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Chapter 3

Transactional Philosophy and Communication Studies

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The pragmatist conception of transaction that provides a point of departure for this volume is the axis of a distinctive, comprehensive approach to inquiry. It is one that "develops the widening phases of knowledge, the broadening of system within the limits of observation and report" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 122). John Dewey[1] offered a defining distinction between *interaction* and *transaction*. The former relies principally on "procedure such that its inter-acting constituents are set up in inquiry as separate 'facts,' each in independence of the presence of others" (p. 122). The more encompassing transactional approach takes a view of "Fact such that no one of its constituents can be adequately specified as fact apart from the specification of other constituents of the full subjectmatter [*sic*]" (p. 122). Holistic attention to context and the interrelations of its constituent elements is a general hallmark of the pragmatist, transactional approach. (Ed. Note: Earlier in his career, Dewey often used the concept of *interaction*. Ironically, he applied it not in the sense developed here, but to describe his transactional ideas. Readers therefore should interpret its use,

[1]Dewey and Bentley (1949) jointly wrote *Knowing and the Known*, from which many of the observations about the transactional approach included in this chapter are taken. Bentley was sole author of three chapters of the volume; Dewey was sole author of one chapter; and the remaining eight chapters were co-authored. The emphasis here on Dewey highlights his particular importance to a pragmatist transactional philosophy, which was developed in other works as well—notably, Dewey's (1938) *Logic*.

with reference to Dewey's work, in other chapters of this volume in the transactional sense.)

A new transactional contextualism (Bruner, 1990) is taking shape in the contemporary human sciences. Psychologist Bruner (1986) noted its influence, that "[i]f you engage for long in the study of how human beings relate to one another, especially through the use of language, you are bound to be struck by the importance of 'transactions' " (p. 57).

Transactionalism, in both its originating and current formulations, is integral to a qualitative theory of action (Taylor, 1985) that advocates "a basic reversal in the order of explanation from the philosophy that Cartesianism and empiricism bequeathed to us" (p. 89). A "double shift" (p. 88) is involved. Movement "from a psychology of immediate self-transparency to one of achieved interiority" focuses attention on "the life of a living being who thinks" and whose "thinking is essentially expression" (p. 88). A corollary "principle of embodiment" implies a transactional view of experience as "the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (Dewey, 1958, p. 22; see also Woodward, 1996, p. 165). Embodiment means that "[g]rasping things through symbols, establishing and maintaining practices, are things we do, are to be understood as activities" (Taylor, 1985, p. 87). In this light, the transactional approach is a theory of inquiry as practice and practice as inquiry.

This chapter begins with a discussion of core conceptual issues connecting qualitative philosophy with the pragmatist transactional position. Transactional concerns and commitments are then examined in relation to the development of communication theory. A commitment to neofunctionalism (Joas, 1996; see also Thomas, 1989) is advocated as a way of making the underlying organicism, or naturalism, of the transactional position compatible with insights of poststructuralist social science (see Denzin, 1997). The chapter concludes with specific assessment of the implications of transactional thought for contemporary and future communication studies.

A QUALITATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

Transactional thought originates in a qualitative view of human action that results from an "expressivist turn" (Taylor, 1989, pp. 368–390) that Western thinking took in the 18th century. Philosophers of this era became preoccupied with "finding the good in our inner motivations" (p. 368). One central concern was to link inner experience with outer events by demonstrating how expression of the good depends on the communi-

cative ability to "make it manifest in a given medium" (p. 368). This "principle of embodiment" (Taylor, 1985, p. 85) is a legacy of the qualitative view that becomes central to transactional theory. The emphasis on how the human "subject and all his functions . . . are inescapably embodied" (p. 85) is part of a "reaction against dualism" (p. 80) and an effort toward "recovery of the subject" (p. 80) that characterize debates of the earlier era as well as our own.

A key commitment of qualitative philosophy is its understanding of action, which rejects how Cartesianism "explains action in terms of the supposedly more basic datum of the mental" and instead "accounts for the mental as a development out of our primitive capacity for action" (Taylor, 1985, p. 90). This qualitative view of the subject as an agent holds that agency is realized through actions as the agent's identity unfolds in the process. The specific role of knowledge is to complete what action begins. Accordingly, the qualitative emphasis on "agent's knowledge" (p. 80) contrasts with observer's knowledge where cognition would receive prior emphasis.

The qualitative injunction to "understand reality as activity" (p. 83) challenges an empiricist or "causal view" of reality as "external event" (p. 81)—an objectified state of affairs to be contemplated from "a separate domain of inner, mental space" (p. 81). The causal account views action as primarily instrumental. Acts are directed toward external elements on the basis of "privileged access" I have to the motivating inner bias of "my desire, or intention—the cause of my action" (p. 81). In contrast, agent's action is creative (see Joas, 1996, p. 132)—a claim that pragmatist thought takes up and elaborates.

