

# THE MYTHS OF THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Lee Harvey

Amended draft of a version published in *Quality and Quantity*, 1986, 20(2–3), pp. 191–217,

This draft available at <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/Harvey%20papers/Harvey1986mythsofchicago.pdf>

Auspices at the time of writing:

Lee Harvey, Department of Sociology and Applied Social Studies City of Birmingham Polytechnic  
Franchise Street Perry Barr Birmingham West Midlands B32 1SU England

Minor amendments 21 May 2013.

## Abstract

Reconstructions of ‘Chicago School’ sociology perpetuate certain myths about the nature and style of the sociology carried out at the University of Chicago. These views have been analysed and four elements have been identified. These are that Chicago sociology was reformist in orientation, atheoretical, ethnographic and influenced by the pragmatism of G.H. Mead. The genesis and substance of these myths are scrutinised.

## Introduction

Much has been written about the ‘Chicago School of Sociology’ over the last half century. During that time certain elements of the Chicago approach to sociology have been emphasised and a view of the Chicagoans as ethnographic sociologists has emerged. Chicago is not infrequently contrasted with Columbia style sociology, the two institutions seen as representing the dichotomous nature of empirical sociology in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. vii) wrote:

Mentioning the Department of Sociology at Columbia University brings to mind Merton’s middle-range theory and Lazarsfeld’s quantitative methodology. On the other hand, the ‘Chicago tradition’ (from the 1920s to the 1950s) is associated with down-to-earth qualitative research, a less than rigorous methodology and an un-integrated presentation of theory.

The representation of empirical research in this simple antithetical manner is both based on, and leads to, a gross over-simplification of the approach undertaken at the two ‘Schools’. This paper examines the ‘Chicago School’ to assess the relationship between the mythology and the ‘reality’.

The identification of myths as an historiographical task [1] involves various methodological problems. First, the elaboration of the concept of myth, second the identification of elements of various, possibly conflicting, myths, third, the critical assessment of these elements.

Myth does not refer here to the original anthropological sense of ‘fabulous narration’ a sense in which it is still commonly widely used. Nor does it refer to a ‘distorted’ thesis about the origins of humanity. In short, myth does not mean either fable or legend. Myth has, however, been held to be a truer (deeper) version of reality than either (secular) history or realistic description or scientific explanation. Recent developments have taken on elements of this position to argue that social structures are imbued with

myth(s) that are linked to ideology (in some way). That is, myth is not simply a deliberately false account or belief.

It is in this sociological sense that myth is used in this paper; more specifically the position suggested by Barthes (1967, 1974). Thus myth is used in the sense of generalised connotation. This usage raises certain questions about the relationship of myth and ideology and about the nature of the latter. Such questions, however, are beyond the scope of this paper and are not explored in depth here. Discussion of this issue may be found in Harvey (1983a). For the purposes of this exploration of the 'Chicago School' it is sufficient to point to the 'motivated' nature of sociological myths. The motivation is important in helping disentangle the plethora of competing myths, and while the scope of this paper does not include an analysis of these motivations a typification of the genesis of myths aids the critique of the core elements of 'Chicago School' mythology.

As will be shown, myths of the 'Chicago School' are varied and often conflict. This is because they do not all derive from the same source. Indeed, myths can be regarded as having four typical points of origin and thereby serve to legitimate conflicting interests. It is, therefore, useful to designate various categories of myth. Myths may be generated contemporaneously or retrospectively, internally or externally. Thus the image the Chicago sociologists generated of, and for, themselves constitutes a contemporaneous internal myth. The images projected by their contemporaries outside the Chicago orbit are thus contemporaneous external myths. These tend to take two forms depending on whether the externalists are supporters of the internally generated myth or not. This internal myth, and the subsequent contemporaneous external myths are projected at a level over and above the unit itself. The myths operate at more than a personal level, indeed are directed principally at the 'academic' level, and relate to the theory within the discipline, its epistemological underpinnings, its applicability (either in terms of 'usefulness' or its 'critical' potential) and so on. Myths are complexes that inter-link these different aspects and the component elements develop an 'autonomy' through the inter-linking, which itself reinforces the mythical edifice.

This process becomes compounded over time and retrospective accounts generate myths especially when contemporaneous myths are accepted uncritically.

Historians of the 'Chicago School' have projected various images of the work done in the Department of Sociology at Chicago. These myths are also either internal or external. The latter, like the contemporaneous external myths, are similarly dichotomised, while the former are the result of subsequent Chicagoans constructing an intellectual heritage.

Identifying elements of myth is facilitated by drawing up this essential fourfold categorisation in that it provides a basis for assessing the genesis and motivation of conflicting myths.

The aim of this particular paper, however, is to point to four predominant elements of the various myths surrounding the Chicago School and to suggest that there is little substantive basis for them. While there are hints in this analysis as to the motivation for these myths, the primary concern here is more modest, and is to explore critically the mythical elements through an examination of the internal development of sociological work at Chicago.

The first element is that Chicago sociologists were primarily social ameliorists, sympathising with Progressive or liberal ideas and concerned to resolve social problems (Madge, 1963, p. 109: Berger and Berger, 1976, p. 48: Brake, 1980, p. 30) The second element is that Chicago sociology had no strong theoretical orientation and its work constituted a descriptive exercise in the main. Such theories as it did produce were little more than ideal-type models (notably the ‘concentric zone’ thesis) with little explanatory power (Madge, 1963, p. 110: Brake, 1980, p. 30). The third element is that Chicago sociology was dogmatically qualitative (Berger and Berger, 1976, p. 48: Deutscher, 1973, p. 325) The fourth element is that Chicago sociology is closely associated with symbolic interactionism and dominated by the epistemological perspective of George Herbert Mead. (Deutscher, 1973, p. 325) [2]

### **Chicagoans As Social Reformers**

The idea that Chicago sociology was primarily aimed at social reform is forcibly outlined by Richard Lapiere in his retrospective account of the development of American sociology.

As you no doubt learned in your first course on the history of sociology, American sociologists of the first two decades of this century were—with some few exceptions, of which Cooley is the only one who comes to mind—just moralistic reformers in scientists’ clothing. What you may not know, or at least not fully appreciate, is that well into the 1930s the status of sociology, and hence of sociologists was abominable, both within and outside the academic community.

The public image of the sociologist was that of a blue-nosed reformer, ever ready to pronounce moral judgements, and against all pleasurable forms of social conduct. In the universities, sociology was generally thought of as an uneasy mixture of social philosophy and social work.... Through the 1920s the department of Chicago was the one real center of sociology in the U.S.. It is my impression, one that I cannot document, that most of the men who came out of the Chicago department during this time were fairly passive disciples of the ‘Chicago School’—mostly trained in the ideas of Park, if not by him, and that they went out to spread the good word with a strong sense of mission. (Lapiere, correspondence with Deutscher, 23.10.1964, reprinted in Deutscher, 1973, pp. 36–37).

This view of Chicago sociology as reformist is a reconstructive external myth primarily aimed at the early years of Chicago sociology. It does not apply to the later generations as Gouldner (1973) has pointed out. The post-1950s work of the Chicagoans is seen by Gouldner as determinedly devoid of moral judgements and reformist motivations.

One is therefore left to consider whether the Chicagoans had shifted to ‘value neutrality’ by the late 1950s and, if so, when such a shift occurred. This requires an assessment of the nature and development of the discipline of sociology and a review of the supposed ameliorist orientations of the Chicagoans. The position argued below is that Chicago sociology progressively moved away from overt concerns with reformism, in line with the development of American sociology in general. It is also argued that, while ameliorist concerns were evident in the early decades of the Department, such interests were always mediated by a concern for social theory. This theoretical concern shifted in character, as empirical study acquired more importance, from general holistic theories to empirically validated theories in particular fields of sociology. Thomas, and later Park, were important in providing a framework for this particularistic research, which emphasised theoretical concerns and relegated reformism to a background role. The emergence of symbolic interactionism as an approach to sociology, particularly in relation to the study of deviance, saw in effect, the mirror image of the early reformist concerns at Chicago.

