**The Chicago School, So-called**

Sociologists have been talking about the Chicago School of sociological thought for a very long time. It has become a sort of origin myth for a sociology at least some of us now approve of. People say "Chicago School" and think to themselves, as the late Helen Hughes used to say (though she said it sarcastically), "There were giants on the earth in those days," and then they add that it is time we imitated those giant ways. The principal chroniclers of the Chicago School, notably Gary Alan Fine and his collaborators (1995, especially 1-16 and 82-107) and Martin Bulmer (1984, especially 151-89), do not, of course, have so simple or simple-minded a view of what the school consisted of. But the myth, powerful enough to overcome any qualification or contradictory details, persists.

What is (or was) the Chicago School? At the very least, these things go into the contemporary picture, the myth, of what the school consisted of, believed in, and represented:

1. The founders, who included Albion Small, W.I. Thomas (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Thomas and Znaniecki 1920), and the philosopher George Herbert Mead (Mead 1934), created and held to a unified scheme of sociological thought, shaped by the guiding originality of Thomas and Mead, whose ideas formed a coherent and cohesive framework within which research could be done).

2. A second generation at Chicago undertook a vast research program, based on the thinking of the founders and propelled by the energy and vision of Robert E. Park and his junior colleague E.W. Burgess (Park and Burgess 1921).

3. As a result, a generation of researchers and thinkers, trained by these people and led by Everett C. Hughes (Hughes 1943; Hughes 1984) and Herbert Blumer (Blumer 1939; Blumer 1969), undertook research and theoretical development which could be, and eventually was, characterized as "symbolic interactionism."

4. After the Second World War, the University of Chicago experienced an enormous influx of students whose education was paid for by the G.I. Bill. These talented and energetic students of Hughes and Blumer, having been in the war, benefited from an experience of the world until then uncommon among students of sociology. They created a "Second Chicago School," (Fine 1995), whose members used the ideas of symbolic interactionism combined with methods of field research to create a substantial body of research and thinking, still relevant to contemporary interests almost fifty years later.

5. And all of these people were the carriers of a common theoretical tradition which flowed from the vision of Park and the philosophy of Mead, was nourished by the theoretical profundities of Blumer and the research ingenuity of Hughes, and was responsible for two great bursts of theoretically integrated "Chicago School" work, first in the late 20s and 30s, and again after the Second World War.

This is a vision of a school in the sense that historians of thought speak of a school, or what French intellectuals sometimes refer to as a "chapelle" (a chapel). In the structure of such a school, one person's thought is usually seen as central. When sociologists speak of a Durkheimian school, they mean to indicate, and with good reason, that everything connected with that school of thought was of a piece. The theory was and is consistent and coherent. The theory informs the research done in its name. The followers or acolytes

preserve the founder's memory, embellish the theory and its associated body of thought, and further its fortunes, correcting errors and inconsistencies in the master theory and doing work that exemplifies its vision.

The Chicago School was never a school in that full sense. As Jennifer Platt (Platt 1996) has made amply clear, Chicago, the real Chicago on 59th Street in the Social Science Building as opposed to the Chicago of the origin myth, was much more varied and differentiated than that. Park, Burgess, and Ellsworth Faris, the people now commonly thought to have embodied the great Chicago tradition during the crucial years of the 20s and 30s, were early on joined by Ogburn, who had a quite different view of sociology and its mission. Ogburn was the greatest single proponent of quantitative work during those years, perhaps in the entire history of sociology, and was personally responsible (Laslett 1991) for convincing the United States government that his view of sociology and social science—quantitative, empirical in a narrow sense, and scientific in an equally narrow sense—was just what the government needed to do its work efficiently. Ogburn had many followers at Chicago, during both periods of the supposed efflorescence of the tradition and school: Philip Hauser and Samuel Stouffer in the 30s, Otis Dudley Duncan and others in the 50s.