> Dewey and other pragmatists were concerned not to interpret all action according to the model of instrumental action, but, on the contrary, to offer a critique of the overly narrow "practical" orientation of American life. Thus, to regard action as the dimension on which all else rests precisely did not mean to conceive of the world as mere material for the intentions of actors. . . .
>
> These advances and modifications gave the pragmatist understanding of creativity clearer contours. It is indeed true that the pragmatists attempt to anchor creativity in the actions of human beings in their natural and social environment. (Joas, 1996, p. 132)

Qualitative, expressivist attention to action is advanced by pragmatist thinkers in the direction of a transactional theory of creative action. Particularly important from the standpoint of communication studies is the contributing notion of *situated creativity*, which is based on the premise that "[a]ll action is embedded in anthropological structures of communication" (p. 133). Sociologist Joas (1996) described the pragmatist view that "every

situation contains a horizon of possibilities which in a crisis of action has to be rediscovered" (p. 133). It follows that,

> action consists not in the pursuit of clear-cut goals or in the application of norms, and creativity is not the overcoming of obstacles along these prescribed routes. Anchoring creativity in action allows pragmatists to conceive of creativity precisely as the liberation of the capacity for new actions. (p. 133)

This linkage of action and creativity within the context of anthropological structures of communication is a principal contribution of pragmatism to qualitative philosophy, particularly because such a philosophy provides direction for ethnographic examination of cultural and communicative practices. Joas (1996) asserted that "pragmatism is, put succinctly, a theory of situated creativity" (p. 133). This theory fundamentally challenges causal explanation, which is based on a "clear ontological separation between outer event and inner background" (Taylor, 1985, p. 78). The pragmatist alternative holds that "action and purpose are ontologically inseparable" (p. 78) in that they are both grounded in situation.

Communication studies have been significantly shaped by the ways in which competing positions within the field "[draw] the boundaries quite differently, between 'inner' and 'outer' reality" (Taylor, 1985, p. 81). The divisions can be labeled in various ways,[2] but the basic issue is "an ontological one" (Stewart, 1996, p. 15), regardless of whether a paradigm upholds or challenges the presumption "that there is a fundamental distinction between two realms or worlds, the world of the sign and the signified, symbol and symbolized, name and named . . ." (p. 15).

The pragmatist challenge to dualism draws its inspiration from the 18th-century debates and especially the expressivist anthropology that emerged. This culturally oriented view "differs radically from a rationalist definition of man as a rational being" (Joas, 1996, p. 79). The qualitative alternative "conceives of human reason not as a separate faculty which exerts a commanding influence on human sensuality, but rather as a specific way human beings have of interacting with themselves and the world" (p. 79). This position creates a fundamental linkage between identity and community, as Joas pointed out.

> Firstly, we form a clear picture of the meaningful substance of what we vaguely have in mind only through our efforts to express it; and secondly, in our efforts to express something, we always present that which is expressed

[2]The historically significant division between administrative and critical approaches is one example.

> in such a way that other people can appreciate it. Our relationship to ourselves is therefore conveyed via a medium which we share with others. (p. 79)

The pragmatist position highlights these important consequences of the qualitative perspective: that it (a) foregrounds the study of communication as a focus for the human sciences, (b) predicates a transactional view of communication, and (c) links transactionalism with participation in community—ideally as dialogue.

To summarize these transactional commitments, first recall that communication becomes foundational as part of the qualitative challenge to Cartesianism. Assume that the observer's "self-transparency" (Taylor, 1985, p. 85) is not immediately and intuitively "constituted as data"—as empiricism predicates—but rather is "a goal we must work towards . . . something we have to achieve" (p. 85). Then qualitative attention turns inevitably to the question of how "self-understanding . . . is brought off in a medium, through symbols or concepts" (p. 85). Knowledge becomes "the fruit of an activity of formulating how things are with us, what we desire, feel, think, and so on" (p. 85). Accordingly, "formulating things in this medium"—arguably, the defining characteristic of communication—is established "as one of our fundamental activities" (p. 85).

Second, communication emerges as transactional when the human, as an expressive being, is defined as "a being whose thinking is always and necessarily in a medium" (Taylor, 1985, p. 85). This principle of embodiment is basic to the qualitative theory of the human, which regards "our primitive capacity for action" (p. 90) as the foundational precedent for experience. Certainly a basic attainment associated with human expression is to "become more knowledgeable about ourselves" (p. 91). This knowledge is achieved as part of a "long slow process which makes us able to get things in clearer focus, describe them more exactly" (p. 91). In short, expressive activities not only form the basis of personal identity, but they also "reveal things" (p. 91).

Finally, the norm of dialogue in community develops out of this process that brings the things of the human world into focus and relation by and with persons. Expressions are not solely mental or conceptual achievements. Instead they are, preeminently, bodily activities, of which it can be said that "their first uses are relatively unreflecting" (Taylor, 1985, p. 91). But not so their fuller development. An originating "aim to make plain in public space how we feel, or how we stand with each other, or where things stand for us" (p. 91) develops toward "a demand for reciprocal recognition, within the life of a community" (p. 88).

The principle of embodiment suggests that we transact our identities as we simultaneously transact our relations with others and as we transact patterns of exchange by means of the physical–artifactual substratum of human activity. Human action and communication are accordingly triadic

(see Woodward, 1996). They entail transactions that complexly integrate the formation of (i) personal identities, (ii) social relations, and (iii) the physical–artifactual environments of human experience.