There is considerable evidence that, for the first two decades, the research work of the Department, influenced strongly by Small and Henderson, was, indeed directed to reformist ends. [3] Yet, even in this early period the situation was by no means as clear cut as the myth suggests. Throughout, there was a genuine concern to develop sociological theory and ultimately to produce a scientific sociology. Small demanded value neutrality and objectivity of sociologists, which meant, for him, empiricism mediated by a strong ethical sense. Science, for Small, had a dual role, to discover and to evaluate. Ethics were a part of sociology, for it is ethical judgements that lead one to conclude what is worth undertaking. 'What is worth doing' was at the heart of any reformist orientation espoused by the early empirical approach adopted by the Chicagoans.

The decline in importance of ameliorist concerns and the career of the concept of 'objectivity' in social science are interrelated and both closely related to the professionalism of sociology, (see Furner, 1975, Bernard and Bernard, 1943). Reflecting the rapid growth of biology, The Baconian model [4] became the hallmark of the early social scientists. The classification of facts obviates the need for sophisticated theory. Inductivism, however, was beginning to emerge as the essential scientific method by 1870 coincidentally with a concern for a more scientific approach to social policy. As the century closed the separation of reform from science had been established. The rapid professionalisation of the social sciences and their policy making potential resulted in 'closed shops' of academic prowess and opinion whose credibility lay in their espousing objectivity. The 'academic trials' [5] around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, accentuated the tendency to avoid too close an association of academics with political issues. This resulted in more inward looking social sciences concerned to establish status and, with it, security of subject matter.

As Furner notes, the academic freedom trials left in their wake the following clear lessons for social scientists:

'Avoid radicalism. Avoid socialism. Avoid excessive publicity and refrain from public advocacy. When trouble strikes, unless there is certain assurance of massive support, accept your fate in an austere and dignified silence. Above all, maintain a reputation for scientific objectivity.' (Furner, 1975, p. 204)

Objectivity, in the sense of impartiality, had become a major concern and directive for social research. This position was further developed by the new generations of sociologists eager to establish a firm and credible position for sociology in the academic hierarchy (Deutscher, 1973, p. 36). Among such sociologists at Chicago were Thomas and Park. Continuing the movement towards an objective and value-free sociology they began to shift away from Small's ethical concerns, not least of all because of the practical problems of doing the kind of sociology that Small advocated [6].

Thus, while many of the earlier empirical studies done at Chicago were concerned with social amelioration, by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century much of this ostensive reformism had disappeared. A survey [7] of a sample of the doctoral dissertations from 1915 to 1930 reveals that only one was explicitly concerned with social reform. Further, most either had nothing to say about amelioration at all, or took great pains to dissociate their research from reformist positions. A few were openly hostile to reformism.

There are several reasons why this shift in emphasis away from amelioration occurred. Small's theoretical influence waned from around 1910, as Thomas emerged as the major theoretician in the Department. Small's theoretical position involved too many tenuous assumptions and effectively failed to meet the needs of a growing concern for 'scientific objectivity' among sociologists.

Thomas rapidly emerged as the most important theoretician in the 'School', developing the position adopted by Small. This development pushed ameliorative concerns even further into the background. Thomas was a scientist of society. For him, sociology was unique in providing the scientific laws by which change could take place. The potential of sociology to reveal these laws was integrally bound up with Thomas's conception of social evolution. Historical analysis of concrete situations would provide the means for establishing how special conditions effected progress at different points in social development. Thomas' approach reflects that of Small in assuming that sociology ultimately provides the basis for social change and that social laws were discoverable, although Thomas never accepted that such laws could be totally deterministic, only that they would provide the limits within which individualistic analysis would be constrained. Unlike Small, he was not plagued by problems of aligning technique with philosophy. His structure permitted direct empirical investigation, through life histories and the construction of specific theories rather than general orientations. Writing in 1917, Thomas argued the need for:

a more exact and systematic study of human behavior on a scale and with a method comparable with those already provided for the physical and biological sciences. (Thomas, 1917, p. 188).

But this did not mean the simple adoption of physical and biological theories for sociology: quite the reverse. It was a call for a separate development of empirical sociology along objective scientific lines. Essentially, Thomas saw social action as dependent upon sound, tested, empirical knowledge: inductive social theory was to be the basis upon which social technicians should work. Ameliorist concerns were of secondary importance and should not guide research. Sociology should, in the first instance, be concerned with pure research; the opportunity for social control (beyond that of piecemeal reform) may eventually emerge from 'pure' scientific research of the social world.

Robert Park, appointed to the Department in 1914, identified with Thomas' view of sociology. He preached the dictum of non-alignment identified by Furner and went further by advocating a value-free approach. Park was notorious for his vehement verbal attacks on students who professed an interest in social reform, and is said to have commented that Chicago had suffered more at the hands of 'lady reformers' than from gangsterism. As early as 1919, in the wake of the Chicago Race Riot he advised that race relations be studied with the same detachment that a biologist would adopt in dissecting a potato bug (Turner, 1967, p. xvi).

It is notable that Park distanced himself from the Commission investigating the riots, which was 'clearly the idea of reform minded civic leaders' (Bulmer, 1981) and acted simply as an advisor to Johnson (the associate executive secretary of the Commission) and to the other of his students involved in the empirical work. Park's involvement, then, was at the level of the research process and he maintained a detachment from the original subject matter, an attitude communicated to Johnson who was sometimes scolded for being a 'calm student' and not an 'active reformer', (Bracey, *et al.* 1973, p. 15).

Park was not as successful as he might have been in purging all reform ideas from the work of his students, but at least ensured that they were sociologists first and reformers second. Indeed, the work of Cressey (1929), Hayner (1923), Thrasher (1926), Shaw (1930), Horak (1920), Wirth (1926), Frazier (1931) and Young (1924) are testimonies to the detached approach demanded by Park. Despite close ties with various community agencies (Park with the Chicago Urban League and Burgess with the Chicago Area Project) the Chicagoans were first and foremost detached enquirers into the social world, not proponents of particular social reform movements. While reformist sympathies played a part in the empirical work of the early years of the Chicago Department, reformism was a weak secondary consideration for most of the work that was produced from 1915 to 1935. Reformism had essentially lost its place of significance for three reasons. First, it was no longer an integral part of social theory. Second, the growing scientific orientation and professionalisation of sociology, advocated and promoted strongly at Chicago, was concerned to establish well-founded scientific knowledge, accepting that reform could only be considered in the long term and must be based on secure sociological foundations. Third, that piecemeal social reform was no longer a major political issue, and that sociology, like all social sciences, tended to adopt an apolitical and, therefore, policy neutral position.

The development of symbolic interactionism and the accompanying concentration on the actors perspective lead, ultimately, to the mirror image of the early reformist concerns. Instead of a desire to tackle social problems, the tendency by 1940 was to try and see the world from the perspective of the 'deviant' actor. When Becker (1967) asked, 'Whose Side Are We On?', he confronted the very assumption that the early ameliorists had taken for granted. Becker was questioning the validity of the self-righteous position embodied in the ethical and moral position that Small and generations of subsequent scholars, politicians and reformers had adopted.

Gouldner has noted that the later 'Chicago School' declined to moralise. What has been argued here is that since the waning of Small's influence and in line with general development of U.S. sociology, reformist concerns and incipient moralising, had progressively declined in importance with each generation of Chicagoans and that reformism had been no more than a background factor since 1915.

### **Chicagoans As Atheoretical Empirical Social Researchers**

Following the suggestions made by Small that the Chicagoans make the most of their surroundings for research purposes and his insistence that sociology should be greatly developed through empirical study, there was a rapid growth in direct empirical study of facets of the city of Chicago. This tendency began as early as the last few years of the nineteenth century (Dunn, 1895, Clark, 1897, Bushnell, 1901, Gillette, 1901, Riley, 1904, Fleming, 1905, Rhoades, 1906) but became more systematic after the 'Polish Peasant' study, researched in the earlier part of the decade, was published in 1918 (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918). Park took up the cue and for fifteen years actively encouraged students to undertake empirical research, much of it in the city of Chicago. In 1915 he wrote an article entitled 'The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment' (Park, 1915) that outlined areas for investigation and suggested procedures for action. This article, (reprinted twice in different compendiums with some revisions) is seen by many commentators as the start of the intense period of empirical activity at Chicago, which sometimes goes under the label of 'The Golden Era of the Chicago School'. This Golden Era, in particular, is seen as lacking in theoretical orientation, at best providing models of urban growth.