Louis Wirth, a contemporary of Hughes and Blumer and, like them, a student of Park and therefore with a full claim to having legitimately inherited the tradition, often said that he could never understand what people were talking about when they spoke of the Chicago School, since he could find nothing, no idea or style of work, that he and his colleagues shared. Anyone who was there during those periods (as I was during the late 1940s and early 1950s) could not help but be aware of the great differences that divided the faculty and their styles of work, divisions that were passed on to the students, some of whom became serious devotees of one or another of the faculty, but most of whom made their own idiosyncratic combinations of the variety of ingredients they were offered.

Here are some details about the variety of the allegedly monolithic "school" in the post Second World War period, when I was a student. The faculty included, of course, the two giants of the myth, Herbert Blumer and Everett Hughes. It also included some other Chicago-trained people, notably the demographer Philip Hauser. Hauser used, it is true, to boast that he had done field work: he had helped gather data on the employees of the taxi-dance halls described in Paul Cressey's book on that topic (Cressey 1932) by dancing with them. But, despite this boast, Hauser was in fact a strong proponent of quantitative research and had little use for the qualitative work so central to the contemporary idea of the Chicago School.

Ogburn and Burgess were still teaching, and each of them insisted on the importance of statistics in social research. Though Burgess had worked closely with Park, he was not so clearly a proponent of what we now think of as "Chicago-style" research, though he did not oppose it. He devoted much of his research to such topics as predicting criminal behavior and marital "success," using conventional quantitative research techniques to analyze questionnaire data.

During the same period, the National Opinion Research Center, then a relatively new organization, was persuaded to make its headquarters at the University of Chicago, where it still resides, so that survey research was an active and lively presence. Many students worked at NORC and some did dissertations based on survey data.

There were already representatives of the competing "Columbia" school at the university, particularly Bernard Berelson, who collaborated with Lazarsfeld on the famous study of voting in Elmira County (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1948), and with whom other Chicago students worked (e.g., David Gold). After I left, but still in the 50s, other Columbia graduates joined the faculty (Peter Rossi, James Coleman, Peter Blau, Elihu Katz).

In a quite different direction, another influential member of the Chicago sociology department was W. Lloyd Warner, now somewhat forgotten, but then well-known as an author and as having provided the impetus for a number of major community studies. Warner studied, but never completed a degree in, social anthropology at Harvard, his dissertation a large book on the social organization of an indigenous Australian society, the

Murngin (Warner 1937). Though that was a classic anthropological monograph in the style of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who was one of Warner's mentors, Warner worked after that almost exclusively in American communities. He was author or co-author of all the volumes in the Yankee City Series, the large study of class and ethnicity in what was eventually revealed to be Newburyport, Massachusetts (Warner and al. 1941-1959). He was the inspiration for and major adviser to the authors of *Deep South* , the important study of caste and class in Natchez, Mississippi, done by Elizabeth and Allison Davis and Burleigh and Mary Gardner (Davis, Gardner and Gardner 1941). He was intimately involved in the work done by Conrad Arensberg in Ireland (Arensberg 1950), and in the work that led to St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's book on Chicago's black South Side, *Black Metropolis*. (Drake and Cayton 1945) In the late forties, Warner was just finishing a community study in Morris, Illinois (called, in the resulting book, "Jonesville" (Warner et. al. 1947)).

I recite this list of Warner's now mostly (and quite unjustly) ignored work to indicate what a presence he was to students. We knew that he was actively involved in major pieces of qualitative research and some us found inspiration in what he was doing. But, strangely enough for the origin myth, his lineage had nothing to do with the Chicago school, but was classically anthropological, traceable back through Radcliffe-Brown to Durkheim.

Warner was closely associated with the then young William Foote Whyte who, though he received his Ph. D. at Chicago, had actually done what little graduate work he did at Harvard, seriously influenced by Warner, and especially by Warner's associate Arensberg. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (Whyte [1943] 1981) was a model for all of us of what a Chicago style field study ought to look like, as were *Black Metropolis* and the other Warner inspired works. But, as I said, none of this work, seemingly so in keeping with the Chicago style of thought, had anything to do with that tradition. In fact, as we have eventually learned, some of the major representatives of the Chicago tradition, Wirth in particular, were quite unhappy with Whyte's work.