These transactional processes operate at the personal and collective—the "mutual-personal" (see Kirkpatrick, 1986, pp. 137–181; Woodward, 1996, 2000)—levels because the "true goal of the search for recognition remains community" (Taylor, 1985, p. 88). Communication as a form of participation establishes community and dialogue as normative-contextualist (Woodward, 1993) standards. Such standards are tied to "social meanings" (p. 166), which are "normative, while at the same time, they are also historically and culturally contingent." Philosopher Walzer (1983) explained this position—that although "[t]here is no single standard . . . there are standards (roughly knowable even when they are controversial) for every social good and every distributive sphere in every particular society" (p. 10). A situated or transactional approach to inquiry is required to understand social goods and distributions because "[m]en and women take on concrete identities because of the way they conceive and create and then possess and employ social goods" (p. 8). Walzer (1983) specified the transactional nature of the processes involved:

> In fact, people already stand in relation to a set of goods; they have a history of transactions, not only with one another but also with the moral and material world in which they live. Without such a history, which begins at birth, they wouldn't be men and women in any recognizable sense. (p. 8)

I have elsewhere labeled this a *transactional-participatory* (Woodward, 1996) approach as it applies to communication. I draw on this conception in returning to consideration of the pragmatist foundations of transactionalism established by Dewey.

TRANSACTIONAL INQUIRY

The defining themes and commitments of a qualitative philosophy of action are taken up by the pragmatist transactional approach. The holistic, integrative perspective requires

> insistence upon the right to proceed in freedom to select and view all subjectmatters [sic] in whatever way seems desirable under reasonable hypothesis, and regardless of ancient claims on behalf of either minds or material mechanisms, or any of the surrogates of either. (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 124)

This methodological flexibility allows Dewey's transactional philosophy (Becker, 1964, p. 3, and passim; Eco, 1989, p. 27) to address dualist divisions of his own time between materialist and idealist positions. His formulation also anticipates aspects of subsequent debates that have opposed determinist views—materialist, behaviorist, structuralist (see Giddens & Turner, 1987, pp. 350–353, 58–81, 195–223)—to perspectives that uphold the shaping influence of human agency—dialogic, cultural, structurationist (see Buber, 1965; Carey, 1989; Giddens, 1984.). The integrative principle is "that 'thing' is in action, and 'action' is observable as a thing, while all the distinctions between things and actions are taken as marking provisional stages of subjectmatter to be established through further inquiry" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 123).

Communication is at the core of this transactional approach. Dewey (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) asserted that "[t]he transactional is in fact that point of view which systematically proceeds upon the ground that knowing is co-operative and as such is integral with communication" (p. vi). The relevant sense of communication is "the making of something common" (Dewey, 1938, p. 46). Williams (1976) characterized this usage as "the most general modern meaning" of the term—one that "has been in the language since C15 [15th century]" (p. 72). The transactional perspective unifies consideration of the physical and symbolic dimensions of communication. It does so by maintaining that "[l]anguage is made up of physical existences . . . [b]ut these do not *operate* or function as mere physical things when they are media of communication" (Dewey, 1938, p. 46). The appeal to "convention or common consent," which marks the communicative element of human experience, "is that of agreement in *action*; of shared modes of responsive behavior and participation in their consequences" (p. 46).

The transactional "operations" (Dewey, 1938, p. 14) that characterize action and participation "fall into two general types. There are operations that are performed upon and with existential material . . . [and] . . . operations performed with and upon symbols" (pp. 14–15). The integrative perspective of transactionalism holds that "symbols in the latter case stand for possible final existential conditions while the conclusion, when it is stated in symbols, is a pre-condition of further operations that deal with existence" (p. 15).[3]

By concentrating on the nexus of material/symbolic operations in communication, the transactional approach interrelates what academic study

[3]Carey (1989) presented this basic position succinctly with his formula that "[w]e first produce the world by symbolic work and then take up residence in the world we have produced" (p. 30). Carey concludes that "[a]ll human activity is such an exercise (can one resist the word 'ritual'?) in squaring the circle . . . Alas, there is magic in our self-deceptions" (p. 30).

in this field has traditionally separated into "communication . . . discourse as embodied language" and "communications . . . discourse in light of the context of its material embodiment" (see Heyer, 1988, p. 148). Consideration of the first dimension elicits the call for "an approach to the media which is fundamentally 'cultural' " and thus concerned "with the meaningful character of symbolic forms *and* with their social contextualization" (Thompson, 1995, p. 10). The study of communications conventionally implies a focus on the "technical medium" and "the material elements with which, and by means of which, information or symbolic content is fixed and transmitted from producer to receiver" (p. 18). The transactional approach challenges the historical tendency of communication studies to insert a fundamental division of labor between those investigating one or the other dimension of this supposed boundary.

