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An Alternative Path: The Intellectual Legacy of James W. Carey

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AN ALTERNATIVE PATH: THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF JAMES W. CAREY

by

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ABSTRACT

The following is an inquiry into the intellectual legacy of James W. Carey. This study locates, classifies and critiques the three most salient currents of his work: (1) His critique of the intellectual history of mass communications and the positivism of the media "effects tradition"; (2) his North American cultural studies alternative to the dominant ways of knowing in his discipline; (3) and his technological criticism. This study finds that while Carey was neglectful is his analysis of institutions and issues of political economy, the author argues for a continuation of the conversations that Carey began with regards to the ways of knowing in the discipline of Journalism and Mass Communications and his analysis of technology and culture.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When James W. Carey died in 2006, the headline of his obituary in the *New York Times* read "James W. Carey, Teacher of Journalists, Dies at 71." It was a fitting tribute. Carey was indeed an extraordinary teacher, not only of journalists but also of students and fellow scholars, as evidenced in the many memorials and eulogies that appeared in scholarly journals after his passing. But he was not simply a teacher. He was also a communications theorist, historian, and philosopher. His work ranged widely across disciplinary boundaries. Carey paid little attention to the various lines of departmental demarcation and for the most part considered them to be arbitrary.[1] While such boundaries might be useful to higher education administrators in the ordinary business of organizing students and allocating funds, for Carey, they served little purpose in intellectual inquiry.

Carey dusted off old books to explore the relationship between media and culture, and he borrowed from thinkers in other disciplines—like Innis, Geertz, and Dewey—and synthesized their ideas for his own purposes.[2] His *Times* obituary called his tastes "eclectic," but a more contemporary and academic term would be multidisciplinary.

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[1] This is not hyperbole. When asked about how he looked at disciplines, departments, and fields of study, Carey responded, "[i]n a way, I don't look at them, or I don't care about them, or I think they are insignificant." Quoted in James Carey and Tom Reilly, "Putting the World at Peril: A Conversation with James W. Carey," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 102.

[2] On Carey's intellectual dexterity see G. Stuart Adam, "Jim Carey and the Problem of Journalism Education," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 157.

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Unlike most of his fellow communication scholars during the early years of his career, Carey did not think of himself as a social scientist. Rather, he sought to study the media as a form of culture, as situated within culture, in the way that literary critics, historians, philosophers, anthropologists, and others have sought to study other forms of cultural expression, such as the novel or a Balinese cockfight. In other words, Carey wanted to interpret the media; he wanted to dig for and articulate meaning in the communications systems and media content that inhabited the world, both past and present.

Carey was interested in the relationships between people and media—how these relationships are established and how they create and define communities. His major contribution to the discipline of mass communication was his revaluation and critique of the traditional view of the study of communication in the United States. This traditional view, the "transmission view," sees communication as a mechanistic process of sending information through space. Carey's approach to communication merged it with culture such that the two become indistinguishable one from another. For Carey, to study communication was to study human existence as expressed through its symbolic forms—communication as culture. Carey derived his approach to communications from the humanities in an effort to unearth deeper meanings and values in our symbolic environment.

Carey managed to add intellectual depth and heft to the discipline while at the same time eschewing the increasingly complex statistical research within the media effects tradition that continues to dominate the field. Carey rejected the positivist paradigm in communication research with its formally objective methods and reductionist procedures; instead, he sought to investigate the values and meanings of mass communication using older forms of philosophical and historical argument. He

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introduced the term "cultural studies" as a term for his intellectual endeavor in 1963.[3]

This thesis is a study of James W. Carey's scholarship and its contributions to the "cultural turn" in communications research. The book *Thinking with James Carey* provides a useful example as to the spirit of this thesis. In the introduction to this collection of essays, the editors inform readers that their book does not intend to propose that one think as James Carey, but rather with him[4] or alongside him. With this idea as a guiding principle, my analysis of Carey's contributions to the study of communication will use a methodological dialogism that will extend the conversation that Carey began with a hermeneutic intent;[5] in other words, I plan to extend the conversation that Carey began without the expectation of finding any *final* answers to the questions and issues contained in his work. Instead, I wish to highlight what I find to be the most important ideas in his thinking about the study of communication. This thesis will attempt to examine the work of Carey as an "epistemic individual," as Jonathan Sterne referred to him—an author whose work has come to stand as a marker for a particular way of knowing—by outlining his proposals for the cultural study of communication and

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[3] James W. Carey, "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies in Question*, eds. Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc., 1997), 3.

[4] Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson, introduction to *Thinking with James Carey,* eds. Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 1-10.

[5] See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 357-389. I am using the term 'hermeneutic intent' as direct reference to Rorty's notion that hermeneutics is not method for attaining truth but for greater understanding – *verstehen* -- although Rorty does not use the term. Put another way, according to Rorty hermeneutics is an attempt to make sense of what is happening at a stage where we are still unsure of how even to describe it and then to proceed "nonreductively." Rorty's conceptualization of hermeneutics draws heavily from the book *Truth and Method* by Hans-Georg Gadamer that he (Rorty) reads as a tract against the very notion of method in philosophy. I will address the issues of method in the social sciences and mass communications in the first chapter of this project.

exploring the subsequent debates and questions it leaves for his readers.[6]

The methodological approach to this project will first involve an analysis of Carey's scholarship with respect to the three most salient currents in his work: his critique of positivism; his cultural studies alternative; and his cultural/historical inquires into communications technology. Secondly, this study will investigate the intellectual history of mass communications in order to situate Carey among his peers and contextualize his thought. I am using the phrase "intellectual history" in the same way that the journalism historian David Paul Nord uses it, meaning simply a history of thought.[7]

The aim of any intellectual history is to delineate intellectual presuppositions, identify general patterns of thought and central debates, and then analyze how these issues evolve over time.[8] For example, the first era of interest for this study will be the period of intellectual domination of positivist social scientific research following the Second World War and enduring into the Cold War. The second era begins with the anti-positivist revolt that became widespread throughout the social sciences and mass communications in the 1960s; this decade marks the beginning of the cultural turn in communications research. By the mid-to late 1990s, American cultural studies reached a period of uncertainty as some academics attacked it for being too celebratory of popular

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[6] Jonathan Sterne, "James Carey and Resistance to Cultural Studies in North America," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 283. Here, Sterne borrows the term 'epistemic individual' from the French thinker Pierre Bourdieu; see Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[7] David Paul Nord, "Intellectual History, Social History, Cultural History, and Our History," *Journalism Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1990): 645.

