of the nineteenth century. They observed that the increasing demand for books and magazines, not just in cities but also in smaller communities, which had been brought about by, amongst other factors, the division of labour, was facilitated by increased transportation. They realized that in a context of growing industrialization and urban expansion, the press had increased its power, becoming an influential social institution and the most significant vehicle for the communication of ideas. They concluded that the press was the most powerful medium for communicating ideas between the institutions of public power (political parties, unions, the university, the church, and social groups) and the rest of the population.

In highlighting the increasing social and cultural role of the press in the nineteenth century, Small and Vincent drew attention to the possibility that it might be used by different interests for the purposes of manipulation, or be controlled by other means. From this awareness of the press' and the newspapers strong social influence on public communication they argued for a critical assessment of press corporations and the services they provide, including a review of their professional practices and precise observations on the public duties and responsibilities of the newspapers. Their diagnosis was somewhat critical of the press in the late nineteenth century: the press was not providing adequate services in reporting facts, in guiding public opinion, and in observing the form and content of the information published; despite its organized character, the press was unsatisfactory in its coverage of news; it was increasingly affected by the world of business, and tended to follow the path of sensationalism; the combination of self-interest and, occasionally, corruption was leading to distortion of the facts. Small and Vincent concluded that these tendencies were becoming widespread, so that it was becoming increasingly difficult to derive from the newspapers an understanding of social activities and a proper sense of ethical behaviour. Nevertheless, despite these pathologies, they regarded the press as an integral part of a system of public communication, the main mission of which was to collect and disseminate information in the service of a broader concept of democracy. Critical research on the media system is justified by the important role it plays in social life and democratic politics (see Hardt, 2001:150-155).

Communication, Conversation, Community Life and Democracy  
in John Dewey

Although Small and Vincent's work was an important milestone, in that it introduced both communication and the press as foundational topics in American sociology<sup>123</sup>, John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy is widely acknowledged for its merit in having contributed to a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the concept of communication in the history of modern thought (Carey, 1989 [1975]:13-36; Peters, 1986:527-559; 1989:199-220; 2000 [1999]:16-22; Schiller, 1996:24). Dewey was head of the department of philosophy at the University of Chicago between 1894 and 1904, and one of the most influential American thinkers and educators of the early decades of the twentieth century. While the German tradition of political economy is evident in Small, the epistemological importance Dewey attributes to communication owes more to his Aristotelian-Hegelian background and to his engagement with naturalist pragmatism (Dewey and Peters 2001:14). Dewey had a vigorous intellectual influence on the Chicago School of Social Thought, as demonstrated in the various relational aspects of communication and in the understanding that social life is a process which ties together the self, communication, community life and democracy.

There is one permanent thread to Dewey's ideas on communication. 'Of all affairs', he wrote, 'communication is the most wonderful' (Dewey, 2004 [1925]: 35). In his speculations on the origins of human society, Dewey argues that it is the outcome of the transformation of purely organic behaviour of human groups into behaviour marked by intellectual properties, through language and conversation – these being defined as practical activity. These properties derive from the emerging influence of language which, beyond its material basis in acts of signalling, implies cooperation and empathy. Language is eminently a form of activity, an instrument for action, and should not be confused with a mere system of representation, nor does it serve a simple function of representation. Words do not take on meaning on account of their representative nature, but rather because of their relationships to other words and to social engagement consubstantiated in the act of conversation. Because it is a process of sharing common meanings, symbolic action is inextricable from associative action. The intentional action of human subjects is 'trans-actional' in nature. In order for acts or behaviour not to be mere physical occurrences of an organic symbiosis, individuals must understand and communicate each other's meanings and, through this combined action, modify and adjust their conduct accordingly (see Dewey 2004 [1925]:35-36; 1938). What defines communication is that it is a shared experience. Hence it is an experience which congenitally, according to Dewey, has a unique moral character.

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<sup>123</sup> For the reasons given earlier, the same can be said for Sumner and Ross.

In line with his emphasis on the social aspect of communication processes, Dewey also argues that knowledge is attained in the context of symbolic communication as a communal event. Going counter to philosophical positions which hold that ideas and knowledge are the functions of an individual and isolated mind or conscience, he argues that 'knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned' (1981 [1927]:158). Communication, knowledge and understanding are essentially identical phenomena (Dewey 1981 [1927]:176). Moreover, communication also embodies an ideal. Communication, which is a shared experience, creates and conveys symbols, thought and culture, and gives access to sharing other experiences, expectations, moral values, emotions and interests, thus providing the foundations for a democratic way of life. Dewey distinguished between democracy as a social idea and political democracy as a system of government, and for him, associated life, community and democracy were names for the same thing (see 1981 [1927]:143-184).

It is appropriate in this context to quote at length from the beginning of his work *Democracy and Education*, written in 1916, which illustrates Dewey's notion of communication as a cultural, social and political principle:

'Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions – like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.' (1916:4)

Dewey's persistent idea is that communication is not just a medium for symbolic transmission, but also, and above all, a socio-symbolic process occurring at different social levels which maintains, produces and culturally transforms society. While the significance of his thought on the role of communication in the creation of the human self, of society, and of social life has been widely acknowledged, less recognition has been given to his judgments on the press and modern technical information media in real life, a reality in which he analyses trends in commodification, complex technological systems, and political action. Dewey's definition of communication as a ritual of sharing, participation, and possession of common beliefs, on the one hand, and as transmission and remote dissemination of signs and messages, on the other, produced an intellectual legacy that would later, as we shall see below, be imaginatively reinvented by James W. Carey (1934-2006), a key figure in US

communication theory and cultural studies during the second half of the twentieth century.