Carey (1989) indicated the commitments associated with these divergent traditions. He contrasted a "transmission or transportation view of communication" (p. 42), which has characterized much of the development of American communication studies, with a "ritual view" (p. 43). The latter is Carey's preferred way of elucidating an alternative, culturally informed perspective. Although the first position considers communication "as a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control" (p. 42), the latter perspective sees it as a "process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed" (p. 43). The transmission view is based on interests that seek the "extension of messages across geography for purposes of control" (p. 43). It tends to establish communicative norms of "persuasion; attitude change; behavior modification; socialization through the transmission of information, influence, or conditioning or, alternatively, as a case of individual choice over what to read or view" (pp. 42–43). A ritual view "centers on the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality" (p. 43). It selects its archetypes or norms from "ritual and mythology for those who come at the problem from anthropology; art and literature for those who come at the problem from literary criticism and history" (p. 43).

Obviously, a contrast between a more instrumental and culturally attuned view of communication can be described in other terms than transmission versus ritual. From a transactional perspective, it is important to address a continuing tendency of American communication studies to segregate studies of the material and economic aspects of media and communication from sociocultural and symbolic analyses.

Thompson's (1995) social theory of the media illustrates a contemporary effort to combine insights concerning the interrelations of material and symbolic dimensions of communication. Thompson argued that an integrative understanding of discourse and its embodying "material substratum" (p. 18) should be organized around the postulate that "[t]ech-

nical media, and the information or symbolic content stored in them, can . . . be used as a resource for the exercise of different forms of power" (p. 19). Furthermore, the dynamics of power are most appropriately examined from a view that regards technical media "as differing kinds of 'information storage mechanisms' which are able, to differing degrees, to preserve information or symbolic content and make it available for subsequent use" (p. 19). Eisenstein's (1979) analysis of the "new process of data collection" (p. 107) that emerged with the advent of print culture anticipated this information storage view of communication. Thompson's similar conclusions connect with an emphasis that cultural studies approaches, including Eisenstein's, have placed on the political and cultural dimensions of communication:

> [T]he exercise of power by political and religious authorities has always been closely linked to the collation and control of information and communication, as exemplified by the role of scribes in earlier centuries and the role of diverse agencies—from organizations compiling official statistics to public relations officers—in our societies today. (Thompson, 1995, pp. 19–20)

The transactional approach helps articulate and advance this information storage or data collection view of communication. The influence of Carey's ritual emphasis on shared culture has solidified development of an

> important movement in contemporary thought about communication . . . a view that concentrates on the construction of "symbolic universes" . . . how the elements that constitute a "common stock of information" . . . or "stock of knowledge" . . . within a community or culture are produced, reproduced, collected, stored, augmented, manipulated, and retrieved by members of that culture. (Woodward, 1996, p. 155)

Building on foundational "semiotic, sociological, and interactional" (p. 169) models of how "shared worlds" (p. 170) are constructed, a transactional perspective focuses on "three levels of structures—sign systems, social relations, the physical/artifactual infrastructure" (p. 169) that provide the context for communication and action.

These three levels played a prominent part in Dewey's originating analysis of the "naming-named transaction as a single total event [that] is basic" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 137) to human experience. Dewey illustrated with the example of "a trade, or commercial transaction" (p. 270). Attention to the semiotic level—the sign system in question—indicates that what "determines one participant to be a buyer and the other a seller" is that these social identities are "marked by the traits and properties which are found in whatever is recognized to be a transaction" (p. 270).

Thus, a signifying system constitutes a first level at which "one exists as buyer or seller . . . *in and because of* a transaction in which each is engaged" (p. 270). A sociological level of analysis informs understanding of how the social identities in question are not only significations, but also " 'forms of sociation' that represent the multiple ways 'in which individuals grow together into units that satisfy their interests' " (Woodward, 1996, p. 159; cites Simmel, 1950, p. 41). Dewey observed of this second level that "because of the exchange or transfer, both parties (the idiomatic name for participants) undergo change" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 270) solely on account of "being a party in transactions in which cultural conditions partake" (pp. 270–271). The physical–artifactual substratum of action is observable when "specific things become goods or commodities because they are engaged in the transaction" (p. 270). This third level of analysis reveals how physical goods of exchange "undergo at the very least a change of locus by which they gain and lose certain connective relations or 'capacities' previously possessed" (p. 270).

Dewey recognized the triadic (see Woodward, 1996) elements of transactional analysis—signification, social relations, physical–artifactual substratum—in this example. In addition, he observed that the discussion remains only at the threshold of a fully transactional approach. However, until it is acknowledged how,

> no given transaction of trade stands alone. It is enmeshed in a body of . . . transactions that are neither industrial, commercial, nor financial; to which the name "intangible" is often given, but which can be more safely named by means of specifying rules and regulations that proceed from the system of customs in which other transactions exist and operate. (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 271)

The importance of the underlying system of customs centers the transactional approach on cultural practices, highlighting the connection to Carey's and Thompson's ritual and social approaches to the study of communication. Dewey sought out more generalizable observations about the "conditions" of human experience that "have to do with those relatively invariant features of a process . . . [such as transactions] . . . that provide essential grounds for successfully realizing the aims of the process" (Woodward, 1993, p. 165).

> A trade is cited as a transaction in order to call attention to . . . the fact that human life itself, both severally and collectively, consists of transactions in which human beings partake together with non-human things of the milieu along with other human beings, so that without this togetherness of human and non-human partakers we could not even stay alive, to say nothing of accomplishing anything. (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 271)

The culturally determined sense of transaction as an exchange centered on commercial or other forms of value (representing "the concerns, cares, affairs, etc., of common sense" [p. 285]) is accordingly extended toward a broader sense of transaction as "things done and to be done, facta and facienda, that . . . belong to and are possessed by the one final practical affair—the state and course of life as a body of transactions" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 285).