[8] John C. Greene, "Objectives and Methods in Intellectual History," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 1 (1957): 59-60.

media culture and for becoming too politically disengaged and historically ill-informed.[9] My methodological intent for this thesis is to track these intellectual patterns and Carey's relationship to them within their historical context.

This thesis is less a strict biography of James W. Carey and more an analysis of his thought and its relation to the intellectual currents within his own discipline; in that sense, it might be useful to call it an intellectual biography. By Carey's "discipline" I mean the academic profession of journalism and mass communications in which he was a teacher and administrator, but Carey's scholarly work was by its nature multidisciplinary and hard to fit into any specific typology. Carey dealt with issues of culture, communications theory, journalism, media, politics, technology, and methodology throughout his career in many different contexts. Since any attempt to categorize Carey's subject matter would in some way be insufficient, I will use the general term "communications" when referring to it. The best method for defining the nature of Carey's subject matter is to discuss it and trace some of its unifying themes, a major goal for this project, rather than attempting to define it explicitly.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter will discuss and explore Carey's critique of the "media effects tradition," the reigning social scientific paradigm in the study of mass communications. Even a casual reader of Carey would notice that much of his work is concerned with the intellectual trajectory of North American mass communications research. Indeed, the first four chapters of his most well-known book, *Communication as Culture,* address the

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[9] Catherine A. Warren and Mary Douglas Vavrus eds., introduction to *American Cultural Studies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 1-11; Daniel Czitrom, "Does Cultural Studies Have a Past?" in *American Cultural Studies*, 13-22.

issues of the scientism in mass communication research and the alternative paths he advocated. This first chapter will add to the conversation about "positivism" in the discipline by reviewing Carey's critique and by explaining the institutional background of "scientism" and its lack of success in finding mechanistic explanations for human communication.

Of course, Carey did not simply advocate that the media effects tradition be abandoned with nothing left in its place. The second chapter will discuss Carey's project of "cultural studies" as his desired path for inquiry in communication. In other words, this chapter will be concerned with Carey's epistemological position. It will explore his discussion of the transmission and ritual binary in communication research and communication itself, as well as his commitment to and advocacy of democratic ideals and philosophical pragmatism in scholarship. This chapter will also address the various criticisms and debates that accompany the adoption of cultural studies in university curricula and Carey's reaction to these debates. For example, critics of Carey's form of American cultural studies have claimed that his cultural approach to studying media does not adequately address power relations in society. This chapter will address these criticisms and probe Carey's views on power relations in culture. This discussion will examine his relation to the political lines that became drawn as splits began to occur in cultural studies between those who favored the political economic analysis of institutions and those, like Carey, who favored a cultural analysis that was less politically motivated and sought primarily to understand the cultural rituals and symbols of others.

The final chapter of this thesis will address Carey's ideas concerning "technology and ideology." Carey's concern with communications technology sprang from his interest in the work of Canadian academics Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis and their

analysis of different forms of technology. Carey's attention to technology and its relationship to political and popular culture is a major theme in his scholarship, and he returned to it many times throughout his career. Carey's approach to technology includes a critique of it as an ideological category, the utopian belief that technology progresses naturally towards improving the human condition, a position Carey and his co-author John Quirk firmly rejected.

To support his position against this ideology of technology, Carey focused his analysis on how the physical structure of a technology, like the telegraph, influenced its use and cultural effects. For example, in his well-known essay on the telegraph, Carey argued that the telegraph "reworked the nature of written language and finally the nature of awareness itself"[10] and made obsolete more long form, nuanced, and detailed news reporting in favor of the transmission of bits of information. In this chapter, I will outline the origins of Carey's views on technology and their considerable relationship to the thought of Canadian economist Harold Innis, whose work I argue is essential to a fuller understanding of Carey's own work on technology.

Background

James William Carey was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on September 7, 1934, the second of six children. During the war, his father worked in the shipyards and his mother in the textile mills. Carey described his family's ongoing employment status as a constant flow of ups and downs between relative economic security and unexpected job loss, but they were never abjectly poor. None of his immediate family had university educations; in fact, Carey was the first in his family to go to college. But his family was

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[10] Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," in *Communications as Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 162.

very politically active: both his mother and aunt were union organizers when they were not working in the mills, and it is no doubt that Carey's intellectual development was influenced by this early exposure to political life.[11]

Carey was diagnosed with a congenital heart disease when he was in the first grade at a time when the only treatment for such an aliment was a recommendation for rest and isolation from crowded places like schools. So, because of his illness, Carey was kept out of school until he was 14 years old. Unable to join the military and unfit for factory work, Carey was able to go to the University of Rhode Island on a disability scholarship in 1952. Carey had an intuitive grasp of subjects like history and English but was unable to enroll in a liberal arts program because he lacked the necessary high school credits. So, Carey received his degree in business taking mostly economics and business administration courses. After completing his degree, he went on to graduate school to study journalism and advertising at the University of Illinois because he considered it to be the "safe route" as he had written for a student newspaper and thought he might go someplace where he could write journalistically.[12]

Carey finished his Ph.D. at Illinois after having written two dissertations, one on economics and communications (he was not happy with this work), and one on Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan (he was pleased with this work and later published it). Obviously, his diverse interests were evident early in his career. He eventually became a professor at the University of Illinois in the department of journalism, where he taught communications courses that were offered as electives. It was then, in the fall of 1963, as

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[11] Carey and Lawrence Grossberg, "From New England to Illinois" in *Thinking with James Carey,* 11-13.