Such models, notably the concentric zone thesis, are seen as cartographic exercises (Rock, 1979, p. 92), and as worthy, if somewhat inadequate attempts to explain the growth of cities, (Easthope, 1974; Giner, 1972). In short, the Chicagoans are noted for their desire to collect 'facts' irrespective of theoretical concerns, (Rex, 1973).

The suggestion made in this paper, however, is that the 'Chicago School' merely reflected the general development of sociology. There was no sudden switch from speculative theorising (attributed to Small) to 'fact finding' (attributed to Park and Burgess). There remained, throughout, a general theoretical perspective, albeit an evolving one, upon which the sociological research rested. The professionalism of sociology and the changing nature of the concept of objectivity, aligned, as they were, to a concern to establish the scientificity of sociology, resulted in the growth of inductive theorising, of empirical work alongside the development of specific theories. The specificity of these theories at Chicago, as well as elsewhere, gradually narrowed as the concepts of 'validity' and 'reliability' took on a central role in the conceptualisation of science. It is argued here, then, that Chicago sociology was neither atheoretical empiricism nor was it restricted to urban sociology. Certainly the Chicagoans promoted empirical work but always alongside theoretical development.

In order to assess this element it is necessary to review the major theoretical developments at Chicago, and the areas of interest of the principal figures.

By far the best known activities of the Chicagoans in the 1920s is their penchant for producing maps of the distribution of social phenomena in the city. Indeed, much was made of the technique, however, rather than being an empirical validation of the zonal model, the mapping method was central to the assessment of indicators of social disorganisation. The concentric zone thesis itself depended upon the concept of social disorganisation. The succession of studies of the 1920s can be seen as empirical analyses of the theoretical orientation grounded in that 'paradigm'. Cavan's (1926) *Suicide*, Mowrer's (1924) *Family Disorganisation* Wirth's (1926) *Ghetto*, Cressey's (1929) *Taxi-Dance Hall*, Hiller's (1924) *Strike*, Anderson's (1923) *Hobo*, Reckless's (1925) *Vice in Chicago* and Thrasher's (1926) *Gang* all explicitly refer to the concept of social disorganisation, taking the essential nature of the concept for granted. Indeed the concept of social disorganisation was central to the sociological endeavour at Chicago and had been ever since its development in the *Polish Peasant* (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918).

The *Polish Peasant* emerged as the first attempt to elaborate the Chicagoans general theoretical perspective. Thomas was the focus through which the diverse elements of the perspective came together, and, in collaboration with Znaniecki, the empirically based analysis of the adjustment of Polish rural emigrés to American urban life was produced.

The perspective that emerged in the Chicago Department was heavily influenced by a mixture of European social philosophy and American pragmatism and developed by Thomas whose perspective embodied the following features. First, that sociology must take account of subjective as well as objective aspects of human interaction. That is, it should incorporate attitudes as well as values. This tenet incorporated prevailing ideas about sociological work, it included Small's, and the reformists, concerns by suggesting that values were, or could be made, in some way objective. Second, that social control, the ultimate purpose of social investigation can only be approached through the discovery of social laws and that subjective perceptions must be part of these laws. Third, that social laws must relate to the social, rather than personal, milieu. The disarray evident in the growing city of Chicago was seen

as a function of social change, the disorganisation at a personal level was a function of the disorganisation at a social level. The general framework within which sociology should operate was through analysis of the nature and extent of social disorganisation thereby extricating its 'causes' through an assessment of the objective and subjective factors.

Although Thomas was forced to resign from the Chicago faculty in 1918, his theoretical influence persisted and perhaps grew stronger during the 1920s. Carey's interviewees [8] reflect the importance of Thomas, and Park certainly made no attempt to undermine the Thomasian perspective. The sample survey of theses shows that Thomas was cited in the bibliography of all, and that 'social disorganisation' was an integral and explicit part of the theoretical development of the vast majority of those that could be described as having produced a developed theoretical perspective. However, Park, perhaps more so than Thomas, was content to aim at something less than a holistic theory of society and the context for research was resolved into general theories of interaction (as distinct from symbolic interaction) at Chicago in the succeeding decade.

Park advanced the idea of a four-stage process of interaction, drawn largely from his research into, and experience of, immigrants and of black-white relationships. The stages identified by Park were competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. This four-stage process was originally labelled the 'race relations cycle' because it grew out of the work Park had done in that field at Tuskegee. This cycle was outlined in his Introduction to Steiner (1917) and was to become increasingly refined through the work of students, notably, Wirth, Brown and Young. By 1930, the cycle had become firmly entrenched in Chicago sociology and beyond and was a taken-for-granted theory in the analysis of the interaction of diverse cultures. By the 1950s it had become extended into a general theory of interaction of groups, one that Ogburn and Nimkoff (1960, p. 111) made compatible with the structural functionalist approach.

The theory persisted in U.S. sociology generally until the early 1960s. Martindale (1960, p. 256) noted 'To this day there are persons who do not feel they have covered the basic subject matter of sociology until they have discussed competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation.'

In the same way that Park's general theory had evolved out of his own interest in race relations within the context provided by Thomas, so too Ogburn evolved his own thesis. Ogburn was interested in social change and the influence of technology on social change. He adopted the concept of disorganisation, and advocated the pursuit of scientific laws of society (again incorporating the subjective element). Ogburn was more involved with psychoanalytic theory than with the particular interactionism of Dewey and Cooley and was also more concerned with structural features than were Thomas and Park. He saw the immutable forces of technology subsuming the individual in the sense that social evolution would take place irrespective of any individual historical figure, although accepting that the nuances of evolution are mediated by human activity.

Ogburn thus tended to look for explanations of social disorganisation at a less individual and a more cultural level. He thus resolved the Thomasian context into the four-stage process of invention, accommodation, diffusion and adjustment. [9]

Just as the concentric zone thesis was the particular application of Park's general theory of social interaction and change to the urban environment, Ogburn's general theory of change had its particular referent, the cultural lag hypothesis, (Ogburn, 1964, pp 86–95).

Park, Burgess and Ogburn successfully developed aspects of these theoretical perspectives, gradually refining the general theory in respect of specific areas. Thus Park's students increasingly concentrated on race and collective behaviour, Burgess's on the family and Ogburn's on social change and psychoanalysis. Wirth, Hughes and Stouffer encouraged a further generation to develop these areas and a more focussed empirical testing of specific theories evolved. After 1930, methodological validity became more crucial. This feature, added to the rapid increase in sociological work and the differentiation into specialist fields, made holistic theories neither tenable nor, from the prevailing scientific point of view, which emphasised validity and reliability, desirable. (See Wirth, 1947, p. 274.) It has been argued that the Chicagoans were not atheoretical empiricists. On the contrary, as has been shown, they worked at various levels of theoretical concern. Over time, there was a tendency to move from general holistic views of the social world to specific testing of theories, thus reflecting the direction being taken by the sociological profession in its attempt to legitimate sociology as science. The *Polish Peasant* study, and the synthesis embodied in it by Thomas, constituted the initial break with the 'armchair theorising' of the past (as in the work, for example, of Sumner, Ross and Tarde). Thomas's theoretical orientation encapsulated in the 'social disorganisation paradigm' became resolved into general theories of change and interaction and much of the work done in the 'Golden Era' revolved around those theories and particular developments of them. Later generations of Chicagoans became more concerned with particular issues and methodological confrontation. However, abstracted empiricism (Mills, 1959) was certainly no part of Chicago sociology up to 1945. That element of the Chicago mythology, which suggests that the 'School' was atheoretical, is not borne out though the Chicagoans did have strong empirical concerns. They developed theory at various levels through an explicit inductive approach. Apart from anything else, the development of race studies at Chicago under Park's guidance clearly belies the impression that the Chicagoans were mere urban ecologists. Matthews (1977, p. 157) suggests that Park had far more impact on race studies than on any other area of sociology. Chicago sociology of the 1920s and 1930s was self-consciously an attempt to 'objectively develop theory'. It was, as Park would have it, 'Big Picture' sociology, based upon general theoretical perspectives evolving out of a context for study synthesised and bequeathed to the Chicagoans by Thomas.