Dewey's transactionalism presses at the limits of a cultural analysis to seek out "protonorms" that "are of a universal order conceptually speaking; they reflect our common condition as a species" (Christians, 1997, p. 12). Consistent with the normative-contextualist position cited earlier, the notion of protonorms does not imply that "the forms of participation entailed should be considered as invariant across historical and cultural time and space" (Woodward, 1996, p. 169). Rather, "[a]ttention is directed toward comprehending how the norm of participation is sought out, achieved, and contested in diverse, historically concrete situations" (p. 169). Thus, a transactional approach can retain its commitment to situated analysis (see Joas, 1996, p. 160) while pressing toward norms that are grounded in "mutual humanity . . . the bondedness we share inescapably with others" (Christians, 1997, p. 12). Arguing that such norms "can only be recovered locally and inscribed culturally," Christians specified how "[l]anguage situates them in history . . . [and] . . . human beings enter them through the immediate reality of geography, ethnicity, and ideology" (p. 12). A "thicker view"—the "widening phases of knowledge . . . system . . . observation and report" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 122) that transactional inquiry requires—would suggest a standard that can "distinguish between the universal and the particular as with a windowpane, knowing there is a decisive break yet recognizing that the universal realm is only transparent in the local" (Christians, 1997, p. 12).

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS IN COMMUNICATION THEORY

Consideration of how communication theory has incorporated elements of the transactional approach can take a number of paths. One approach is to concentrate on the "fresh perspective on communication" (Carey, 1989, p. 23) afforded by those cultural studies proponents who traced out alternative origins for the field. They have looked elsewhere than the empiricist's dominant paradigm (see Gerbner, 1983) for foundational concepts and orientations toward communicative processes. Carey (1989) specified that

> the resources were found by going back to the work of Weber, Durkheim, de Tocqueville, and Huizinga, as well as by utilizing contemporaries such as

> Kenneth Burke, Hugh Duncan, Adolph Portman, Thomas Kuhn, Peter Burger, and Clifford Geertz. Basically, however, the most viable though still inadequate tradition of social thought on communication comes from those colleagues and descendants of Dewey in the Chicago School: from Mead and Cooley through Robert Park and on to Erving Goffman. (p. 23)

Carey rightly observed that "[n]ames solve nothing" (p. 96). Nonetheless, the tradition they evoke provides alternative "concepts and notions within which media studies might fruitfully circle" (p. 96). This tradition situates the pragmatist transactional philosophy as the centerpiece of "a theory of action and social order" (Joas, 1993, p. 17) focused on communicative processes. A direct intellectual lineage can be traced from these founding figures of pragmatist and symbolic interactionist thought to contemporary scholars in the American cultural studies tradition (see Carey, 1997). This way of conceiving the development of transactional thought in relation to communication theory seems to require no detour into "empirical media study" (see Czitrom, 1982, pp. 122–146) other than to note its value as an antithesis against which to measure success in depicting cultural specificity.

An alternative approach highlights instances where transactional thought appears as a contributing influence within empirical media studies. This avenue is preferable given several factors. Historically, empirical research traditions developed alongside pragmatism, certainly in its later manifestations as Chicago-school sociology and symbolic interactionism. This "proximity . . . has provided a philosophical context for the celebration of instrumental value and the practicality of human action that reflects the utilitarian nature of liberal-pluralism" (Hardt, 1992, p. 5) in the American context. In short, the pragmatist legacy retains important connections to empirical approaches to the study of communication and other social phenomena. These need to be understood.

Assessing the Chicago-school tradition in terms of its relevance to contemporary sociology and social theory, Joas (1993) pronounced that "it stands in the middle between the speculative evolutionist social philosophy of sociology's early years and empirical modern social science" (p. 26). Hardt (1992) catalogued pragmatism's attributes more exhaustively, emphasizing proponents' interests in

> reconciliation between morals and science . . . scientific practice based upon the primacy of the community of inquirers . . . the importance of ethical processes in the discussion of social interests . . . [and] understanding of the practical character of thought and reality upon a behavioral interpretation of the mind. (p. 34)

Hardt (1992) quoted Dewey (1931, p. 24) on the "fundamental difference" that distinguishes pragmatism from "historical empiricism," of

which it is an "extension": "that it does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action" (Hardt, 1992, p. 34). Dewey concluded with the assessment that "this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences" (p. 34). Given these significant affinities, the effort to assess transactional thought in relation to empirical approaches to communication is worthwhile.

A second argument has to do with an increasing interest in research approaches that combine cultural studies with empirical research, often employing mainstream social science methods. Audience studies, in particular, have migrated toward such an integration (see Hay, Grossberg, & Wartella, 1996) that can readily be viewed as consistent with the methodological principles of transactionalism. Examples can also be cited from areas such as feminist theory, which has heard recent calls "to reconnect with more sociological and policy-relevant questions" to produce "a more applied feminist cultural studies armed with data and empirical facts" (Ferguson & Golding, 1997, p. xviii; see also McRobie, 1997). More generally, the prospect of a "new ethnography" (Morley, 1997, p. 121) capable of extending its alternative model of inquiry across media studies predicates a "return to the 'three Es': the empirical, the experiential and the ethnographic" (Ferguson & Golding, 1997, p. xviii). Again, the motivations to connect pragmatism with empirical traditions merit attention.