[12] Ibid., 17-19.

a young professor, that Carey first suggested the title of Cultural Studies as a label for the study of the media and society.[13]

Carey went on to lead a distinguished academic career, which included becoming Dean of the College of Communications at the University of Illinois in 1979, and then in 1992 joining the faculty at Columbia University's School of Journalism. At Columbia, Carey was instrumental in founding a Ph.D. program in communications and philosophy within the journalism school that was a separate entity from the professional degrees the school offered. Carey had to fight to ensure others within the department that his program would not impinge on the professional programs, but his goal was to add a deep intellectual foundation to a school whose original purpose was to train journalists not produce academics. Carey, in many ways, added a depth to his field whose legacy can certainly be felt today.[14]

To examine the work of James Carey is to uncover the ideas of someone with a unique perspective. Carey's work was essentially a constant dialogue with his own discipline, his role as an educator, and the surrounding culture. To read his work, then, is to encounter many of the major epistemological debates and fissures that lay hidden under the surface of the research done within the schools of journalism and mass communications and beyond. By focusing on just one man, one uncovers the major philosophical questions as to what it means to engage in social inquiry and the difficult issues that must be negotiated as to the role of the "expert" within a democratic society. Therefore, to read Carey is to become immersed in the history of his discipline and to

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[13] Ibid., 20.

[14] James Boylan, *Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903-2003* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 240.

engage in a conversation that should never stop as to the proper role of social inquiry in human affairs. Such debates do not come with easy answers, but by examining Carey's thought in relation to his discipline, it is my hope to open up these debates and to keep the conversation going.

CHAPTER 2

CAREY AND THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

The following chapter is concerned with the epistemology of the "media effects tradition" and Carey's case for abandoning it. Carey once remarked that in order to successfully interpret a scholarly text, one must "grasp the structure of the argument into which it is an entry and the identity of the combatants to which it is addressed."[15] With this comment in mind, I can think of no better way to approach the nature of Carey's own work in this area. Without some contextual background, especially as to the combatants Carey was addressing, some of his more important epistemological claims might go overlooked. Therefore, this chapter will locate Carey's place in the history of the study of mass communications by reviewing its dominant research traditions and also by examining Carey's contribution to our understanding of them. This exercise will be a small but important contribution to the intellectual history of the discipline.

A "Lay Epistemologist"

Carey was quick to remind his readers that the intellectual trajectory of his discipline was (and is) situated within a context or a history of thought.[16] Carey's

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[15] Carey, "The Roots of Modern Media Analysis: Lewis Mumford and Marshall McLuhan," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 31.

[16] I think it is important to note that the term "history" is loaded such that the philosopher M. Foucault avoided it and thus borrowed the Nietzschean terms "genealogy" and "archeology" to describe his historical investigations. The problem that Foucault and others have sought to avoid is that the term "history" in western society implies a linear narrative of continuous progression and rationality (with a beginning, middle, and end). It is important in discussions of the intellectual history of mass

thinking on such matters was influenced by Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996), whose book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* brought the challenge of historical interpretation to the belief that science is an accumulation of knowledge that gradually moves towards an exact understanding of physical reality. Kuhn, a physicist and scientific historian, argued famously that the practice of "normal science" operates within dominant paradigms that determine basic assumptions, directions for inquiry, methodology, and issues of verisimilitude.[17] For Kuhn, a revolution in science occurs when a dominant paradigm is overturned; put somewhat differently, a revolution in science occurs when a new solution to a problem is discovered that violates the standards of the old research tradition but whose logic comes to be accepted by the relevant community.[18] Kuhn's project showed the historical context in which such revolutions took place and how older ideas give way to new ones by being completely reconstituted.

Considering that he was heavily concerned with larger epistemological issues in the study of mass communications, it is of little surprise that Carey admired the work of Kuhn. An extraordinary scientific historian and epistemologist, Kuhn almost single-handedly dismantled the image of natural science as a self-contained enterprise that operated efficiently on its own internal logic. The effects of Kuhn's ideas were felt well beyond the disciplinary boundaries of scientific history and made "paradigm" one of the most used words in academic English. For instance, it is revealing that Carey referred to the dominant "paradigm" in the study of mass communications as the "media effects

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communications to remember that this story is somewhat discontinuous and that the passage of time does not necessarily ensure progress.

[17] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[18] See discussion in Ronald N. Giere, *Explaining Science: A Cognitive Approach* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 32-38.

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tradition." Carey consciously avoided the term paradigm because, as a lay epistemologist himself, he was well aware of the implications of using the term because of its relationship to the natural sciences. Kuhn had used "paradigm" in the context of natural science--the majority of his examples were from physics--but Carey had no interest in constructing the study of mass communication as a science searching for natural laws and falsifiable claims.

Carey's project was a revolt against positivism in the social sciences more generally and the study of mass communications in particular. Carey wanted essentially to shape the study of the media into a new branch of the humanities.[19] An eloquent critic, Carey stood for a complete rejection of the idea that only through the application of methodologies from the natural sciences could social inquiries be both reliable and valid (this is sometimes called naturalism). Carey was annoyed by the reductionism in the positivist research of the effects tradition, and he viewed it as a stagnant intellectual outlook that avoided the complexity of social life in the pursuit of a "value free" science of mass communications.