### **Chicagoans As Dogmatically Qualitative Sociologists**

Chicago sociology is frequently characterised as 'qualitative' in comparison to the 'quantitative' approach adopted at Columbia. Some commentators portray map drawing, life-history collection and even walking (Bell & Newby, 1977, p. 52) as the major preoccupation of the Chicago sociologists (at least in the 1920s), others imply that the Chicagoans were preoccupied with participant observation. (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Madge, 1963, p. 89).

This aspect of the myths about the Chicago School is the most enduring and specific. It is popularly held that Park instituted a programme of research that led to the adoption of participant observation and that this approach was the major one employed by the Chicagoans. It must seem strange therefore, that as late as 1940, Daniel should refer to 'the participant observation type method' as though it were far from commonplace (Daniel, PhD, 1940). The sample survey of theses up to 1940 reveals why that should be. Similar to Daniel, none of the studies in the sample used anything approaching 'pure' participant

observation to study a group or community. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* of 1943 is not for nothing regarded as an early classic participant observation study. That it was completed after the 'Golden Age' of Chicago is frequently a surprise to students of the 'School'.

Underlying these elements of the Chicago mythology that relate to methodology is the idea that the Chicagoans were not only qualitative practitioners but also that they were dogmatic about it. The idea of Chicago as the bulwark of ethnography is usually attested to, where it is not taken for granted, by reference to the writings and attitudes of three prominent figures at Chicago. Thomas is portrayed as dogmatic in his claim that life history constitutes the fundamental sociological method, Park is noted for his antagonism to statistics, and Blumer is seen as the prime advocate of participant observation. Each of these positions will be examined below. The argument advanced in this paper is that ethnography was indeed the preferred approach to research in sociology at Chicago in as much as it offered the opportunity to incorporate subjective meaning into sociological analysis. However, there was no antagonism towards quantitative methods as such, for they were widely used by the Chicagoans. Any objection to quantitative sociology was based upon the style of use of these instruments rather than of any institutionally based aversion to quantitative techniques *per se*. Nor does this imply that the Chicagoans were phenomenologists, concerned with the subjective element of social interaction alone, and thus prepared to adopt any method that provided insights into subjective meanings irrespective of the concerns of 'positive' sociology. On the contrary, as has been shown, Thomas provided the context for work that emphasised the subjective element within a process of the discovery of laws of society. Furthermore, it is argued below that the choice of methodology was further affected by the area of study, by methodological development, as well as by changing conceptions of the nature of objectivity and of sociology as science. Ultimately, it is suggested here, that as a whole, the Chicagoans were methodologically eclectic, and, although individuals may have had preferences, they were rarely dogmatic about methods nor were they belligerently oblivious to methodological developments and disputes.

The methodological positions of Thomas, Park and Blumer will be examined in turn.

Much has been made of Thomas's conviction first proposed in the *Polish Peasant* (1918) that the life history method was crucial to sociological research. Yet this too, is an oversimplification of his position for many reasons. Although Thomas incorporated life history into his works, notably the illustrative life history of Wladek Wisznienski in the *Polish Peasant* and case studies in the *Unadjusted Girl* (1924), neither were exclusively life history analyses, nor indeed were many of the products of the 'Chicago School': Shaw's (1930) *Jack Roller* and Sutherland's (1937) *Professional Thief* were exceptions rather than the rule. Furthermore, despite references to life history in the *Polish Peasant*, Thomas's major supportive statements for life history method came in his 1931 address to the Brookings Institute. This was in the framework of a debate that knitted statistical analysis with qualitative material, and came after the publication of the bulk of the 'classic' studies of Chicago. The importance of life history, of personal documents of any kind, of case records, was, for Thomas, that they provided objective data for the examination of meanings and made accessible the subjective element in casual relationships.

In 1918, sociology had not fully assimilated the rapid development of statistical techniques, and attitude testing instruments applied to a representative sample was a technique yet to emerge. (Bogardus had not 'invented' his social distance scale, Thurstone's work in psychology was at an embryonic stage, Ogburn (at Columbia) was discussing trend analysis, using descriptive statistics but only suggesting the potential

of correlative analysis (see Ogburn (1912 and 1917)). So Thomas proposed the direct route, collect and examine written records, and, given that attitudes are formed through a lifetime of experience, obtain written life histories from which to systematically extract the subjective meanings of respondents. What Thomas and Znaniecki wrote in the *Polish Peasant* is at the root of the notion that Chicagoans were dogmatically qualitative. It seems quite provocative and is often quoted (in part).

We are safe in saying that personal life-records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material, and that if social science has to use other materials at all it is only because of the practical difficulty of obtaining at the moment a sufficient number of such records to cover the totality of sociological problems, and of the enormous amount of work demanded for an adequate analysis of all the personal materials necessary to characterize the life of a social group. If we are forced to use mass-phenomena as material, or any kind of happenings taken without regard to the life histories of the individuals who participate in them, it is a defect not an advantage of our present sociological method.' (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918, Vol 3, p. 1)

This statement has to be put into context. First, it is the only statement of this sort made in the *Polish Peasant*, and the only one made by Thomas in his work throughout the twenties. Second, it prefaces the one complete life history included in the first edition of the *Polish Peasant* and is clearly designed to legitimate the inclusion (note that the second edition saw the life history shifted from its central position and located at the end of the last volume as a kind of appendix). Third, the inclusion of life history is logical for Thomas if subjective meaning is to be incorporated into social laws as life history also provides the context for such meanings. These three elements lead to an overstatement of the role of the life history that neither Thomas nor the Chicagoans reflect in practice.

These projections of the qualitative elements of the myths about Chicago that are accentuated by suggesting a 'dogmatic adherence' to qualitative approaches among Chicagoans ignores the methodological sophistication embodied in their work. This sophistication is quite marked in the *Polish Peasant* (1918) in which Thomas first confronted the inadequacies of social theory and challenges then current sociological practice examining methodological problems in depth. The *Polish Peasant* study is not, as has often been implied, the embodiment of qualitative life history analysis quite remote from concerns of structured causal explanation. On the contrary, Thomas states quite clearly

The chief problems of modern science are problems of causal explanation. The determination and systematization of data is only the first step in a scientific investigation. If a science wishes to lay the foundation of a technique, it must attempt to understand and to control the process of *becoming*. Social theory cannot avoid this task, and there is only one way of fulfilling it. Social becoming, like natural becoming must be analysed into a plurality of facts, each of which represents a succession of cause and effect. The idea of social theory is the analysis of the totality of social becoming into such causal processes and a systematization permitting us to understand the connections between these processes. (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918, p. 36)

The idea of social laws was an integral part of Thomas' (and the Chicagoans) theoretical position. However it was, as suggested above, mediated by a concern for the subjective element of social action. Attitudes involve a process of individual consciousness that 'determines real or possible activity of the individual in the social world'. Values are data 'having an empirical content accessible to members of some social group and a meaning with regard to which it is or may be an object of activity'. Social

values are different from objects in as much as the latter have no meaning for human activity. The incorporation of meaning into the causal process is fundamental for Thomas and the interactionists who follow him at Chicago.

The analysis of social activity that addressed values and attitudes implied, for Thomas, a holistic approach. Prefacing a position that C Wright Mills (1959) was to restate and expand, Thomas argued that, in studying society, 'we go from the whole social context to the problem, and in studying the problem we go from the problem to the whole social context' (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918, p. 19). In such a procedure, Thomas claimed, one should proceed as if one knew nothing of the area, for the most usual illusion of science is that the scientist simply takes the facts as they are, without any methodological presuppositions and 'gets his explanation entirely *a posteriori* from pure experience' (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918, p. 37). On the contrary, Thomas asserts, a fact is already an abstraction and what one must attempt is to develop this abstraction methodically rather than presume that the uncritical abstractions of common-sense are adequate. This systematic process of abstraction must be done because 'the whole theoretical concreteness cannot be introduced into science'.