The empirical tradition is on the process side of a distinction between two main schools of communication study (Fiske, 1990). The process school is "concerned with how senders and receivers encode and decode, with how transmitters use the channels and media of communication . . . with matters like efficiency and accuracy" (p. 2). The "semiotics"[1] school is concerned with "production and exchange of meanings . . . the role of texts . . . signification . . . culture" (p. 2).

Two articles published in the 1950s represent the empirically oriented process school and introduce elements of a transactional perspective: the first, by psychologist Theodore M. Newcomb (1953), and the second, by communication scholars Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr. (1957). These essays suggest the long-standing interest that certain empirical researchers have shown in integrating a more sociocultural view of communication as "communicative acts" with an empirical concern for measuring effects of the "transmission of information, consisting of discriminative stimuli" (Newcomb, 1953, p. 393).

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[1]Stewart's (1995, 1996) critique of the semiotic model exemplifies an interest that contemporary transactionalism shares to transcend both the effects model and the symbol model by focusing attention on what Stewart labeled *articulate contact*—a notion that has much in common with transactional inquiry.

These articles share the premise that communication occurs as actions within a "life space" conceived as "the system of relations between two or more communicators and the objects of their communication" (Newcomb, 1953, p. 403). Additionally, communication is distinctively seen as the basis for creating "a more extended environment" (Westley & MacLean, 1957, p. 34), which it does "by means of symbols expressing shared meanings" (p. 34). Expression begins to be viewed here not solely according to a source-receiver view of message transmission. Rather, it becomes an attribute that characterizes "a person, or primary group, or a total social system" (p. 34). Such terms begin to suggest a cultural analysis that will take more definitive shape only a decade or more later (see Carey, 1989, 1997; Fergsuon & Golding, 1997; Hardt, 1992).

Newcomb (1953) introduced the notion of "co-orientation" (p. 393). It emphasizes how communication is "dependent upon a common environment" (p. 394). The "continued attachment" of communicators is seen as "contingent upon the discovery or development of common interests beyond themselves" (p. 394). Included here are "two considerations of complementary nature" (p. 394). The first is *environmental reference*—that the "more intense one person's concern for another the more sensitive he is likely to be to the other's orientations to objects in the environment" (p. 394). The second is *social reality*, in the sense that the "other's judgment provides a testing ground for social reality" (p. 395) or "what is true and valid" (p. 394). The integrative, transactional thrust of these observations is to suggest that "it is an almost constant human necessity to orient oneself toward objects in the environment and also toward other persons oriented toward those same objects" (p. 395). Furthermore, "[c]ommunication is the most common and usually the most effective means" (p. 395).

These foundational notions point toward a general theory that aims to be "sufficiently general to treat all kinds of human communication from two-person face-to-face interaction to intentional and intercultural communications" (Westley & MacLean, 1957, p. 38). This would include, of course, mass communications. "Advocacy roles" and "channel roles" for purposive and nonpurposive communicators would make up some of its elements. The parts would also include "behavioral system roles," meaning "a personality or social system requiring and using communications about the condition of its environment for the satisfaction of its needs and solution of its problems" (p. 38). This is often referred to as a receiver or public. In addition, the model includes the "totality of objects and events 'out there' " and "these objects and events as abstracted into transmissible form: 'messages' about . . . relationships" (p. 38). Expanded understandings of communication begin to suggest "[a] transactional approach [that] is seeing together what has been seen separately and held apart" (Steg & Schulman, 1979, p. 317).

These important additions to the paradigm of empirical, communication research nevertheless are limited by the narrow instrumentalism to which the authors often revert. The dynamics of the communication system are viewed primarily in terms of a message sender's possible solutions to communicative challenges, which are encountered in Newcomb's (1953) model:

> under conditions of demand for co-orientation . . . a problem which he can attempt to solve behaviorally (i.e., by communicative acts) and/or cognitively (i.e., by changing either his own orientations or his perception of . . . [another's] . . . orientations. (p. 401)

Consideration of mass communication contexts does not alter this behaviorist orientation. Although individual behavioral intentions may be more difficult to attribute, still this stage of development in process theory bases its analysis on the motivating factors of " 'need satisfactions' and 'problem solutions' " (Westley & MacLean, 1957, p. 36). Thus, the quality of analysis remains distantly removed from a view of transactionalism that emphasizes how "human action could not be fully or properly accounted for from the inside out—by reference only to intrapsychic dispositions, traits, learning capacities, motives, or whatever," but needed instead to be "situated . . . conceived of as continuous with a cultural world" (Bruner, 1990, p. 105).