A modern society, a Great Society in Deweyian terms, needs mechanisms to implement conversation and systematic discussion on a different scale to traditional societies, in order to promote a democratic social order, a Great Community. To this end, the media and the news are an opportunity for public debate and for action, the body through which a public is constituted and public opinion is formed. The role of the genuine press is to promote conversation in modern culture, generating the ability to follow an argument, understand other positions in depth, extend the limits of comprehension, discuss viable alternative proposals, and to contribute to a common civic moral disposition (Dewey, 1981 [1927]:143-184).

Communication, for Dewey, consists of building the identity of peoples, just as art, architecture, custom and ritual do, and thus sets up a relationship which is intrinsic to the nature of public life. It is here that the technical information media, and newspapers in particular, have an added responsibility to create an informed and enlightened public opinion, containing within it the germ of rational and critical action. There is a clear ethical principle in this conception of communication, to the extent that any obstacle to communication, sharing and expanding experience must be overcome. The media offer Dewey an ample space for learning, in which the largest number of citizens can be brought together, without sacrificing their identities as members of particular social groups. With the concept of instrumentalism, which Dewey saw as embodying an evolutionary notion of progress through technological development, information techniques are regarded as instruments whose main function is to solve problems and, as these change, so they (the technologies) must adapt to such change. As Peters states, communication is seen as the solution for social disorganization and for the difficulties which democracy faces in a period of enormous change (Peters, 1989:205).

Years later, Dewey's vision becomes increasingly nuanced. In *The Public and its Problems*, published in 1927, Dewey, who is far from being regarded as a critic of industrial civilization, shows signs of some discomfort with the paradoxes emerging from the paths taken by American society since the World War. The work reveals a Dewey who is no longer an optimistic and patriotic liberal, the defender of the civilizing force of industrialization who had supported American participation in the first large-scale world war.<sup>124</sup> In several passages, he is much more ambiguous regarding the social conditions produced by large, impersonal organizations and by the techniques of communication. They

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<sup>124</sup> After the Second World War, Dewey wrote an 'Afterword' to *The Public and its Problems*, dated 22 July 1946. In it, Dewey reflected on war and international relations, and argued for his persistent approach in favour of finding areas of common interest. His comments on the dominance of economics in the political organization of social life are noticeably critical, as is the link he makes between modern technological methods and the destruction brought about by war.



emerge as both offering liberating potential and presenting a problem. On the one hand, communication techniques help to multiply and enlarge those connections (freely circulating opinions and facts) which are essential to public life, but on the other, they paralyze and disturb the extraordinary reach of those connections. It is not Dewey's intention in this interpretation to make technology the scapegoat; on the contrary. In his view, the problem lies not in technology *per se*, but in the weakening or absence of ideas and moral values to accompany technological factors. As he wrote: 'We have the physical tools of communication as never before. The thought and aspirations congruous with them are not communicated, and hence are not common. Without such communication the public remain shadowy and formless, seeking spasmodically for itself, but seizing and holding its shadow rather than its substance. Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse' (Dewey, 1981 [1927]:142). The press is one of the large and impersonal organizations which, in focusing on its own interests, seriously hinders the possibility of establishing community.

This short summary of Dewey's thought shows how his viewpoint established communication as the central element of human life and human societies, using a poly-faceted and multidimensional idea. Through his interpretation of individual thought as the outcome of a communicational exchange which the subject makes in a context of association, Dewey drew up a hypothesis on the social nature of the dialogical roots of thought. Consequently, he located the process of communication between individuals in a framework which is both sociological and normative, a notion which would be creatively adopted by George H. Mead. Dewey pointed to the need to think about mass communication. That task was inseparable from his wider concerns with social, political and moral order, in a word, with democracy, ideas which we will come across in the work of both Thomas and Znaniecki, and Park. We agree with Peters when he states that Dewey provides the elements for a theory of mass communication (even though he does not call it that) preceding the emergence of the mass media as we know them (Peters, 1989:201). However, one cannot avoid noting the idealistic nature of Dewey's views. On the one hand, he sought to emphasize communication's potential contribution to a sense of community, while on the other he argued that the press should be seen as the civic part of conversational process.

A Polyphony of Hypotheses on Communication: George Herbert Mead, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, Ernest Burgess and Robert Park

Based on the pioneering work of Small and Dewey at the University of Chicago, the next generation of social theorists, in particular, Mead, Thomas and Znaniecki, Park and Burgess, further explored the communicational conceptions of human rationality and society. Whether in developing the theoretical approach which puts interpersonal communication at the heart of the formation and transformation of the human character and of social

interaction, or in addressing the possibilities and contradictions which modern means of communication (particularly the press) offer for public life, these thinkers made fundamental contributions to positioning communication as an essential category in sociology.