Central to this endeavour, then, is the need to ensure that 'our facts must be determined in such a way as to permit of their subordination to general laws' for a fact that cannot be treated as a manifestation of a law (or several laws) cannot be explained by causal processes. Following upon this proposition, Thomas, predating Popper, further asserts a falsificationist principle. In noting the problem of generalising laws that are initially manifest in particular spheres, Thomas suggests that the social scientist assess the core concepts of the proposition embodied by the particular law and, should such concepts relate to other circumstances, present the law in general terms.

Thomas's methodological presuppositions were not, then, a refutation of positivistic principles *per se*, but rather an attempt to develop them. The emphasis on subjectivity, however, and the often-quoted statement proclaiming the perfection of life history has led to a view of Chicago sociology as dogmatic or, at the very least, as methodologically naive.

Park is portrayed as having a clear dislike of statistics. While it is true that Park distrusted simple statistical accounts he was not dogmatically opposed to statistical analyses. He encouraged Charles Johnson, as co-director of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations to investigate the Race Riot of 1919 using statistical techniques and himself employed a mixture of case study and statistical analyses in the 1925 West Coast Survey of Japanese immigrants. Indeed, as part of this study Park encouraged Bogardus to produce a quantitative indicator of social distance, which led to the Bogardus Social Distance Scale.

From 1915 to 1922 (with the exception of 1921) Park offered a course on 'the Survey', which looked at 'the uses and practical limitations of the Social Survey' and described and compared 'technical devices for the analysis, description and presentation of sociological data with reference to the different fields in which they have been practically employed', and estimated 'the value for science and for social reform of the results obtained' (University of Chicago Official Publications, 1915).

From 1917 Park also offered two alternative courses on research methods to those of Edith Abbott, namely 'Research in the Field of Social Psychology' and 'Field Studies'. Park was joined by Burgess in the teaching of the latter in 1920 and it then became the only method course in the department until

1927. This course provided the instruction and training for the subsequent field studies of Chicago and led to the publication of Palmer's (1928) handbook.

At no time (until Ogburn arrived in 1927) did the Department have its own statistician, despite Small's repeated requests for one (dating from 1915), and instruction in the principles of statistics had to be sought elsewhere. Most graduates seemed to use the Economics Department for this service and attended Douglas's sessions. While the techniques of statistics were thus taught elsewhere, an appreciation of them was integral to the Department and the involvement of the sociology students in the development of small area statistics and the Chicago Fact Books reflect the encouragement rather than discouragement of statistical expertise and appreciation by the Department.

Park and Burgess's students had made use of statistical techniques before Ogburn arrived in 1927. Ernest Mowrer started the research in 1920 that culminated in the publication of *Family Disorganisation* some seven years later. It was, in his own words

The search for a fundamental and scientific analysis of marriage disorganization ... by an examination of statistics and statistical methods as these could be applied to the phenomena of divorce and desertion. (Mowrer, 1927).

The Chicagoans, prior to Ogburn's arrival were aware of the work being done by Thurstone, although few of the sociologists used it ostensibly until Ogburn began to adopt and encourage its application. From 1928 onwards, in which year Thurstone addressed the Seventh Annual Institute for Social Research [10] outlining his procedures, multivariate analysis became part of the arsenal of techniques available to, and used by, the Chicagoans.

Attitude analysis was important to the 'Thomasian' perspective (which was still strong at Chicago) and a practical way of extending the amount of data of this sort that could be collected was a welcome development at Chicago. Thomas, himself, notably shifted his position on the suitability of attitudinal data collected by test instruments. During the 1920s he became more interested in the statistical approach, possibly influenced by his collaboration with Dorothy Thomas, although he never forsook the case-study approach. The Chicago sociologists 'formally' accepted the validity of test procedures following Stouffer's influential thesis (1930) comparing life history and attitude surveys. He argued that, for some kinds of attitudes, the administratively easier test instrument was as good as the life history record. (Although perhaps less subtle in the case of extreme attitudes.) In the same year, Brown (1930) also included an assessment of life history and attitude surveys, which suggested that for delicate areas the life history would be more accurate, (although deferring, in a footnote, to Stouffer's more rigorous study in respect of straight-forward attitudinal statements).

The difference in emphasis on the scope of the attitudinal scale technique, (Brown was much more concerned about its ability to probe delicate areas than was Stouffer, who, although admitting this deficiency, made sure not to overstate it) may well have reflected the position of the supervisors, Ogburn for Stouffer and Park for Brown. However, it did not represent a schism in the Department, merely the alternative sides of the debate on case study *versus* statistics, which was raging generally through sociology in the United States at the time. Statistical analysis in social science was developing rapidly and there was a certain amount of reaction to it from the interactionists who began to see a move towards a more 'positive' sociology ignoring the subjective element. Cooley (1928) argued strongly in

favour of the case-study approach and Shaw, who had been one of the sociologists to embrace statistics at Chicago in his analysis of delinquency trends, argued forcibly for the value of case studies in providing an understanding that went beyond the superficiality of (official) statistics. In his discussion, Shaw (1927) explicitly shows, through an example, how hypotheses may be derived from case study. He asserted that the

case study method emphasises the total situation or combination of factors, the description of the processes or sequence of events in which the behavior occurs, the study of the individual behavior in its total setting, and the analyses and comparison of cases leading to the formulation of hypotheses. (Shaw, 1931, p. 149.)

Burgess, perhaps, provides the 'paradigm' for methodology at Chicago. His views on technique were more flexible than most and he reflects the changing climate, combining an interest in the new techniques like multivariate analysis with a determination not to allow technique to swamp the methodological concerns of interactionism (Burgess, 1927, p. 112).

With Ogburn's assistance Burgess tended to structure his research proposals in a dualistic case study-statistics manner. A proposal for a collaborative study on family and community organisation concludes

The case studies of families in different communities will, of course, be closely related to the statistical study of indices of social and familial organization secured in the companion study. It is to be expected that the significance of the statistical indices [employing the Multiple Factor Method of Thurstone] will become clear in terms of the processes of family and social life revealed by the case study method.' (Ogburn Papers, Box 30, undated, approx. 1931).

Burgess had always been more inclined towards the incorporation of statistical analyses than Park and one of Burgess's more enduring contributions to empirical sociology was the predictive work that led to the construction of the Burgess-Wallin Rating Scale of potential delinquency.

The survey of doctoral theses presented at Chicago from 1920 to 1940 shows that there is no real evidence of the domination of any one method. The Chicagoans and their students were quite eclectic in their data collecting and processing procedures.

During the 1940s and into the 1950s, there was a hardening of attitude. Methodological eclecticism slowly gave way to methodological dogmatism, in theory if not so quickly in practice, especially at the prompting of Blumer. Blumer developed his methodological position at the time of the next major debate in sociology. In effect, it was a sharpening of the discussion embodied in the first debate between statistics and case study and, while not a simple dialogue between Blumer and Lundberg, can be seen as encapsulated by the 'extreme' position each adopted [11]. Blumer (1931, 1956) argued that sociology was not scientific and that in using variable analysis, especially unreflectively, it was failing to generate essential concepts. Instead, he argued for the development of sensitizing concepts and in so doing reaffirmed the role of the subject in sociological understanding (Blumer, 1940). His discussion led him to advocate participant observation as the method most likely to generate such sensitizing concepts, (Blumer, 1969, ch. 1).

Lundberg, on the contrary, argued that sociology, psychology and all the social sciences were essentially no different from natural science and that clearly defined concepts of a definitive nature could be constructed. He adopted Briggeman's notion of 'operationalism', and argued that clear operational definitions would enable social phenomena to be precisely measured, enabling procedures akin to those used in natural scientific investigation to be adopted for the study of the social world. In the first volume of the *American Sociological Review*, (Lundberg, 1936), he argued forcibly against Blumer asserting that sociology was essentially variable analysis anyway and that the principle of multivariate analysis was being used in such classics as the *Polish Peasant* even though statistics were not collected as such. Although embodying different views of the nature of science, especially as it may apply to the social world, the two extremes encapsulated by the Blumer-Lundberg confrontation were most apparent at the methodic level.