Carey was well informed about the intellectual history of the research traditions that fall under the umbrella of journalism and mass communications. Carey's interest in this history was not coincidental, of course; Carey used his discussions about the intellectual history of his discipline as a weapon to advocate for a major shift in its dominant research traditions. By discussing this history, Carey pointed to the politically and culturally contingent factors that had influenced his discipline's development in order to strengthen his call for an alternative path.

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[19] Carey, "Humanities are Central to Doctoral Studies." *Insights: The Journal of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication* (1989): 2-5.

Carey's audience was a generation of quantitative, social scientific, mass communications scholars committed to the "empirical" study of media effects. Stephan Jay Gould's comment that most natural scientists "don't care a fig about history" is generally true for social scientists as well.[20] Quantitative social scientists in mass communications are trained to gather and analyze data; they are adept in operationalizing concepts, finding statistical correlations, and interpreting data sets. All of these techniques are standard operating procedure in the methodological canon of mass communications research, which primarily includes quantitative content media analysis, mass social scientific surveying, and psychological experimentation. But social scientists do not study, or even give much thought to, the history of the intellectual processes in which they are engaged. Beginning in the early 1960s and 1970s, Carey began to remind professional social scientists in communication that the methodological traditions and epistemological claims to which they were committed had a history and one not without controversy and relevant philosophical debates.

Carey, Intellectual History, and Mass Communications

Carey described the path of communications research in the United States as guided by two models, which he expressed in another one of his characteristic binaries. In his words, "one model of communication was seen as a mode of domination, in another as a form of therapy; in one model people were motivated to pursue power and in the other to flee anxiety."[21] Carey's two models did, in fact, encompass a great deal of the type of the research done in the so-called media effects tradition. Yet, the most important

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[20] Stephan Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 25.

[21] Carey, "Space, Time, and Communications," in *Communication as Culture*, 112-113.

contribution of Carey was not the generalizability of this binary. What is most important was Carey's effort to remind his readers of an obvious fact, that these two models "were also models for the enactment of the communication process, powerful models of an *actual social practice* [emphasis mine]."[22] That is, as an actual social practice, the research done within these two models responded to, and was shaped by, the social context in which they emerged.

Of course, Carey's scholarship in these areas of intellectual history had more of an influence on his students and sympathetic acquaintances than his quantitative social scientist colleagues. One such acquaintance, the historian Daniel Czitrom, went on to write one of the more balanced accounts of the history of the "media effects" tradition that was far more wide-ranging than versions common in the field in the 1980s when he wrote. Heavily influenced by Carey, much of Czitrom's historiography of the study of mass communications in the U.S. was an extension of Carey's own thought in book length form; it included figures like John Dewey, Robert Park, Charles Cooley, Harold Innis, and Marshall McLuhan, all figures who were not normally included in effects tradition history unlike figures like Walter Lippmann or Paul Lazarsfeld.[23] Czitrom, a professional historian by trade, added analytical depth to the alternative history that Carey originated.

The intellectual history of the media-effects tradition is a story about the eventual confluence of a variety of different enterprises that, for various reasons, took an interest in understanding the social impact of modern mass communications. Czitrom provided a

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[22] Ibid., 113.

[23] For his reflection on the influence of Carey on his book, see Daniel J. Czitrom, "Twenty-five years later," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 24, no. 5 (2007): 481-485.

useful taxonomy of these types of research, what he called "empirical media study," and it included the following categories: (1) propaganda analysis; (2) public opinion analysis; (3) social psychological analysis; and (4) marketing.[24] The basic premise of all of these forms of effects research presupposed that mass media had at least some form of effect on an audience's attitudes and behavior, and all of this research wanted to know more in order to utilize and/or control the power of the new mass media environment.

All of these forms of research relied on a positive science of social relations, which is essentially what Czitrom was referring to when he wrote of "empirical media study." He suggested that that these founding researchers' understanding of human action owed tacitly to the behaviorism of J.B. Watson and relied heavily on quantitative social scientific methods believed to uphold professional standards for objectivity. These forms of inquiry assumed a stolid quality and presentation, or as Carey put it, "[t]hey assume that the flattened scientific forms of speech and prose, that peculiar quality of presumed disinterest and objectivity, are the only mode in which truth can be formulated."[25] This style of inquiry owed to the standards for objectivity that had found new life in the 1920s in American sociology, and elsewhere, as the old idea that social inquiry should imitate the natural sciences became more prominent during the interwar period and remained dominant through much of the Cold War.[26]

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[24] Daniel J. Czitrom, "The Rise of Empirical Media Study," in *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 122-146.

[25] Carey, "Mass Communication and Cultural Studies," in *Communication as Culture*, 38.

[26] The idea that social inquiry should imitate the natural sciences can be traced to French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857). For an examination of Comte's ideas on American intellectual life see Gillis Harp, *Positivist Republic: Auguste Comte and the Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1920* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1995); On the scientism of American sociology see Robert C. Bannister, Sociology and Scientism: 1880-1940 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

Of course, one immediately notices that Czitrom's taxonomy was quite
fragmented, filled with a range of institutional prerogatives and varying political and
cultural struggles. Carey's audacious opening sentence to his 1996 essay, "The Chicago
School and the History of Mass Communications Research," spoke to this inherent
fragmentation when he wrote that "[s]trictly speaking there is no history of mass
communications research."[27] He went on to explain that a whole host of writers,
impossible to classify or lump together, from as far back as the seventeenth century had
been writing about issues that could fall under the heading mass communications; it was
thus almost impossible to assemble a clear linear narrative about this kind of intellectual
history.