At Dewey's invitation, the social psychologist George H. Mead (1863-1931), a distinguished exemplar of the philosophical school of pragmatism in the social sciences in North America, lectured in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago between 1894 and 1931. He has become a classic figure in sociology, recognized above all for his reflections on the social nature of human subjectivity. Mead's work is widely acknowledged as having creatively extended Dewey's reasoning whereby human identity, and sociality itself, arise from, and develop with, communication. In fact, those parts of his work which are most often cited are his explanations of the social nature of the human self and the micro-sociological levels of social interaction. Mead developed in detail the idea that communication consists of a process of creating and expressing symbols through which the human self becomes both object and product of its own experience and interaction with other members of society. He fruitfully explored the idea that communication is a constitutive concept of the self and of the common life of individuals and societies. The key process of development of the human subject as a social subject is based on a complex interplay in which the subjects are able to engage when, in pursuing their intentions, they succeed in adjusting them according to how well they anticipate the possible responses of others in relation to those intentions. The complexity of that interactive exercise, which is communicational and thus constitutes social interaction, derives from the fact that human communication is not merely an exchange of signs, gestures or abstract ideas, but a process in which each one adjusts his own behaviour to the attitudes of others. This type of cooperative action between subjects is possible because human beings are able to draw on a particular kind of gesture – which Mead called significant symbols – in their communicative interaction. Certain gestures, which only humans can make, become significant symbols when they are responses to a given meaning in the experience of one individual and that same meaning is in turn evoked in another individual. Amongst the gestures which humans can draw on, those which are most likely to become significant symbols are vocal gestures or vocalizations and, within these, language. When gesture becomes language, that is to say when it adopts the form of rational cooperative activity, it becomes a significant symbol which invokes a particular meaning.

Mead developed some important ideas, which have become part of the social science heritage, on the role of language as a mechanism for socialization and the organization of action. Mead's arguments highlight the fact that, unlike a mere conversation of unconscious or non-significant gestures, language involves the communication of meanings or, in other words, significant gestures. These do not produce an immediate or direct response, but need to be interpreted in order that an answer may be obtained. This is the essential space for symbolic interaction, the domain in which individuals, in order to respond

to the gestures and actions of others, are compelled to use and interpret the symbols which those gestures and actions represent. For social interaction to take place, which means the same thing as human communication, symbols alone are not sufficient. It is of fundamental importance that the symbols be significant for the actors involved, that they have a common meaning shared by all members of a society or particular social group.

Significant symbols which human beings are able to create prolifically make it possible to produce complex webs of communication, out of which history and culture emerge. Subjects share a culture, an elaborate set of significations and values which governs most actions and makes it possible, to a large extent, to foresee how other individuals will behave. It is precisely in the sharing of common meanings that society becomes a cooperative activity. In order for individuals to form a cohesive social unit – and according to Mead this is the ideal of human societies – a system of communication is required in which those who carry out specific functions take on the attitudes of those whom those functions affect (Mead, 1934:327). In this interpretation, society is only possible, and is only maintained, through communication, the ideal form of which would be a universal discourse. If communication could be enhanced, then there would be a kind of democracy in which each individual could find, within himself, that which he seeks in the community (Mead, 1934:327-328). Democracy would be a community's process of enlightened self-government and self-regulation through communication between its members on the common problems which emerge in the exercise of inter-subjective praxis, and who demand the continuous normative revision of what constitutes a sense of duty. Mead was convinced, however, that in existing democratic systems communication had not developed in this way: individuals did not place themselves in the position of those they affected. In Mead therefore, communication is understood as the heart of a theoretical approach – and one which has a visible influence on modern thought – which reinforces the intrinsic relationship between moral development of society and the human personality of its members. The extent to which Jürgen Habermas adopted core aspects of Mead's thought in his monumental work *The Theory of Communicative Action* (2007a [1981]; 2007b [1981] particularly in Volume Two) is widely acknowledged, as is the contribution that incorporation of Mead by Habermas made to enshrining Mead's work in the canon, albeit at the cost of confining Mead to research into the micro levels of social interaction (Silva, 2007). While we cannot here embark on a more complex discussion of the way Habermas incorporated Mead's approach and the extent of its effect on the development of a concept of radical democracy which Dewey did not achieve, we should nonetheless recall that Mead had already expanded the connection between

communicational and democratic rationality to topics such as political democracy, war, international relations, industrialization and social reform.<sup>125</sup> In addition to having been the main defining principle of social interaction, communication in Chicago was also granted a crucial role in re-establishing social cohesion and control as part of a process of social change brought about by vast economic, demographic and technological transformations. Both the new techniques of transportation (railroad, automobile, airplane), and new communication devices (the telegraph, the newspaper, the telephone, cinema and radio) were seen as instruments through which modern society was being formed by communication. These devices, and their growth, were viewed as a condition for the creation of a democratic community in a context of social change. This standpoint, strongly indicative of Dewey's influence, can clearly be seen in the now classic work of William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1984 [1918-1920]), and in the work of Robert Park (on his own as well as with Ernest Burgess) which one can interpret as part of a joint effort to structure and organize the new cities which had arisen as a result of large migration flows, mass industrialization, and the growth of civic life.

In the face of an accelerating process of social disorganization, a term used by Thomas and Znaniecki to describe the decline in relations of proximity (primary groups) and the loss of ties of solidarity brought about by a shifting population, the breaking-up of families, and the proliferation of market relations, communication is redefined as the principle for re-establishing order and social cohesion, key concepts of Chicago sociology, not only in small local communities, but also at a national level. For these sociologists, 'social reorganization,' or modern social organization, can only be achieved by way of active processes of communication. Communication is an antidote to 'social disorganization' (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1984:218-219).