These differences came at a time of narrowing focus of theory, and when the trend towards the assertion of the 'scientific method' was being questioned. The potential for methodological disputes within narrow theoretical territories was thus created. The conflicts in the 1950s and early 1960s between symbolic interactionists and structural functionalists are a legacy of this development.

It has been suggested that Chicago sociologists did not simply adopt ethnographic techniques. They were aware of the potential of statistical research and saw a useful role for it. Rather than being dogmatic, the Chicagoans were methodologically eclectic. They were effected by developments in sociology as a whole, both theoretic and methodic, and that, with the narrowing of theoretical concerns and in the light of debates on method the Department avoided methodological conflict at least until 1950. Each member of the Department may have had preferred approaches, but there is no evidence of dogmatic adherence to a qualitative approach within the 'School'.

### **Chicagoans As Meadian Symbolic Interactionists**

The final element of the myths about the Chicagoans analysed here is that which relates to the influence of G.H. Mead on the 'School'.

This element derives principally from retrospective constructions of the history of symbolic interactionism. This has been from both an internal and an external perspective.

One of the more penetrating accounts (Rock, 1979) argues that symbolic interactionism has its epistemological roots in the German philosophical tradition, from Kant through to Simmel. American Pragmatism assimilated much of this tradition and symbolic interactionism grew out of a fusion of the early interactionists (Park and Thomas) and the psychology of Dewey, Cooley and Mead. Mead, in retrospect, seemed to have had a very important role in this development because of the direct teaching link he had with the Department of Sociology. This link, however, is not as strong as is often popularly supposed. Mead taught a course in Advanced Social Psychology in the Philosophy Department (until 1932) that was an available option for sociology students. Not all took it and not all found it enrapturing. Mead, it seems, was not a dynamic lecturer, tending to 'think out loud' and rarely providing opportunities for questions. Mead was largely unavailable to students.

Lewis and Smith (1981) have provided an extensive account of the marginality of Mead to the sociology department in his lifetime and, in so doing, have provided a recent critique of the 'myth' of the dominant position of Mead. Their joint attack is two pronged. First, they argue that Pragmatism was not a unified

approach and that Mead like Pierce was a realist while James and the other Pragmatists were essentially nominalists. Blumer, and the Chicagoans espoused a nominalist perspective. Second, course enrolments, references in theses, books and articles suggest that Mead had little direct influence, except on a small group of graduate students. This influence only emerged after 1920, at a time when enrolments in Mead's classes were declining. This, they argue, can only be attributed to the role played by Ellsworth Faris and later by Herbert Blumer.

Lewis and Smith make no attempt to account for Mead's posthumous influence and why he has been accepted as founding father of symbolic interactionism given his marginality. They make no attempt to explain how Blumer adapted Mead and thereby influenced an important mid-century tradition with American sociology. [12]

Mead has been acknowledged by most commentators on interactionism (especially symbolic interactionism) as the main 'founding father' of that intellectual orientation as Fisher and Strauss (1978, p. 483) have pointed out. This, according to Rock (1979, p 166), is despite the fact that the central concept of 'self' as developed by Mead expressly excludes much that later symbolic interactionists include.

One must ask why Mead is seen as so important, when indeed, most of the Chicagoans exhibited little of his overall theoretical position. Of those who invoked Mead, they either used his social psychology as a convenient framework without incorporating the wider presuppositions of his position or simply slotted some of his ideas into a Park-Thomas framework. The essential elements of that framework owe little directly to Mead, rather they are the product of the German tradition fused with a general Pragmatic critique of early American sociology. Thus Dewey, Cooley and James had as much impact on the development of the Chicago sociological approach as did Mead, as, for most interactionists, no single strand of pragmatism caught their attention or led to a factional division within the department. Indeed, an analysis of doctoral dissertations up to 1940 shows that Mead is cited far less often than Cooley in bibliographies and that Mead's theories are referred to and used only rarely whereas Cooley is often cited as the provider of social psychological theories and categories. Mead's emergence as a major figure (and Cooley's relative 'decline') only occurs after 1935 (following the departure of Park) in the wake of the publication of *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1934). Strauss reflects this situation when, in the introduction to the 1964 edition of Mead's collected papers (Mead 1964), he noted that despite Mead's early influence on the philosophy department, the sociologists did not begin to notice him until the 1920s and even then Thomas and Park drew little directly from Mead. Mead was not even included in the readings in the Park-Burgess text of 1921. However, Strauss notes, there were several streams of staff influence in the Department, some of whom gave more prominence to Mead. By way of illustration Strauss offers an autobiographical note.

Before I went to Chicago as a graduate student in 1939, I had been directed to the writings of Dewey, Thomas and Park by Floyd House, who had been a student of Park in the early twenties. House never mentioned Mead, that I can recollect. But within a week of my arrival at Chicago, I was studying Mead's *Mind, Self and Society*, directed to it by Herbert Blumer.' (Mead, 1964, p. xi)

Strauss, and later Faris, R.E.L. (1967), emphasised the importance of Ellsworth Faris on the emergence of Mead and suggested that during the 1940s Mead entered the mainstream of sociological thought at

Chicago and elsewhere and became the social psychologist for sociologists. Until then, Mead had been a part of a general 'pragmatic' approach to social psychology.

The following extract from Bogdan and Taylor (1975, p. 14) provides a clue as to the reasons for the retrospective importance attached to Mead.

Symbolic interactionism stems from the works of John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, Robert Park, W.I. Thomas and George Herbert Mead, among others. Although interactionists continue to differ among themselves as to the meaning and importance of various concepts related to symbolic interactionism, Mead's formulation in *Mind, Self and Society* represents the most comprehensive and least controversial presentation of the perspective to date.

The Mead-Blumer line of symbolic interactionism is seen as the 'purest' heritage.

Mead's durability and emergence as the provider of symbolic interactionism owes much to the role of Blumer in the development of Chicago sociology and the determined advocacy of his own brand of interactionism. In order to legitimate his perspective, he argued forcefully that he provided the most faithful development of Meadian constructs and, by degrees, has been taken by historians of symbolic interactionism to imply that Mead encapsulated the core of Chicago Sociology. Thus, for example, Meltzer *et al.*, (1975, p. 55) state, 'Blumer has elaborated the best known variety of interactionism—an approach we call the Chicago School. This approach continues the classical, Meadian tradition'.

Through the assertion of a 'pure' heritage derived from Mead, Blumer, and subsequent historians (especially those sympathetic to Blumerian symbolic interactionism) have generated a taken-for-granted view of the centrality of Mead. Once established, this myth generates its own momentum and, in the case of the development of symbolic interactionism, a tradition of work evolves that takes this mythical element as 'true'. In short, the attempt to legitimate (a branch of) symbolic interactionism has given Mead a role in the 'Chicago School' he did not have. This role is not merely the product of Blumer's own accentuation of Mead it is also a result of the other elements of the 'Chicago myths' spelled out above.

Blumer cannot, however, be entirely exonerated. He has suggested that his is the purest form of interactionism and implied that its progenitor was Mead and that Mead gave a new dimension to pragmatism. This position is reflected in Rucker (1969) who argued that Mead took up and developed Chicago Pragmatism and that it is through Mead that sociology incorporated pragmatic epistemological presuppositions. Despite close links between Mead and Dewey, both academically and personally, Coser (1975, p. 355) suggests that Blumer has attempted to set Mead apart. He writes that: 'Blumer relates that Mead would sometimes point with a bit of sarcasm to the profuseness of Dewey's output and to his attendant tendency to write sloppily and with lack of precision'.

Coser seems not to share this view that Mead was so important. He comments that during their association at Chicago, 'Mead was content to play second fiddle to Dewey's resounding first violin'. Coser, further, adds that there is no need to draw too sharp a distinction between the inputs of Mead and Cooley to symbolic interactionism. Such differences as there were are of style not content. What is more, as Mead hardly ever published, his influence on others can be found 'only in the effects his

teachings and conversations had on students and colleagues: his wider impact came only after the posthumous publication of his work' (Coser, 1975, p. 355).