Carey pointed out that what is called the "history of mass communications
research" is merely a recently assembled and relatively minor literary genre. In Carey's
version of the story, the intellectual history of the effects tradition had been assembled for
a variety of purposes in order to justify and legitimate a new twentieth-century invention
of the mass media and its related institutions, and to give direction and status to a

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[27] Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communications research," *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 14. In this essay, Carey argued, essentially, that the work of what is generally referred to as the "Chicago School of Sociology," namely the work of Robert Park, Charles Cooley, and John Dewey, contained observations about communications that were a necessary component of a more complete intellectual history of the discipline of mass communications. But Carey's discussion of the "Chicago School of Sociology" was a highly bracketed one that only included the work of the three aforementioned authors. Obviously, some scholars have criticized Carey's characterization of the "Chicago School" because it reduced an entire department to the thought of a few scholars–although, Carey was hardly the first to utilize the "Chicago School" trope. Obviously, a fuller view of the "Chicago School" would take into account the departmental divides that existed because this famous department was made up of academics with very different, sometimes competing views very much at odds with one another. See discussion in Jefferson Pooley, "Daniel Czitrom, James W. Carey, and the Chicago School," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 24, no. 5 (2007): 469-472; See also Harold S. Becker, "The Chicago School, So-Called," *Qualitative Sociology* 22, no. 1 (1999): 3-12.

professional class of teachers and research serving those institutions.[28] In other words, the field's origin story had been constructed to legitimize the needs of a new professionalized class of teachers, researchers, and media workers. The actual history, though, is much more fragmented and messy.

Therefore, given the fragmented nature of research in mass communications, the dangers of constructing an alternative intellectual history are fraught with potential cliffs and hurdles.[29] This is because an "intellectual history" is a historiography of ideas that attempts to examine multiple, fluid strains of thought and research. The subject matter is further complicated by the fact that some research traditions are in active competition with others, some are dominant and others not—and some remain dormant waiting to be discovered again. Nevertheless, the perceived intellectual history, or rather the dominant one, bounds academic practice to an identity about the research being carried out and its methods and goals. Carey understood this and sought to change the perception of this history with a critical analysis and an alternative version that included thinkers like John Dewey, Harold Innis, and even Clifford Geertz.

A Brief History Media Effects Research: "Strong Effects"

The standard version of the media effects research tradition's history – by which I mean the version that is told by practitioners in mass communications – begins in the years surrounding WWI. Of course, as mentioned before, much commentary had been written before this time period that could certainly be considered research into mass

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[28] Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communications research," 14; see also, Carey, "Graduate Education in Mass Communication," *Communication Education*, 28, no. 4 (1979): 282-293.

[29] On the perils of writing an intellectual history of mass communications, see comments in Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson, introduction to *Thinking with James Carey*, 2-3.

communications, but one must begin somewhere, and this is generally considered to be the genesis of the more modern forms of "media effects" research.[30] Research into what came to be called the "hypodermic needle" view of communications, which is the view that mass media messages have a direct influence on one's thoughts and behavior (the "strong effects" view), began during this time and was shaped in the context of mass industrial warfare. Carey's comment that the history of communications research was "hardly an innocent history" was an allusion to this war-related aspect of this intellectual history.[31] More generally, this early history of "media effects" research in the United States was tied almost exclusively to the interests of commercialism and the state, with the possible exception of social psychological analysis, which in its infancy was concerned with the effects of mass media on children and adolescents.

Commercial interests in mass communications research were very straightforward. In the years following WWI, consumer surveys were widespread among marketers as improvements in statistical sampling and survey techniques added the verisimilitude of these types of social data. The importance of market research increased in tandem with the growth of commercial radio because, unlike print media, a radio program's audience could not be calculated with a simple observation of circulation.[32] As the historian Sarah Igo has made clear, however, it was not obvious in the 1920s that the public would be open to the prying questions of market researchers. Indeed, businesses had to be convinced as to the utility of these new methods of consumer research even if

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[30] For the standard version of the history of media effects research see Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communications Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 456-464.

[31] Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communications research," 14.

[32] Czitrom, "The Rise of Empirical Media Study," 126.

they stood to gain from this type of data. Consumer surveys and their associated data on consumer behavior were made "valid" and acceptable by a fluid socio-cultural process that shaped the perception of the public as much as it reflected it.[33]

Research into the effects of propaganda became a significant endeavor on the part of all the governments involved in both world wars. In the United States, much attention was paid to what historian Christopher Simpson has aptly called the "science of coercion," or rather wartime propaganda efforts that included all of the seemingly innocuous and more nefarious efforts one might expect of a government trying to persuade a passive domestic population to support war and then to convince an enemy of its defeat.[34]

Naturally, such a new and concentrated effort to alter public opinion on behalf of the state came with a subsequent backlash and a general apprehension towards the newer mass media and its power. Postwar views among the public towards propaganda became loaded with a view of sinister forces hard at work to control the opinions of an unwitting public. Such anxieties about the mass media's power and the potential of that perceived power in service of national interests became the focus of much of the earlier research on state propaganda and its effects as the research reflected on these popular anxieties.[35]

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[33] See Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University of Press, 2007).

[34] For an examination of U.S. propaganda efforts during WWI and the infamous "Creel Committee", see James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War: The story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939); For commentary on U.S. propaganda during WWII, see Paul H. Haridakis, Barbara S. Hugenberg and Stanley T. Wearden, eds., *War and the Media: Essays on News Reporting, Propaganda, and Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009); For a detailed examination of U.S. propaganda efforts during the postwar period see Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research & Psychological Warfare, 1945-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[35] For Carey's discussion of these points, see Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communications research," 14-16.