This is the direction in which Thomas and Znaniecki's references to the role of the press in modern society point. In an excerpt from *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, where they discuss the possibilities of social reorganization of peasant communities, which faced isolation as a result of increasing and ever-deepening contact with the outside world (wider, more complex and intercultural human spaces), they describe how, given the impossibility of forging harmonious cooperation on a large scale, communication through the press had taken the place of direct contact, and how abstract moral solidarity had given way to concrete social solidarity (1984:218). In Thomas and Znaniecki – and this goes for other Chicago thinkers too – we find a diffuse and very

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<sup>125</sup> Silva's recent research (2007:291-313) into the unpublished Mead archive shows that Mead's thought goes beyond the already well-known original contributions he made at the micro-sociological level of social interaction and how his theoretical assumptions expanded to include these topics.

characteristic conception of the American imaginary – the hope that information technologies would somehow play a redeeming role, as part of the phenomenon which Leo Marx called the ‘technological sublime’. David Depew and John Durham Peters have summarized that spirit very appropriately: ‘Each new medium of communication, from the telegraph to the Internet, has been greeted not only as a more efficient means of sending signals, but as reordering, for good and ill, the tissues of the democratic order itself. The question of communication and community in the United States is thus not only a fascinating theoretical issue; it is entangled in a long and deep history of political anxieties and wishes’ (2001:6).

The connection between social change, planning and resettlement, and communicative action was also one of the persistent themes in the work of Robert Park. The works of Park, one of the sociologists closest to the philosophical-communicational thought of John Dewey, who also had an in-depth knowledge of European social theory, particularly the German, became classics of urban sociology. Communication, however, is the key concept on which he built his sociological approach. Acknowledgement of the significance of his work on communication came rather late, only in the 1980s (Frazer and Gaziano, 1979:1-47; Czitrom, 1982:91-121; Saperas, 1992:160-168; Rogers, 1994:172-190; Berganza Conde, 2000; Buxton, 2008:345-362; Muhlmann and Plenel, 2008), even though his doctoral thesis, published in German in 1904 and translated into English only in 1972, had addressed theoretical problems which are ever-present in communication studies, and which are constant elements in all his thought – collective behaviour (the masses and the public), the media, the nature of sociology, and social ties.

His interest in the topic goes back to the final decade of the nineteenth century (between 1891 and 1892), when he was still a journalist. At Dewey’s invitation he took part in a publishing venture entitled *Thought News, a Journal of Inquiry and a Record of Fact*. The main objective of *Thought News*, which was never published, was to help make clear to the public the ways in which social laws produce what are conventionally defined as ‘problems’. According to Willinda Savage, writing in 1892, Dewey and the journalist Franklin Ford, another of the project’s mentors, had described the *Thought News* project as follows: ‘This will be a newspaper and will aim to perform the function of newspaper (...) which shall not discuss philosophic ideas *per se* but use them as tools in interpreting the movements of thought; which shall treat questions of science, letters, state, school and church as parts of the one moving life of man and hence of common interest, and not relegate them to departments of merely technical interest; which shall note new contributions to thought, whether by book or magazine, from the standpoint of the news in them, and not from that of

patron or censor’<sup>126</sup> (Savage in Czitrom, 1982:107). In facilitating a better understanding of events, this higher journalism would provide the knowledge that must precede effective action (Matthews, 1977:27). The power of the press would thus reside in the ability to publicize the meaning of the relationships between facts, and more generally, their own relations to the movement of life. Only in this way could one make the transition from opinion to intelligence, providing a scientific basis for social action. An apt quotation from Dewey summarizes their ideas: ‘A proper daily newspaper would be the only possible social science’ (Dewey in Matthews, 1977:20-30).<sup>127</sup>

Park’s involvement in the *Thought News* project left an indelible mark on his vision for sociological research, and on his thinking about news, journalism, and the influence of public opinion. That vision sought to make a close connection between the two forms of knowledge which he believed had much in common, journalism and sociology. In this he belongs with the German sociologist and journalist Siegfried Kracauer, who also attended Georg Simmel’s lectures in Berlin. The final words of an autobiographical note he dictated to his secretary at the Fisk University, found among his papers after his death, express his belief that he always saw the sociologist as a kind of ‘super-reporter’, a reporter who was a bit more precise and operated with a little more detachment than the average, and recalls his friend Franklin Ford’s use of the term ‘Information with a capital I’ (see Park, 1950). Park believes that the news is the public’s main source of knowledge of the surrounding environment. Following Dewey, he argues for the existence of ties between indispensable, rigorous and plentiful information, and the democracy anchored in conversation and the creation of a public which such information makes possible. Hence the major responsibility he assigns to the press in building that democratic public, as well as in reinforcing the quality of democracy. According to Park, the conditions for achieving these objectives were exceptional, on account of the technological developments which had enabled the new means of communication to overcome physical and psychological obstacles between people (giving them the opportunity to recreate their face-to-face relationships on a large scale), while at the same time enabling the dissemination of the truth to increasing numbers of people. His experience with that project and his work as a journalist strengthened his conviction that communication was the main cohesive force in modern society.

In Park and Ernest Burgess’ book, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1970 [1921]) communication is viewed as the central element in sociology. In this

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<sup>126</sup> The excerpt cited by Czitrom is in a 1950 article, published by Willinda Savage, ‘John Dewey and “Thought News” at University of Michigan’, *Michigan Review* 56, Spring:204-205 based on the *Michigan Daily*, 16 March, 1892.

