

Legacy of the Chicago School

A Collection of Essays in Honour of the Chicago School of Sociology During the First Half of the 20th Century

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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 13th to the 14th 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 Quééré, 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 Eglhoff, 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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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-

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