There are other reasons for the prominent position attributed to Mead in the practice of sociology at Chicago. Besides the fact that he taught a course offered to sociology graduates at Chicago (although by no means unanimously popular (see Carey interviews and Lewis and Smith, 1981)), Mead is seen as the only major theoretician at the time in the social sphere and it became taken-for-granted that symbolic interactionism was rooted in Meadian social psychology. This interpretation gained credibility as structural functionalism became important because, as Coser (1975, p. 340) suggested, 'It is hardly a subject of dispute that modern role theory from Linton and Parsons to Newcomb and Merton has been enriched by freely borrowing from Mead'; a point echoed by Fisher and Strauss (1978, p. 488) who suggest that sociologists have frequently taken 'bits and pieces from the sociologists armamentarium' especially constructs like 'the significant other' or 'role taking', which eventually transformed Mead's dynamic development of the self into a static notion fitting the structural functionalist ideas of 'status', 'role' and 'reference groups'. (See also Strauss in Mead, 1964, p. xii.) Fisher and Strauss (1978, 1978a, 1979) have attempted to put the position of Mead into perspective. They asserted, essentially, a dichotomous tradition at Chicago, the interactionism of Thomas and Park and the symbolic interactionism developed by Blumer and based on Mead.

There would, then, seem to be at least two interactionist traditions, each grounded in a different intellectual history....While some interactionists owe little or nothing to a Meadian perspective, the work of others is rooted in both Mead and what is nowadays called the Chicago-style perspective, which derives in fact, mainly from Thomas and Park. A younger generation, coming more lately to interactionism and in a period after the Chicago Department of Sociology had radically changed in character, seem to divide—some moving toward Meadian interactionism, others doing work in accordance with the spirit of Chicago-style sociology. Still others draw on both sources of interactionism. (Fisher and Strauss, 1978, p. 458)

## **Conclusions**

Chicago sociology was born out of Progressive concerns with social problems, but was far from simply a reformist activity in itself. Even the early Chicagoans, Small, Henderson and Vincent were sociologists first and social reformers second. For Small, reform was an integral part of sociology, objectivity involved ethics and ethical judgements determined what sociology was worth doing. The 'School', as it developed from 1915 dropped this ethical component from its conception of scientific sociology and concentrated on generating knowledge to promote an understanding of the social world and potentially to control it. Whatever reform concerns the Chicagoans had, they were secondary to the development of sociological knowledge, reform could not proceed satisfactorily without a sound scientific basis for action. The Chicagoans were at the very least, scientific reformers rather than partisan ameliorists.

The Chicagoans were not atheoretical in their approach. Their concern for empirical detail lay in its exploratory and confirmatory nature. They were theoreticians, at the forefront of the development of sociological theory. The contribution in this field, through the 'social disorganisation paradigm' and theories of culture, gave their social enquiry a holistic orientation that was complemented by the particular theoretical developments in fields as diverse as the family, sociology of knowledge, race studies and collective behaviour. The theories in these areas were as important as the 'concentric zone

thesis' with its related developments, 'centralised decentralisation' and 'succession', which lay at the heart of the urban ecological studies in the Department. The general interactionist approach laid the foundations for the development of symbolic interactionism and its considerable impact, through later generations of Chicagoans, on the study of social deviance.

The Chicagoans were ethnographers. The 'School', dedicated to an interactionist perspective, was concerned to incorporate subjective meanings into their understanding of the social world. Yet, they were not dogmatically qualitative. They could not afford to adopt such a position, as they did not forsake the ostensibly positivistic adherence to explanation and the possibility of social control. Only Blumer, in the period after 1935, began to generate a perspective in the Department that doubted the possibility of a 'scientific Verstehen' sociology and began to drift temporarily towards a more ostensive phenomenological position. However, many of the later generations, who adopted Blumer's critique of 'variable analysis', still retained the assumption that research would test hypotheses and establish the relevance of factors. (See for example Geer 1959, Becker and Geer, 1957, 1957a, 1960, Becker, 1958, 1967.) Throughout, Chicago sociologists were eclectic in their use of methods. Even at periods when they were drawn into, or initiated what might be seen as dogmatic debates on method, they practiced a multiplicity of methods. Thus, when Thomas argued for the centrality of life history he conceded the practical difficulty of relying on it entirely; when case study and statistics were being debated the Chicagoans argued their complementarity, and when, much later the participant observers seemed rigidly opposed to quantitative approaches, Becker argued for the comparative yardstick role that participant observation may play, rather than for its absolute dominance (Becker and Geer, 1962). The Chicagoans were more dominated by an approach to research work rather than by a commitment to a particular method. They sought to clarify the historical context of the area of study, to assess all sources of literature impinging on the research, and to gather empirical information from whatever sources, and by whatever means, were appropriate and available. There was, initially, an acceptance that subjective meaning may be most appropriately gleaned from life history but an equally pragmatic awareness that life-history records were far from easy to access and analyse. This resolved itself, to some extent into the adoption of the principle of attitude-scale construction following Thurstone's pioneering work in the Psychology Department and Stouffer's and Brown's assessments of the suitability of the method *vis á vis* life history. Throughout the period to 1940 most studies employed a combination of methods, few used participant observation in its 'purest' sense as the main medium of data collection. The 'methodolatorous' position adopted by the 'School' dated from 1940 and was more a product of the symbolic interactionist fringe, prompted by Blumer and ultimately pursued at Berkeley, rather than of the Department as a whole, which at that time was increasingly tending towards quantitative analyses of census data.

As the later generations were more affected by a narrowing of methodological focus and 'retreated' into deviancy studies, so too they were more influenced by Mead. Once again, the evolution of symbolic interactionism was important in the rise of the myth of the Meadian impact on the 'Chicago School'. Mead had little impact on the Chicagoans of his time, and it was only after the posthumous publication of his *Mind, Self and Society* in 1934 that his ideas became widely known.

This resumé provides an alternative account of some aspects of the Chicago sociological endeavour to those embodied in various 'mythical' accounts. Given the prior methodological and epistemological description *vis á vis* myth deconstruction, no definitive claims are made for the analysis. However, it is based upon a review of the activity of the Chicagoans in the light of myth critiques. The above is the

result of a critical dialectical analysis that confronts myth and in itself is unmotivated metascience rather than motivated historical reconstruction.

### Footnotes

1. Historiographical is used throughout to refer to the study of the writing of history.
- 2 This has recently been reconsidered by Fisher and Strauss (1978) and Lewis and Smith (1981).
- 3 Henderson linked sociology with Christian reform (see Henderson 1899).
- 4 See the *Journal of Social Science* (1869) pp 1–2.
- 5 The most famous ‘academic trials’ were those of Ely, Commons, Bemis, Smith, Ross and Andrews. These cases of academic freedom in the 1880s and 1890s arose because of the radical sentiments of the above-mentioned academics. See Furner (1975, p. 163 ff).
- 6 Essentially, Small was unable to develop theorising at anything other than a universalistic level, and was thus unable to provide a context for empirical study. His was a general sociology providing a frame of reference for social reform.
- 7 The sources used in this analysis includes a random sample survey of twenty one Ph.D. theses submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, between 1920 and 1940. Other sources were documents (Papers) in the Special Collections Department, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago; Official Publications of the Department of Sociology, and books and articles published by members of the Department.
- 8 Carey (1975). In the course of his research Carey interviewed a large number of ex-Chicagoans. Copies of the complete transcripts of these interviews are lodged in the Regenstein Library. All references to Carey’s interviewees are to these transcripts.
- 9 Invention is either mechanical or social. Accommodation occurs when more elements are added to the cultural base than are lost. Diffusion represents the spread of invention. Adjustment is forced when an invention interacts with other cultural elements.
- 10 The Institute for Social Research was the annual conference organised by the Chicago Sociology Department’s Society for Social Research. An event attended by current and past staff and postgraduates as well as other invited speakers.
- 11 Both approaches derive from pragmatism, Blumer from Mead and Lundberg from Bridgman.
- 12 The limitation of their argument lies in the imposition of an artificial cut off date of 1935 and an outmoded dichotomy, viz nominalism-realism.