<sup>127</sup> The excerpt cited by Matthews is in Charles Cooley, Notes on Lectures by John Dewey at Michigan. University of Michigan Historical Collections. On the *Thought News* project, see also Czitrom (1982:104-108), Berganza Conde (2000:14-20) and Muhlmann (2008:26).

book, which many see as the most influential work of sociology of the inter-war period in the US, sociology is seen as 'the science of collective behaviour', which studies minds in social relation, as opposed to psychology, which focuses on minds in isolation (Park and Burgess, 1970:42). Further on in the book the authors write: 'Sociology, as collective psychology deals with communication' (1970:132). Communication is the process whereby one individual's experience is conveyed to another, and at the same time the means by which individuals achieve common experience (see 1970:36-37). It is this experience which establishes the conditions for a common, public life, and for a consensus in which the individual participates, to a greater or lesser degree, and of which he is himself a part. The social organization of human beings, the various types of social groups, and the changes which take place within them at different times and under different conditions are determined not only by instincts and by competition, but by a social heritage – made up of customs, tradition, public opinion, and contract – which is created in and transmitted by communication (see 1970: 80-81). 'The continuity and life of a society depend upon its success in transmitting from one generation to the next its folkways, mores, techniques and ideals. From the standpoint of collective behavior these cultural traits may all be reduced to the one term, 'consensus'. Society viewed abstractly is an organization of individuals; considered concretely it is a complex of organized habits, sentiments, and social attitudes – in short, consensus' (1970:81). In this *sui generis* reality of communication, Park and Burgess perceived, as Peters rightly observes, a 'new possible foundation for the social sciences', in particular, for the emergence of the new disciplinary oxymoron which goes by the name of social psychology (Peters, 1986:533).

In a later essay entitled 'Reflections on Communication and Culture' (Park, 1972 [1938]:98-116), the link between communication and society is even stronger, when he insists that communication performs several essential functions in holding society together. Communication builds consensus and understanding between individuals in a given social group. These are fundamental principles for building a society, and also for cultural unity; communication forges and encourages a network of customs and mutual expectations which bring together the various social entities (family, work organization, etc.); it helps to maintain the order and cooperation which are vital for the continuity of society; it passes on the cultural legacy, the history and traditions of social groups, in the sense that it not only ensures that common undertakings are pursued, but that social institutions endure on a day to day basis and from generation to generation (see Park, 1972:102).

The cultural dynamics of the social group by means of communication are the key to his concept of social control. Parkian social theory assigns importance to two kinds of social order: first, the biotic or ecological order, governed by involuntary relations and symbiotic interaction – as in competition, conflict, adaptation and assimilation. This is the order of the external world, of the commercial world, and also to a lesser extent of politics, in which the free and socially and morally unconstrained individual pursues his individual

interests. Secondly, the moral order, in which communication is the dominant form of interaction, which produces conscious meanings and voluntary institutions. The moral order is found in the more intimate world of community and family. Within it, the individual is confronted by the interests, expectations and demands of others. In primary groups, communication and personal influences are the principles of order. Park's intent is to suggest that these two kinds of social order, governed by competition and communication, are mutually reinforcing and complementary, even though they perform different social functions.

In putting forward a model of society as being governed by the two kinds of social order simultaneously, Park – adopting the archetype of the naturalistic theory of social evolution – sees society as always being moulded by the inherent dynamism of a structure which is constantly adjusting to the social needs of individuals and groups, constantly in a state of 'unstable equilibrium' or 'dynamic disequilibrium'. This shifting compromise is only realized when consensus, built through communication, attenuates relations of competition and conflict. Whereas competition differentiates individuals and groups, communication unites them. This approach is also the framework for his research on the press.

In *The Immigrant Press and its Control* (1922), Park puts forward the hypothesis that the foreign-language press is a changing and ambivalent force. While it inevitably leads to assimilation of American culture, it also preserves the group's cultural heritage<sup>128</sup>. The press is the tie which binds the immigrant with his ethnic group, the community in which he lives and the world around him, that is to say, the nation which welcomes him. As its title suggests, the book also touches on the importance of the concept of social control, a central notion of Parkian theory. Aware of the American government's concern that the immigrant press might spread propaganda or opinions prejudicial to national security (over half the foreign-language newspapers published in the US were in German), Park advocated close collaboration with the institutions of the immigrant communities, particularly the press, in order to encourage integration and the assimilation of the American culture. For Park, the foreign-language press could be regarded as an instrument of 'Americanization.'

In his essay on the natural history of the press, an historic achievement of a 'surviving species, (...) an account of the conditions under which the existing newspaper has grown up and taken form' (Park, 1923:274), he traces the historical development of newspapers in four main phases – newsletters, party papers, independent papers and the yellow press. Guided by the idea that the press is an institution moulded by an unceasing process of adjustment to the

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<sup>128</sup>*The Immigrant Press and its Control* was a work commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation, of New York, on ways to Americanize the immigrant population of the US in the 1920s. The project was entitled *Americanization Studies for the Acculturation of Immigrant Groups into American Society*.

needs of individual subjects and groups, in a framework of the change brought about by each historical period, Park argues that in the modern city the newspaper has come to replace the personal contacts and organized gossip of the small community (the village), as the main source of social control and formation of public opinion. For Park, the newspaper and the news in the big city are mechanisms of social control and for the formation of public opinion in the sense that they are a guide to reality, systematically emphasizing that which is unusual and 'supplying topics for conversation': 'the press is asked to create a mystical force called 'public opinion' that will take up the slack in public institutions' (1923:278). In this essay, he also sets out the hopes placed in the potential role of the newspaper in building community spirit in the urban societies of the early twentieth century, although he does point out the difficulties in such an undertaking: 'It is evident that a newspaper cannot do for community of 1,000,000 inhabitants what the village did spontaneously for itself through the medium of gossip and personal contact. Nevertheless, the efforts of the newspaper to achieve this impossible result are an interesting chapter in the history of politics as well as the press' (Park, 1923:278-279).