The prospects for a transactional perspective to foster more productive dialogue between the traditions depend on recuperating functionalism. Functionalism is arguably a common reference point that empirical studies and the transactional perspective could mutually adopt and develop. The project must begin with reaffirmed rejection of any structural-functionalist paradigm that would attempt to establish sociocultural norms based on the ability of communication to successfully integrate diverse cultural interests under the banner of an attributed, shared worldview. A methodological bias toward "interpreting all ideas and practices as systemically normalizing" (Thomas, 1997, p. 83) renders this sort of functionalism largely incapable of explaining "evidence of unshared values or contradictory beliefs" (p. 82) when these emerge.

What is required, instead, is a functionalism attuned to communicative process in a manner that acknowledges how "[p]articular virtues perform certain functions, play certain roles in human life" (Wallace, 1978, p. 15). This approach starts out from the premise that "life is a normative concept that cannot be understood apart from the conception of a creature's good" (p. 16). It seeks to comprehend the culturally specific functioning of "[s]uch virtues as courage and restraint [that] enable individuals to govern themselves, to pursue plans, to act on principles, and to participate fully in a life structured by intelligence, institutions, and conventions" (p. 15). The

underlying organicism of pragmatist transactional philosophy is developed in a critical spirit, avoiding two distortive extremes of relativism and ethnocentrism.

> A functionalism of this kind is critical relative to a broad conception of the proper activity of the organism and thus differs decisively from what might be called the *tout comprendre, tout pardonner* functionalism of cultural relativist anthropology. It is also different from Parsonian functionalism, which has dominated much of contemporary sociology and political science, since it begins with a set of provisional and corrigible claims about objective human needs and problems rather than with a list of the characteristic or necessary functions of social or political systems. (Salkever, 1983, p. 210)

This critical functionalism is designed to take on what Taylor (1989) considered to be "the greatest intellectual problem of human culture . . . distinguishing the human universals from the historical constellations and not eliding the second into the first so that our particular way seems somehow inescapable for humans as such . . ." (p. 112). Christians' (1997) advocacy of "a broadly based ethical theory of communication" approaches this challenge through a series of questions posed "at three different levels of abstraction" that contribute to a credible "normative vision" (p. ix).

> In foundational terms, what is the rationale for normativity in an age of normlessness? Within the domain of particular cultures, are there common values underlying them that are similar to those of other cultural traditions? And on the level of communication practice and policy, are there master norms that provide direction and boundaries for media morality? (p. ix)

Grounding the search for normativity in a critical functionalism may seem counterintuitive at first glance—an attempt to recommend functionalism to ethicists and cultural theorists whom we might expect to be its principal critics. For example, when Carey (1989) defined *communication* as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (p. 23), one is inclined to view this formulation in the light of Carey's accompanying critique of functionalism:

> Functional analysis, like causal analysis, goes directly from the source to the effect without ever seriously examining mass communication as a system of interacting symbols and interlocked meanings that somehow must be linked to the motivations and emotions for which they provide a symbolic outlet (p. 55).

Carey regarded functionalism as inevitably a species of causal explanation—a premise that anthropologist Rappaport (1979) questioned when

he observed that "[w]e should beware of confusing explanation with informativeness or understanding" (p. 49). Rappaport's assessment of functional accounts was that

> whether or not they are "explanatory" (and if properly formulated and appropriately applied I take them to be), statements of "what it does" and "how it does it" may well be among the most informative, important, and interesting that may be made concerning an organ, an institution, or a convention. (pp. 49–50)

Rappaport moved into direct dialogue with Carey's position when he further observed that, "among the most informative things that can be said about structures or systems, be they organic, social, cultural, or ecological, are statements concerning how they maintain, order, reproduce, and transform themselves" (p. 50).

The tension between functional and cultural accounts begins to be resolved by the previously discussed distinction by Dewey between an empiricist concentration on "antecedent phenomena" and the "precedents of action," when compared with a pragmatist emphasis on "consequent phenomena" and the "possibilities of action." A neofunctionalism[5] attuned to creative possibilities aligns communication theory with "a social theory which is based on action theory, does not conflate functional analyses and causal explanations, yet contains the benefits of a controlled use of system models" (Joas, 1996, p. 222). Joas suggested that relevant approaches might be more appropriately conceived as "constitution theories" (p. 230)—a category elsewhere linked with the "normative-contextualist" thrust of transactionalism (see Woodward, 1993, p. 164). Regardless of the label one prefers, the key concern is to "make social processes intelligible in terms of the actions of the members of a society without assuming there to be some underlying transhistorical developmental trend" (Joas, 1996, p. 231).

TOWARD AN ECOLOGICAL TRANSACTIONALISM

The contemporary value of the transactional perspective to communication studies centers on the originating promise of pragmatist philosophy to uncover the "foundations of a theory of action and social order" and to develop "these fundamental ideas into concrete social scientific theory and empirical research" (Joas, 1993, p. 17). This suggests how the rele-

[5]Thomas (1989) presented the specific case for a revised and applied functionalism in communication studies in its broad implications.

vance of transactionalism extends beyond communication studies to the human sciences more generally. The integrative material/symbolic perspective of the transactional core philosophy responds to a general critique of social science that Bourdieu (1988) expressed. Bourdieu observed that it "oscillates between two seemingly incompatible points of view, two apparently irreconcilable perspectives: objectivism and subjectivism . . . physicalism or psychologism" (p. 14). He said that the social sciences tend either to "treat social facts as things" or "reduce the social world to the representations that agents have of it, the task of social science consisting then in producing an 'account of the accounts' produced by social subjects" (pp. 14–15). A transactional perspective envisions a remedy to this rupture by overcoming the "intellectual isolation . . . that separates studies of individual psychology from studies of the sociocultural environment in which individuals live" (Wertsch, 1985, p. 1). The appropriate interdisciplinary and integrative strategy characterizes pragmatist transactional philosophy.