Hughes did similar work—his major community study of an industrializing town in Quebec (published as *French Canada in Transition* (Hughes 1943)) and his later studies of race relations in American industry (e.g., (Hughes 1984), pp. 265-75)—which did stem directly from the tradition of Park. Hughes, in fact, quoted Park all the time and it was from him that some of us learned that we were spiritual descendants of Park. But the Park we learned about from him was not just the Park who told people to get their hands dirty in the real world, the advice that Blumer incessantly repeated. No. Hughes's Park was the one who wanted not just interviews and observations, but statistical studies of the spatial distribution of social phenomena as well.

So there were a varied lot of people at Chicago at every period of its development and by no means all of them were participants in the "Chicago tradition," as it is now conceived, and some of those whose work was congruent with the Chicago tradition had scarcely heard of it.

(There is more to the confusion. Nelson Foote, a social psychologist trained at Cornell, came to Chicago as an assistant professor and made common cause with people like Anselm Strauss, who were coming to be seen as "symbolic interactionists." And Herbert Goldhamer, whose work was much more political, much more influenced by large-scale social theory in the European style, and by psychoanalysis (see Goldhamer and Marshall 1953), was also present, and had a remarkable influence on some people who worked with him.)

Further, there was grave dissension within the ranks of the true "old Chicagoans," the students of Park and Burgess from the first Golden Age. In particular, as the archival research of Abbott and Gaziano (1995) has revealed, Hughes and Blumer, now thought as the twin embodiments of the tradition in their generation, had very low opinions of one another. Blumer thought Hughes had a second-rate mind, and Hughes was openly contemptuous of Blumer's inability or unwillingness to do research (see also Lofland 1980). A similar tension existed between Hughes and Wirth, and Hauser sided, in a coalition that doesn't make much sense if you think about "Chicago" as the embodiment of a "symbolic interactionist" tradition, with Wirth and Blumer.

Hughes, on the other hand, was very close to the anthropologists: to Robert Redfield (Redfield 1941) who, like him, was a spiritual descendant of Park (as well as Park's son-in-law); and to Lloyd Warner, with whom he collaborated in teaching and in a variety of other ways. It's clear, in the documents Abbott and Gaziano found, that Hughes and Warner regarded themselves as the "active researchers" in the department, as opposed to Wirth and Blumer who they saw as mere talkers and tenders of the flame.

When Anselm Strauss (Strauss 1959; Strauss 1961; Strauss et. al. 1964) returned to Chicago, where he had been a student of Blumer and Burgess, he soon became involved with Hughes and thought of himself as in that camp, insofar as he was in any camp.

If you imagine that students of the generation I belonged to were passive recipients of a great coherent tradition of Chicago symbolic interactionism, then, you are quite mistaken. The department did not give us any coherent tradition to receive. We were, instead, confused by the mélange of contradictory viewpoints, models, and recommendations the department presented to us. And each of us made what we could of it, emphasizing what we could use, ignoring what we couldn't. Most of us, for example, though not all (e.g., Albert J. Reiss), eventually pretty much ignored Burgess. Most of us ignored Ogburn (but not, of course, Dudley Duncan). Some of us were heavily influenced by Warner. Warner was the main inspiration for Erving Goffman (Goffman 1961; Goffman 1963) until many years after he left Chicago, when he announced an allegiance to Hughes that was not reciprocated. Warner was a major influence for Eliot Freidson (Freidson 1970) as well, and for me, in my case mostly because he represented to me the romance I associated with social anthropology, a field I admired but whose strenuous work settings I wanted to avoid. (That is why I was so taken with the idea of urban anthropology: you had all the romance of anthropology but could sleep in your own bed and eat decent food). David Gold thought of himself as a Lazarsfeldian, but later saw that he had a lot in common with people like me, something he seemed to have absorbed from Blumer that he couldn't quite put his finger on.