Park traces the history of those difficulties, which is also the history of the newspaper. It is implicit in the essay that the paths taken were not those which best matched his hopes for the press. Park concludes that if history did not follow the path he might have wished it to follow, the fault lay not with institutions, but with the people chosen to lead them, and with incorrigible human nature. Thus one cannot expect newspapers to be more than they actually are: 'newspapers are about as good as they can be'. In his view, it would only be possible to achieve a better press by educating people and organizing political information and intelligence (Park, 1923:289).

In the many articles he wrote on the press over two decades, one can detect his increasing discomfort with the kind of journalism which threatened to come to the fore in the twentieth century. He started out believing that news and the circulation of news are fundamental for the process of cultural dissemination, but could not help being aware that the chosen formula for increasing newspaper readership was to add a touch of literature to the news: to write news so that it would appeal to the emotions. With this aim in mind, the formula became love and romance for women, sport and politics for men (Park, 1923:287). This was what the founders of the so-called yellow press, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, had gambled on, the main contribution of the former being muckraking and the second 'jazz' or noise. Before Pulitzer and Hearst, newspapers had adopted the principle that their business was to educate. After them, they appealed to the heart rather than to the mind. From then on, not everything printed in the newspaper belonged to the realm of news. It was printed as news, but was read as if it were cheap literature – published because it incited the emotions and excited the imagination, and not because the message was urgent and a call to action. While the news is essentially located in time and space, in art and literature time and space do not limit circulation (Park, 1927:806-813; 1972 [1938]:115, 116).

The way Park argued it, the new trends in the penny press, and later the yellow press, produced a type of journalism which, instead of educating a democratic public and encouraging the formation of public opinion, the press became increasingly a 'controlling mechanism for directing attention' (1972 [1904]:46). The opinion thus formed was a judgment made at the precise moment the information was received, and this could only produce immediate and unthinking perceptions. These trends led Park to fear that modern readers would regress into the emotional, uniform and intolerant crowd described by Gustave Le Bon. In his analysis, the drastic changes which had occurred in the modern world had led to a loss of historical perspective, and to a tendency to live in an eternal 'illusory present.' Together with early critics of the cinema, Park made a ferocious attack on modern media-based pastimes: 'This restlessness and thirst for adventure is, for the most part, barren and illusory, because it is uncreative (...) It is in the improvident use of our leisure, I suspect, that the greatest wastes in American life occurs.' (Park, 1925:675). Years later he refers to symbolic and expressive forms of communication – literature, cinema and the fine arts – as 'subversive cultural influences' (Park, 1972 [1938]:115). Park concludes, '(...) the function of art and of the cinema, is on the whole, in spite of the use that has been made of it for educational purposes, definitely symbolic, and as such it profoundly influences sentiment and attitudes even when it does not make any real contribution to knowledge' (1972 [1938]:116).

By virtue of the extent and diversity of his empirical research, and the significance of his insights for intellectual thought, we may rightfully consider Park to be the first sociologist of communication and the media. Other Chicago thinkers granted an essential role to communication in creating social ties, and left valuable contributions to sociological explanation in this area, but it was society and its organization, and the profound changes then taking place which focused their attentions. Park, on the hand, combined these concerns and his civic ideals with the concrete study of how communication and the media developed and operated in the real world during that period. The later research which two of his pupils, Paul Cressey and Frederic Thrasher, did on cinema in the 1930s, confirm his strong attachment to the media (Buxton, 2008:345-352).

#### James Carey's Cultural Theory of Communication and the Chicago School of Social Thought

In the period between the two world wars communication studies became established institutionally in the US as a scientific and academic field. The theoretical framework within which this institutionalization took place was very different to the theories developed by the Chicago School of Social Thought. It focused on quantitative and qualitative descriptions of audiences, with the aim of measuring the short-term effectiveness of the media on different publics, and became the mainstream research paradigm in a political context of world conflicts and later, over two decades, in the social context of mass consumption which emerged in its wake. This kind of research studied directly and indirectly

perceptible social and psychological effects – influence, persuasion, attitude change, opinion formation, and individual decision-making, changes in electoral behaviour, consumption patterns and use of the various media.

From around the 1920s, two generations of researchers were active in the scientific field of mass communication studies, studying the effects of communication. Two philosophical and ideological attitudes influenced the study of the effects of mass communication and were powerful factors in shaping academic research. On the one hand there was the liberal tradition, with its utilitarian and economic bent. On the other, there was the legacy of logical positivism on the concept of science. The first of these attitudes, whereby human societies are governed by the social contract and the natural laws of the market, stresses a view of communication focused on the options and effects facing individuals when they make their choices as readers, listeners or spectators and are guided by utility or satisfaction of individual desires. The key theoretical question here is the conditions of freedom which sustain individual decision-making. During the period mass communication studies were becoming institutionalized, the logical positivism-influenced attitude held that communication phenomena should be explained according to the general and universal laws of the physical and natural sciences, and interpreted these laws as valid and meaningful propositions susceptible to empirical verification. This epistemological position implied, to a certain extent, that communication research which was not based on those assumptions was not to be regarded as scientific knowledge worthy of the name, but was considered to be merely speculative. The central task of the process of communication was defined and limited to audience observation and analysis.