Laboring to construct this transactional approach from his vantage point at mid-20th century, Dewey lacked essential critical insights and methodological resources to carry through on the envisioned program. Dewey's transactional philosophy sometimes evinced an "organic idealism" (see West, 1989, p. 95) that had essentialist, universalist tendencies. In addition, the notion of "organized intelligence" (see Schiller, 1996, p. 72, for a critique) extended the naturalism associated with the organismic metaphor, often uncritically, to the study of human activities and institutions. Its applications there must be carefully delimited. Treating "knowledge as itself inquiry—as a goal within inquiry, not as a terminus outside or beyond inquiry," the transactional perspective arguably embraces an antiessentialism that "excludes assertions of fixity and [all] attempts to impose them" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. vi). At the same time, it develops its underlying organicism in ways that allow for normative statements to be generated based on "enriched descriptions of primary life processes in their environments and of the more complex behavioral processes in theirs" (p. 129).

Contemporary updating of the transactional model is made possible by what sociocultural researchers, as exemplified by Joas, have learned as a result of addressing the "crisis of representation in the human sciences" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 7). A "sixth moment" of interpretive and ethnographic sophistication—attuned to a "postcolonial world . . . defined by difference and disjuncture and shifting borders and borderlines" (Denzin, 1997, p. 265)—is called for as the progressive result of poststructuralist experimentation. Interactionist (see Denzin, 1989; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995) and transactional models of sociocultural life are necessarily transformed in the process. Insights from contemporary cultural and interpretive theory—and particularly constructivist (see Pearce, 1995)

views—can contribute to a more valid transactional synthesis of organismic with cultural perspectives (see Woodward, 2000).

One notable model for this integration is philosopher Jonas' (1974, p. xvii) long-term project to connect a "theory of organism" or "philosophical biology" (Jonas, 1966, p. 2) with "a reunion of ontology and ethics" (Vogel, 1996, p. 15). For Jonas (1974, p. xvii), the resultant "philosophical anthropology" or "philosophy of life" (Jonas, 1966, p. 282) pronounces in favor of an "intrinsic forward thrust of organic theory itself toward an ethical completion" (Jonas, 1974, p. xvii).

Jonas' (1984, p. 189) movement of thought is toward an ecological perspective (see Jagtenberg & McKie, 1997, for assessment of ecological approaches in communication studies), which is consistent with the overall trajectory of Dewey's transactional philosophy. Dewey referred specifically to the importance of the "descriptive spade-work of the ecologies" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 125). He considered ecological studies of his era to be "full of illustrations of the interactional . . . and . . . still fuller of the transactional . . . (where the observer . . . sees more sympathetically the full system of growth and change)" (p. 128). Thus, ecology was a likely source of "anticipated future development of transdermally transactional treatment" (p. 125) with its particular emphasis on "organism and environment" (p. 123). Penetrating beyond "current conventional distinctions between them" (i.e., organism and environment)—the transactional perspective "requires their primary acceptance in common system, with full freedom reserved for their developing examination" (p. 123). Nearly half a century later, Jonas (1984) invested primary importance in "the nascent science of ecology" (p. 6) as the source of relevant questions for ethical philosophers and sociocultural theorists of our time. It also is important as the impetus for the "interdisciplinary pooling and integration . . . [of] . . . the global environmental science that is needed" (p. 189) as a guide to his envisioned ethics of responsibility. On the basis of such connections among the past, present, and projected future of interdisciplinary research and activism, and notwithstanding important critical qualifications induced by historical perspective, Dewey's agenda usefully can inform a contemporary vision. The vision would focus on how critical inquiry should be carried out in a poststructuralist (see Best & Kellner, 1991, pp. 20–25; Giddens & Turner, 1987, pp. 195–223) or postsemiotic (see Stewart, 1996) spirit. This agenda can be aimed especially at understanding how language, action, and agency interrelate; how their dynamics influence the expression of social and personal identity; and the consequences this picture has for the symbolic and geophysical habitats of human action.[6]

[6]Jagtenberg and McKie (1997) indicated new maps of how postmodernist thought can combine with environmentalism to articulate norms of sustainability based on "ecological holism" (p. xii).

Dewey's orienting perspective on transactional analysis remains relevantly applicable to developing an antiessentialist, dialogic social constructivism (see Pearce, 1995) based in contemporary cultural studies and directed toward ecological holism. Advances in communication studies will prove central to its development. The transactional perspective contributes distinctively to communication studies by indicating how a culturally sophisticated ethnographic approach can address broad ecological concerns with an empirical rigor appropriate to its commitment to a "situated" (see Anderson, 1996, pp. 84–87) view of human action.

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