Carey's power and anxiety models of communications research are encapsulated in the word propaganda itself. In his well-known book *Propaganda*, Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud and the so-called "father of public relations," examined the etymology of the word propaganda and pointed out that the word did not gain its negative connotation for subversive mendacity until the 1920s.[36] It was not until after the first and second world wars that the word in popular parlance was used with the ubiquitous negative connotation it has today. The final straw was, of course, the Nazi regime. That infamous regime's use of propaganda forever made the word itself forever associated with lies, half-truths, and mass manipulation. To take one example: consider the writings of radical writers like Emma Goldman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The word propaganda was used quite frequently and with a positive connation, in this case with an aim to propagate a socialist and revolutionary ideology.[37]

The political scientist Harold Lasswell was one of the forerunners of early propaganda research and is considered one of the founders of mass communications research as well. His work on the style and techniques of propaganda focused on the individual psychology of central political figures—Hitler, for example—and how their personalities reflected on their attempts to manipulate mass public opinion through the alteration and manipulation of symbols. Lasswell also studied propaganda from a more macro perspective, looking into questions of how the media operated, its role in politics, and how it could be utilized to manage public opinion in an American context.[38] And it

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[36] Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2005).

[37] See Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and other Essays* (Dover Publications: Mineola, 1969).

[38] Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); for Lasswell's definition of propaganda see Lasswell, "The Theory of Political Propaganda," *The American Political Science Review* 21, no. 3 (1927): 627-631.

was Lasswell who famously coined the major question to which a science of communication should be directed: "who says what in which channel to whom with what effect."[39] Lasswell's conception of this new science was that social scientists would reveal how to use mass media to influence target audiences, and they would do this through an ostensibly apolitical process of scientific progression and application of the resulting knowledge.

Lasswell is also credited with developing the first forms of quantitative content analysis, one part of the methodological trinity of "empirical media effects research" that includes social scientific surveys and psychological experiments. Carey's models of power and anxiety communications research were embodied in Lasswell's work, most noticeably in his views on the proper uses of propaganda and the role of social scientists in shaping public opinion through the mass media, what Edward Bernays called the "engineering of consent." But for Carey, the major thinker that laid the foundation for research about the media was, of course, the "father of American journalism," Walter Lippmann whose book *Public Opinion* (1922) made the role of the expert essential for the shaping of the public mind and the smooth functioning of an "administrative democracy."

Public Opinion Research

The history of mass communication research in the effects tradition is closely aligned with the quantitative techniques of mass polling. Many of the sampling methods and survey techniques for public opinion research common today were fully developed

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[39] Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and function of Communications in Society," in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communications,* eds., Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971/1954), 88.

by the mid-1930s. But the academic concern with public opinion and polling had taken shape during the Progressive Era (roughly 1890-1920), mainly in response to the explosive issues concerning labor and capital. Labor statistics bureaus began to flourish as reformers needed to be able to point to more balanced reports and less controversial data collection.[40] The quantification of social facts was a socially progressive phenomenon, and it encouraged the growth of a professionalized class trained in the statistical methods necessary to gather the data and interpret the results.

Indeed, the quantitative measurements of public opinion by national surveys and mass polling have transformed the way the public is conceived, marketed to, and governed in the modern United States.[41] Methods of mass surveying are techniques that enforce a high level of discipline on both the administrators of the survey and of the respondents; in this process, opinions themselves were formally standardized. Social scientists in the interwar period learned quickly that logically equivalent forms of the same question produced very different answers, and so the level of standardization had to be increased to decrease this variation.[42] But the forms of standardization and the mode of quantification used have never been completely divorced from power relations in the workforce and elsewhere. The difference between public opinion polls and surveys of academics provides a vivid example of this dynamic. Where opinion polling relied on standardized questions and answers, surveys of academic "attitude"—or rather their opinions on social issues—allowed for survey administrators to rephrase questions, vary

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[40] For a discussion about the historical context of the uses of the social scientific survey in the U.S., see Stephan Park Turner and Jonathan H. Turner, *The Impossible Science: An Institutional Analysis of American Sociology* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 15-28.

[41] Igo, *The Averaged American*, 1-22.

[42] Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 34.

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the order, and allowed for the respondent to use their own words. Public opinion polling, on the other hand, was only made valid after the fact, after the questions and answers adhered to an acceptable level of discipline that could be quantified and analyzed.[43]

The academic concern with public opinion in early twentieth century America was in part a further outgrowth of Carey's "power and anxiety" model, but also in part what media scholar Michael Schudson has called a "democratic realism" that emerged in the 1920s.[44] This "democratic realism" found its most articulate spokesman in a former government propagandist and journalist, Walter Lippmann. Lippmann pointed to the problems inherent in democracy given the fact that it was impossible for an average citizen to be totally informed about all the issues confronting the nation at any given time. He argued famously that it was necessary for the establishment of an independent "intelligence bureau" to provide expert and objective opinions based on factual information to political leaders and the public.[45]

Lippmann's democratic realism was the first complete articulation of a new brand of administrative democracy, that is, a type of civics that placed the role of "experts" over that of the "public" and is essentially the brand of democracy that is characteristic of American politics today. John Dewey famously argued against the necessity of a new class of experts to shape public opinion in a review of Lippmann's book *Public Opinion*, first published by the magazine *The New Republic* in 1927.[46] Carey's reappraisal of this

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic books, 1978), 88-120.

[45] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1922). 239-249.

[46] For Dewey's full treatment of Lippmann's argument see Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1927).

Dewey/Lippmann debate—with Carey, of course, siding with Dewey—influenced many journalism historians' and media scholars' understanding of the role of the expert in a democratic society.[47] Carey, like Dewey, believed that the establishment of Lippmann's intelligence bureau would merely lead to a group of academics primarily concerned with their own status and prestige rather than serving the greater public interest.