The principal current which opposed this orientation, established by the German intellectuals of the Frankfurt school, some of them exiled in the US, also adopted an attitude very different to that of the Chicago tradition. The Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Lowenthal sought to renovate the Marxist critique by shifting the target from economic power to symbolic power, and by sharply criticizing the consequences of capitalism and industrialization for social organization and the culture of advanced modernity. Other thinkers in the US, such as Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald, also interpreted those consequences on the basis of a reductionist concept of mass culture which limited culture to ideology, action to reproduction, and communication to coercion.

In the troubled period at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, a group of scholars revolted against what Jefferson Pooley called 'natural science envy and blind faith in quantitative methods' (2007:469), as well as reacting to the post-war confidence in scientism. James Carey was one of those from within communication studies in the US who took an active part in the protest movement in the social sciences in the 1970s. To support and legitimate his developing cultural approach, interacting with other hermeneutic alternatives such as Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology, Richard Rorty's neo-Pragmatism, and British cultural studies under Hoggart and Williams, Carey

reclaimed the key concepts of the Chicago School of Social Thought: the commitment to an understanding of knowledge as a project which is both epistemological and ethical; and the sharing of a concept of communication as a symbolic process in which societal reality is made possible and can be transformed. The following excerpt shows his debt to the Chicago School of Social Thought: 'Education in mass communication begins where research on mass communication began: the University of Chicago. Just before the turn of the century, the first systematic work on mass communication was initiated by John Dewey and carried on later by a distinguished group of philosophers and sociologists: G. H. Mead, Robert Park, W. I. Thomas, Franklin Giddings, Herbert Blumer. As a whole, the group showed an interest in German social theory, in an interpretative sociology, and in methods that were broadly historical and comparative, and observational. While it never did engage Marxism directly, it did find itself in tension with Marxism because it was interested in similar problems and operated at the same level of engagement. It was a movement we would describe as broadly humanistic. Its work contributed, on the one hand, to the theory of mass society and, on the other, to the development of what is known today as symbolic interactionism. While the latter is often formulated in rather too interpersonal a way, it continues to provide for many an entrance into the world of mass communication that is a broadly historical, interpretative, empirical and critical.' (1979:288-289).

The reclamation of this legacy, always present in his work, intensified from the beginning of the 1980s onwards, as part of the response to the collapse of a view of communication expressed in behavioural, utilitarian and functional terms. In addition to being based on the pragmatism of the Chicago School of Social Thought, his cultural conception of communication draws on the theory of symbolic forms of Max Weber and Ernest Cassirer, and on Harold Innis' cultural theory of media technology. It also has ties to the cultural critique of figures such as Lewis Mumford. In the interplay of all these traditions, Carey not only fights the reductionism of the scientific view of communication, but also provides important guidelines for integrating hermeneutic approaches into what he believed were the contradictions emerging from the immense transformations in the communication system and the cultural fragmentation of post-modernity (1997b:324).

Reality is brought into existence, says Carey, through the immeasurable symbolic forms with which human beings make sense of the world, using their own intellectual capacities (1992a [1975]:26-27). For Carey as for Dewey, this process is communication. Communication gives meaning to the chaos of the world and puts society into action, offering shared identities, guiding us into common models of interpretation, and encouraging relations of mutual respect. Carey also saw conversation as the existential ritual *par excellence*, in which social experience is shared and becomes the common culture. He rejected the idea that human societies come into being from a contract of association or by agreement between individuals. On the contrary, he believed that human societies are continuously built up through language, but it is a language which,

unlike that of animals, conveys values, conceptions of good and evil, of justice and injustice, advantage and disadvantage – which go beyond mere individual sensibility. It is precisely on those values or ideas that the principles of common life rest. It is such shared notions which create family and society. Thus Carey rejects the liberal doctrine according to which society is formed by potentially egotistical individuals and survives through the ‘invisible hand of Providence’. He does not believe that the market keeps individuals together, coordinates their actions, and ensures freedom. Still less does he believe that social harmony is the result of competition between individuals – or that competition is the primary value of society (Carey, 2001:ix-xiii).

Carey suggests two contrasting and potentially competing forms and practices of communication: the ‘transmissive’ and the ‘ritual’. The former is more widely disseminated in the industrial cultures, and refers to terms such as ‘sending’, ‘transmitting’ or ‘giving information to others’. This conception follows conventional models of signals transmission and messaging over long distances. Although its origins lie in the past, it is this model of communication which was boosted when transportation and technology came to the fore in the nineteenth century, and it provided the framework for theoretical developments in the twentieth century (Carey, 1992a:15). The ritual version of communication refers to notions such as ‘sharing’, ‘participation’, ‘association’, ‘communion’, and owes a debt to participation ceremonies, building experience, and the feeling of belonging to a community (Carey, 1992a:18). Carey argues that neither of these approaches necessarily denies what the other asserts. But while the ritual approach does exclude the transmission of information, Carey sees the original meaning, or the highest form of communication, not as the transmission of intelligent information, but in the construction and maintenance of a cultural world which has meaning for human action (1992a:18-22).