And so on. The result of this—of each person inventing his own private Chicago—was that no two of these Chicagos were exactly alike. There were many things that people who had been trained there at a particular time shared, but there were also enormous differences. Not usually contradictions, but only because (I think) we were more interested in research results than in grand theorizing. I think it's true that this generation was known far more for the research projects its members published than for any theories they developed.

And yet there *was* a Chicago School and a Chicago tradition. What were they?

Here I want to draw on a crucial distinction made by Samuel Gilmore (Gilmore 1988) about a quite different arena of social life. Gilmore studied contemporary musical composers and found that some composers who were commonly thought to belong to a particular "school" of composition not only didn't know each other, they felt nothing in common with people whose views they were supposed to share, indeed often weren't even aware of those people and their views. And, on the other hand, some people who shared little or nothing in the way of compositional theories, ideas, or practice, nevertheless collaborated in all sorts of musical activities.

He calls the first type a "School of Thought," and says that schools of thought are created from the outside, by critics who look at the field and decide that certain people share certain ideas, that their work shares certain stylistic features, and that they thus constitute a school. The second group he calls a "School of Activity." What members of such a school have in common is that they work together on practical projects. For instance, they may organize a concert series together, each one thus getting his or her music played, even though they disagree violently on what music should be. So some people who, at least in our later view. think and act alike, may never have acted collectively (the "school of thought"). And some people have acted collectively even though their ideas may not be congruent (the "school of activity"). A school in the classical sense I alluded to at the beginning would combine both of these—its members would think alike and act together in pursuit of their shared ideas.

It may be that the "chapelles" of French sociological thought, prominent until the

mid-1970s, approached this model. But that is probably a result, I'm tempted to say an artifact, of the way French sociological activity was then organized, in small research groups headed by well-known leaders who competed with other leaders to make their theories dominant.

American sociological life, on the other hand, is organized in departments, which find their homes in teaching institutions, in colleges and universities in which the department is required to teach all the sociology courses that need teaching, and thus very often to encompass a great variety of styles of work. So American departments are, for the most part, "schools of activity." They can only harbor a "school of thought" with great difficulty and even successful efforts to make them do so have seldom had lasting results. This is a long story I won't go into fully here, but it would repay close study. At every period of its development, Chicago was a school of activity, an organization that was trying to cover the major possibilities available in the field at any moment (even though one might for a time be dominant) in order to be able to field an adequate team. The object was not to present a united theoretical front, but to get students taught and degrees given, to raise money for research projects, and so to develop and maintain a reputation for the department as a good all-around place. Since Chicago had been the first (or almost the first, *pace* Alan Sica (Sica 1983)) sociology department in the country, quite possibly in the world, the job was to continue to be Number One in every respect.

And so Goffman, having first been interested in Wirth, finally got a degree working with Warner. My dissertation committee consisted of Hughes, Warner, and the anthropologist Allison Davis, who taught in the School of Education. Research projects were done by people who had little in common; e. g., Wirth and Hughes collaborated on studies of the Chicago public schools, though they had quite different ideas about what was important to study and how to study those things. (My field work for my dissertation was supported financially by this project; I never had two words with Wirth about what I was doing.) "Chicago" was, to repeat, a school of activity, the activity being the training of more sociologists, and the awarding of degrees, and the maintenance of a reputation within and beyond the university.

American departments are seldom, for the reasons I have given and because of the nature of generational change—even if people are from the same school, the second generation is very different from the first—monolithically of one persuasion. It only looks that way if you don't look too closely. The Columbia department of the 40s and 50s (the great days of that department) looked quite monolithic, the "tradition" they espoused a combination of Merton's theorizing and Lazarsfeld's hustling of survey contracts out of which sociological silk purses could be made. But there were other people there then, who get left out when the story is told. And other kinds of work done too. That's also a story for another day.

The moral of today's story is that "Chicago" was never the unified chapel of the origin 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 characterized 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. I think, and not just because I was his student, that Hughes was—*in that sense*—the true Chicagoan, the real descendant of Park, the sociologist who was properly skeptical of every way of doing social science, including his own.

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