In an essay first published in 1982, Carey characterized Lippmann's notion of "democratic realism" in the following way: "Lippmann endorsed the notion that it was possible to have a science of society such that scientists might constitute a new priesthood: the possessors of truth as a result of having an agreed upon method for its determination."[48] In an essay published in 1995, Carey built on his original critique of Lippmann and argued that Lippmann's notion of "democratic realism" relegated journalism to the practice of translating the "arcane language of experts" into something digestible by a mass public.[49] This translation process transmitted the judgments of experts and in this process ratified those judgments legitimate. In this sense, the public played no role in the democratic process and was instead only an audience to the decisions made on their behalf. In Carey's words, "[p]ublic opinion no longer refers to opinions being expressed in public and then recorded by the press. Public opinion is

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[47] For Carey's appraisal of the Dewey/Lippmann debate see "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media'," in *Communications as Culture*, 57-67; On Carey's influence on the discipline's understanding of this debate see Sue Curry Jansen, *Walter Lippmann: A Critical Introduction to Media and Communication Theory* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012). Jansen argues that Carey was responsible for a misreading of Lippmann that came to dominate the discipline of journalism and mass communications; in Carey's reading, Lippmann essentially played the role of the villain and Dewey the defender of democracy. Jansen, of course, argues otherwise. Whether one agrees with Jansen's reinterpretation of this "debate" between Lippmann and Dewey—Jansen does not consider it a debate in the strict sense—depends more or less on one's point of view.

[48] Carey, "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media'," 59-60.

[49] Carey, "The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 246.

formed by the press and then modeled by the public opinion industry and the apparatus of polling.[50]

In Carey's version, it was Lippmann who marked the genesis of the culturally resonant notion that experts should play the primary role in American conversations about civics. According to Carey, Lippmann's *Public Opinion* "founded or at least clarified a continuous tradition of research" on the mass media.[51] Yet, despite the power of his rhetorical ability, Lippmann simply gave an articulate voice to a cultural trend that was already under way. It is true that by the late 1930s social scientists began to view research in the effects of mass media as a realm of inquiry in which a new disciplinary field could be organized. But in terms of the establishment of a new "priestly class," these types of professional modes of social inquiry, attempts to establish a science of society, had begun to gain favor in the U.S. as early as the late nineteenth century, well before Lippmann's book was published in 1922.[52] Yet Carey's focus on Lippmann served to address the standard version about the intellectual foundations of "effects tradition" research—this focus on Lippmann was a politically motivated attack on the underlying ideological premise of the positivist media research in his own discipline.

Lippmann's "intelligence bureau" was, of course, never formed in the precise way that he proposed; nevertheless, the spirit of his proposal gained traction. Survey techniques and social scientific methods for national polling made "mass society," or rather national public opinion, comprehensible to an emerging class of professional social

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[50] Ibid., 247.

[51] Carey, "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media'," 59-60.

[52] On the emergence of the professional class of social scientists in the U.S., see Thomas Haskell's brilliant *The Emergence of Professional Social* Sciences: *The American Social Science Association and The Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

scientists; and these social scientists, in mass communications and elsewhere, followed Lippmann's articulation of the role of the social expert by clinging to a self-image of detachment and objectivity; in doing so, they added to their prestige and respectability, especially in the context of the political circumstances that arose during the Cold War. The founding of the academic journal *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1937 embodied the essence of Lippmann's call for a new role of the public opinion expert. The forward in the inaugural issue illustrates this point:

A new situation has arisen throughout the world, created by the spread of literacy among the people and the miraculous improvement of the means of communication. Always the opinions of relatively small publics have been a prime force in political life, but now, for the first time in history, we are confronted nearly everywhere by mass opinion as the final determinant of political and economic action…. Scholarship is developing new possibilities of scientific approach as a means of verifying hypotheses and of introducing greater precision of thought and treatment.[53]

This statement showcases the anxiety, hopes, and desires of the new "priestly class" in discovering a positive science of communication that is clearly in line with Lippmann's original thesis.

Social Psychology: From Strong to Limited Effects

If much of the early media effects tradition discussed thus far dealt in the realm of commercialism and politics, and by extension an overarching concern with media and political power, the last form of the effects tradition to become dominant dealt in the realm of social psychology. In terms of this social psychological approach, the Payne Fund studies on motion pictures and children are an early example of the dawn of this type of analysis. The Payne Fund studies were twelve studies coordinated by W.W.

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[53] As quoted in Czitrom, "The Rise of Empirical Media Study," 124.

Charters in the early 1930s that sought to examine the effects of viewing movies on children and adolescents.[54] The study authors generally acknowledged the complexity of the situation—specifically that it was difficult to draw a direct line of causality between juvenile delinquency and the viewing of motion pictures. (This nuance was quickly thrown aside in popular press.) That some of the studies contained correlational data about viewing movies and general anti-social behavior was all that was needed to inflame popular anxieties about newer media and its effects. These studies received much attention and were often selectively quoted in what was basically a populist attack on the motion picture industry for its perceived corruption of youth.[55]

Note here that the Payne Fund studies were archetypal of Carey's anxiety model communications research. Thus, the historical importance of the Payne Fund studies stems from their relationship to the society more so than their analysis of it. These studies reflected in themselves the popular angst towards newer media contained in the larger society in which they took place; they are prime examples of "therapy" for these popular fears about new media. In this way, the Payne Fund studies were an early academic response to anxieties about the impact of mass media, much like the research done on the effects of violent television shows on children done more today.[56] Carey's Kuhnian observation about the importance of social context in the production of social research helps explain these studies, and should inform our conception of such studies

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[54] W.W. Charters, *Motion Pictures and Youth: A Summary* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1934).

[55] Czitrom, "The Rise of Empirical Media Study," 125.