Carey’s ritual or cultural theory of communication, and his view of human life as being symbolically constructed and at the same time experienced, provides social theory with valuable explanatory ideas on the relevance of communication in modern societies. Under the influence of an Innisian approach to social history and technology, he explored the notion that the bias of communication technologies affects social, economic, political, and cultural organization, as well as conceptions of time and space. ‘Media of communication are not merely instruments of will and purpose but definite forms of life: organisms, so to say, that reproduce in miniature the contradictions in our thought, action, and social relations’ (Carey, 1992a: 9). One of Carey’s main contributions was to demonstrate clearly how journalism and the media are not one and the same. The media reflect the various ways in which people experience messages and information, and are subject to strong commercial and power interests. Journalism, on the other hand, for Carey as for Dewey and Park, is seen as having an inalienable commitment to democracy; it is part of the process of the conversation of the community, its goal being to strengthen the conversational foundations of community life and to fulfil democratic ideals. From this point of view, the news is a form of

cultural expression. Journalism is the practice of that cultural expression, helping to establish social ties and maintain a community, and exists independently of any media system. Technology and bureaucracy do not define the practice of an activity: rather, it is the exercise of a set of skills for achieving improvement and elevation of public life, a common life which can be shared by all as citizens. Carey believed that journalism as practiced in society has been increasingly and seriously threatened by a market-driven media industry, by the brave new world of information technology, by a readership which no longer believes in the press, by a political climate which alienates citizens from politics and journalism, and by other problems deriving from the professional culture of the press itself (see Carey 1979:234, 241, 249).

Among the intersecting traditions which Carey so originally reclaimed, the ethical and epistemological commitment of the Chicago School of Social Thought to the possibility of a democratic public life finds an echo in several modern intellectual movements – cultural studies (e.g. *Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, n° 2, March de 2009), media ecology (e.g. *Explorations in Media Ecology*, vol. 5, n°2, 2006), the civic journalism movement –, in the philosophical theory of communication found in thinkers such as John Durham Peters (1986;1989; 2000), and in the historiography of research into media and communication in the US (Park and Pooley, 2008).

## Conclusion

Small, Dewey, Mead, Thomas and Znaniecky, Park and Burgess, the thinkers of the Chicago school, developed their ideas under the influence and impact of the social-democratic and reform movement in American public life after the second industrial revolution. They placed communication and the subjective life at the heart of their understanding of human beings and of sociological explanation. Moreover, they added a normative aspect to this interpretation of human communication: communication is a moral foundation for collective life and the condition for democracy as a social ideal. Persuaded of the validity of this approach, they believed in the possibilities of democratization and social progress offered by modern communication technologies.

For the purposes of this essay, we have pointed out some common elements in the ideas of members of Chicago School of Social Thought, although we are well aware there are some discontinuities between them as well. Three main aspects of their ideas stand out for an understanding of communication.

First, the concept of communication was synonymous with connection, with bonds between human beings. Socialization, and the process of formation of the self, take place through communication. Distancing themselves conceptually from instinctive interpretations of human behaviour, the Chicago thinkers established a theoretical viewpoint which places interpersonal communication at the heart of the formation and transformation of the human personality. This line of reasoning opened the way for the research for which Blumer coined the term symbolic interactionism. This concept of communication is based on a

trans-actional approach to the symbolic activity of individuals at several interconnected levels, from the inner being of one individual to the interpersonal and inter-group levels, right up to global society. In connecting communication closely to the social sphere, this approach also gave sociology a potential level of analysis – the intra-individual – which had hitherto been confined to psychology, one which was creatively pursued by the tradition of symbolic interactionism. At the same time, it provided a powerful hypothesis to counter the causal logic of the French tradition of sociology as developed by Durkheim, which limited sociological explanation to the group *qua* group. Secondly, communication was regarded as the potential key to solving the social problems of urban, cosmopolitan, industrialized societies. Communication and community were used as discourses to protest and resolve the contradictions brought about by advanced industrialization and the enormous growth of cities during that period of history. They were also used as a formula for humanizing those factors and producing consensus as a democratic way of life (Peters and Simonson, 2004:16). In the Chicago tradition, the possibility of democratic rationality lies in the communicative character of human rationality, which can be incorporated by the structures of power and is revealed in the democratic forms of political organization

Thirdly, the Chicago thinkers shared a point of view which included the study of modern means of communication, their technologies, and their institutions. They were thus pioneers in research into newspapers, public opinion, transportation and communication infrastructure and flows, networks, and interactive groups. However, their engagement with social reform tended to run ahead of the concrete study of the ways in which communication and the media were developing, and they neglected issues such as conflict, authority and domination. This approach, which had also been a feature of German political economy and Weberian sociology, meant that they lost sight of some of the darker realities of modern communication.

Drawing on the US experience of establishing its advanced industrial society, the Chicago School of Social Thought made a strong contribution in social theory to a communicative and cultural approach to subjectivity, social relations, and public life. The theoretical core of this contribution is in line with a normative representation of man which goes beyond the monism of egotistical interest and instrumentalism, and the nature of *homo economicus*. These ideas intersect with others generated in different latitudes during more or less the same period, such as those of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss and political economist Karl Polanyi. Whether we continue to draw on the Chicago thinkers, like James W. Carey, or on the various cultural studies approaches which have flourished in Canada, Europe and elsewhere in the world, it is still an important task today to think about where modern society is headed by examining the

links between communication and culture, and adopting an ethical approach to democracy and public life<sup>129</sup>.

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