### References

- Anderson, N. (1923) *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Barthes, R. (1967) *Elements of Semiology*. London, Cape.
- Barthes, R. (1974) *Mythologies*. London, Cape.
- Becker, H.S. (1958) ‘Problems of inference and proof in participant observation’, *American Sociological Review*, 23.
- Becker, H.S. (1967) ‘Whose side are we on?’, *Social Problems*, 14, pp. 239–47.
- Becker, H.S. & Geer, B. (1957) ‘Participant observation and interviewing’, *Human Organization*, 16, pp 28–32.
- Becker, H.S. & Geer, B. (1957a) ‘Participant observation and interviewing: a rejoinder’, *Human Organization*, 16, pp 39–40.
- Becker, H.S. & Geer, B. (1960) ‘Participant observation: the analysis of qualitative data’, in Adams, R. N. & Preiss, J.J., (Eds.), *Human Organization Research*, Illinois, Dorsey Press.

- Bell, C. & Newby, H. (Eds.) (1977) *Doing Sociological Research*. London, Allen and Unwin.
- Berger, P.L. & Berger, B. (1976) *Sociology: A Biographical Approach*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Blumer, H. (1931) 'Science without concepts', *American Journal of Sociology*, 36, pp 515-533.  
Reprinted in Blumer (1969) p 153 ff.
- Blumer, H. (1940) 'The problem of the concept in social psychology', *American Journal of Sociology*, 1945, pp 707-19.
- Blumer, H. (1956) 'Sociological analysis and the variable', *American Sociological Review*, 21, pp 683-90.
- Blumer, H. (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.
- Bogdan, R. & Taylor, S.J. (1975) *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Approach to Social Research*. London, Wiley.
- Bracey, J., Meier, A. & Rudwick, E. (1973) 'The Black Sociologists: The First Half Century', in Ladner, J. A., (Ed.), *The Death of White Sociology*, New York, Random House.
- Brake, M., 1980 *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures*. Routledge: London
- Brown, W.O. (1930) *Race Prejudice: A Sociological Study*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Bushnell, C. J. (1901) *A Study of the Stock Yards Community at Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Carey, J. T. (1975) *Sociology and Public Affairs: The Chicago School*. Beverley Hills, Sage.
- Cavan, R. (1926) *Suicide: A Study of Personal Disorganization*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Clark, H. B. (1897) *The Public Schools of Chicago: A Sociological Study*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Cooley, C. H. (1928) 'Case study of small institutions as a method of research', *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, 18, pp 147-55.
- Coser, L. A., (Ed.), (1975) *The Idea of Social Structure: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Merton*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Cressey, P. G. (1929) *The Closed Dance Hall in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Daniel, V. E. (1940) *Ritual In Chicago's South Side Churches For Negroes*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Deutscher, I. (1973) *What We Say, What We Do*. San Francisco, Foresman.
- Dunn, A. W. (1895) *An Analysis of the Social Structure of a Western Town: After the Method of Small and Vincent*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Easthope, G. (1974) *History of Social Research Methods*. London, Longman.
- Faris, R. E.L., (1967) *Chicago Sociology, 1920-1932*. San Francisco, Chandler.
- Fisher, B. & Strauss, A. (1978) 'Interactionism' in Bottomore, T. & Nisbet, R. (Eds.), (1978) *History of Sociological Analysis*, London, Heinemann.
- Fisher, B. & Strauss, A. (1978a) 'The Chicago tradition and social change: Thomas, Park and their successors', *Symbolic Interactionism*, 2, pp 5-23.
- Fisher, B. & Strauss, A. (1979) 'George Herbert Mead and the Chicago tradition of sociology', *Symbolic Interactionism*, 2, vol 1, pp 9-26 (part 1) & vol 2, 9-20 (part 2).
- Fleming, H. E. (1905) *Some Phases of the Production and Consumption of Literature in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Frazier, E. F. (1931) *The Negro Family In Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Furner, M. O. (1975) *Advocacy and Objectivity: A crisis in the professionalism of American social science 1865-1905*. Lexington, University of Kentucky Press.
- Geer, B. (1964) 'First Days in the Field', in Hammond, P., (Ed.) (1964) *Sociologists at Work*, New York, Basic Books.
- Gillette, J. M. (1901) *The Culture Agencies of a Typical Manufacturing Group, South Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.

- Giner, S. (1972) *Sociology*. London, Robertson.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery Of Grounded Theory*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Gouldner, (1973) 'Introduction', to Taylor, I., Walton, P. & Young, J. (1973) *The New Criminology*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Harvey, L. (1983) 'Methodological problems of ideology critique', Research Unit Discussion Paper, 11, Birmingham Polytechnic.
- Hayner, N. S. (1923) *The Sociology of Hotel Life*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Henderson (1899) 'The Ministry Today - It's New Experience', *University of Chicago Record*, 43, p. 281.
- Hiller, E. T. (1924) *The Strike As Group Behavior: A Study in the Process and Technique of Control of the Striking Group*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Horak, J. (1920) *The Assimilation of the Czechs in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Lewis, D. J. & Smith, R. L. (1981) *American Sociology & Pragmatism: Mead, Chicago sociology, and symbolic interactionism*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Lundberg, G. (1936) 'Quantitative methods in social psychology', *American Sociological Review*, 1, pp 38–60.
- Madge, J. (1963) *The Origins of Scientific Sociology*. London, Tavistock.
- Martindale, D. (1960) *Nature and Types of Sociological Theory*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.
- Matthews, F. H. (1977) *Quest for An American Sociology*. Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1964) *On Social Psychology*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Meltzer, B. N., Petras, J.W. & Reynolds, L.T. (1975) *Symbolic Interactionism: Varieties and meanings*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mills, C. W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Mowrer, E. R. (1924) *Family Disorganization: An Introduction to a Sociological Analysis*. Ph.d., University of Chicago.
- Ogburn, W. F. (1912) 'Progress and Uniformity in Child Labour Legislation', *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, 48, No.2. New York, Collier.
- Ogburn, W. F. (1917) 'Statistics of American Cities', *Reed College Record*, 27 (Dec).
- Ogburn, W. F. ([1957] 1964) 'Cultural lag as theory' in Duncan, O.D. (Ed.) *William F Ogburn on Culture and Social Change*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Ogburn, W.F. & Nimkoff, M. F. (1960) *Handbook of Sociology*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 4th edition. (First Published 1947 by Paul, Treach Trubner & Co. of London. British adaptation of Ogburn and Nimkoff, 1940).
- Palmer, V. (1928) *Field Studies in Sociology: A student manual*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Park, R. E. (1915) 'The city: suggestions for the investigation of human behavior in the city environment', *American Journal of Sociology*, 20, pp 557–612.
- Reckless, W. C. (1925) *The Natural History of Vice Areas in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Rhoades, M. C. (1906) *A Case Study of the Delinquent Boys in the Juvenile Court in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Riley, T. J. (1904) *A Study of the Higher Life of Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Rock, P. (1979) *The Making of Symbolic Interactionism*. London, Macmillan.
- Rucker, D. (1969) *The Chicago Pragmatists*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Shaw, C. R. (1930) *The Jack Roller*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

- Shaw, C. R. (1931) 'Case study method', *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, 21, pp 149–57.
- Steiner, J. F. (1917) *The Japanese Invasion: A study in the psychology of international contacts*. Chicago, McClurg
- Stouffer, S. A. (1930) *An Experimental Comparison of Statistical and Case History Methods of Attitude Research*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Strauss, A. (Ed.), (1956) *The Sociology of George Herbert Mead*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Sutherland, E. H. (1937) *The Professional Thief*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Thomas, W.I. (1917) 'The Need for A Social Science' in Jennings, H. S., (Ed.), (1917) *Suggestions of Modern Science Concerning Education*. New York, Macmillan.
- Thomas, W.I. (1924) *The Unadjusted Girl: With cases and standpoint for behavior analysis*. New York, Little Brown.
- Thomas, W. I. & Znaniecki, F. (1918) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Boston, Gohram Press, 5 Vols.
- Thrasher, F. M. (1926) *The Gang: A study of 1313 gangs in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Wirth, L. (1926) *The Ghetto: A study in isolation*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.
- Wirth, L. (1947) 'American Sociology, 1915–1947', *American Journal of Sociology Cumulative Index Vols 1 to 52*, pp 273–281.
- Young, E. F. (1924) *Race Prejudice*. Ph.D., University of Chicago.