[56] See Elizabeth Perse, *Media Effects and Society* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001). *Media Effects and Society* provides an extensive review of more contemporary media effects research. Perse's review of this research shows that, as was the case with the Payne Fund studies, it remains a very difficult, to put it mildly, to firmly establish whether or not media have direct causal effects on human behavior or not.

today.

As Carey observed, the anxiety over media effects on children is one of the only remaining forms of the "strong-effects" theory in modern media effects research; this is because children are believed to be more vulnerable to the media to which they are exposed. On the other hand, the "hypodermic needle" or "strong-effects" theory of an all-powerful media has generally faded out of fashion, only to be revived occasionally for various forms of ideological hand wringing. Fully-grown adults are seen to be capable of discerning between media that are harmful or mendacious and media that are not. According to the "limited effects" model, more or less established by researchers like Paul Lazarsfeld and Joseph Klapper beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, adults are protected from the harmful effects of mass media by numerous mediating factors. Some of these protective mediating factors are personal psychology, meaning that people seek out media to fulfill personal interest and desires, and some are social, meaning that people assign meanings to mass media according to the social groups to which they belonged.[57]

In the standard view of the intellectual history of mass communications, the shift from the "strong effects" theory to a more "limited effects" theory essentially ruled out the fears of propaganda for producing dangerous extremism en masse. One of the most well-known studies completed during this period that challenged the popular notion of an all-powerful mass media, and led to the "limited-effects" theories more or less dominant today, was published in 1944 by "arch-quantifier" Paul L. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues,

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[57] See discussion in Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communications Research." 16-17.

Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, called *The People's Choice*.[58] This study relied on interviews with approximately six hundred respondents to determine the level of influence campaign messages had on voters during a presidential election. What the study found has already been discussed, namely that personal relationships were very important in the political decisions of individuals. That this rather prosaic finding was found to be interesting is revealing of the intellectual climate in which it was done and the popular notions about media that existed; this study reaffirmed the good sense of the American public and implicitly congratulated the functioning of American liberal democracy. It also pushed academic discussions about what the media *ought* to be, towards positivist discussions about what it is.

In the postwar years, the limited effects model firmly took hold and as Carey put it "the research tradition [became] largely a mopping up operation: the closer and more detailed specification of the specific operation of mediating and intervening factors."[59] While Carey's articulation of the path this research tradition took was basically caricature, there was much truth in it. What happened to the media effects tradition after the end of WWII and into the 1950s and beyond became a relatively uninteresting debate about media effects, with no firm answers, and no grand theories or explanations. Bernard Berelson, the distinguished mass communications scholar who was a co-author of the study with Lazarsfeld and Gaudet that introduced the limited effects theoretical perspective, famously reached a breaking point in 1959 and publically announced that the field was going nowhere: "We are on a plateau of research development, and have been

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[58] Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

[59] Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communications research," 17.

for some time."[60]

Despite Berelson's announcement, however, the research has continued. Within the discipline, debates as to questions about the media's effects became locked between oscillating views of a minimal-effects-theory of media,[61] and a not-so-minimal effects theory.[62] That is to say, scholars have varied significantly in their positions about the level of impact of the media's messages over the past fifty years of communications research regardless of the increasingly complex and abstruse methods and statistical models used. The trend of minimal-effects-theory sees media messages as having negotiated meanings within minds of their audience. The not-so-minimal effects school of theory, on the other hand, view the media as having a more powerful influence than the minimal-school might assert, and the debate continues to this day.[63]

Given the effects research tradition's inertia, Carey, in characteristic fashion, diagnosed the situation in this way: "[u]nder these circumstances, we can continue to wait for our Newton to arise within the traditional framework, but that increasingly feels like waiting for Godot."[64] A Newton of communications has never arrived, but the reasons for the institutionalization of the effects tradition and how it was cemented and expanded had nothing to do with its intellectual success or failure. The research institutions and

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[60] Bernard Berelson, "Forum: The State of Communications Research," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1959): 6.

[61] For a full description of the limited effects theory, see Joesph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1960).

[62] E.g. Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Return to the Concept of a Powerful Mass Media," *Studies of Broadcasting* 9 (1973): 67-112.

[63] For an interesting overview of this debate from an internal perspective see W. Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim, "The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research," *Communications Theory* 21, no. 2 (2011): 169-196.

[64] Carey, "Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies," in *Communication as Culture*, 71.

methodological commitments of American sociologists and mass communications scholars have stemmed from an American intellectual culture dedicated to "scientism" and "positivism." These commitments are in one sense the product of intellectual culture, but in another sense they were the product of purely political circumstances that came out the Cold War.

The Cold War and Positivist Social Science

The type of positivist research that Carey railed against in the 1960s and 1970s had been greatly expanded by state prerogatives and underlying political realities; the positivist social scientific paradigm in mass communications and other disciplines owes much if its prestige to the legacy of the Cold War. According to social science historian Theodore Porter, the postwar period from 1945 to the late 1960s saw the social sciences becoming closely intertwined with the pragmatic and ideological requirements of the Cold War. Porter maintains that the effects of McCarthyism did not so much politicize the academy as depoliticize it. The Cold War provided incentive for social scientists of all shades to focus on the technical tools of science, the practical application of statistics, and the embrace of neutrality and detachment as distinct from the more value based, morally engaged, and *subjective* analysis of earlier forms of social inquiry. Of course, this form of academic depoliticization was itself political; avoidance of political issues completely is one form of status-quo conservatism. Because of their insistence on independence and their preoccupation with neutral objectivity, a large number of Cold War social scientists disavowed the values and interests that shaped the production of

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social knowledge in the first place.[65]

The Cold War period saw the social sciences in the United States reach unprecedented levels of prestige and expansion; the relevance of "scientific" or systematic planning for the purposes of national security had been growing in importance since WWII. Porter and Carey both held that one cannot view the intellectual currents in the social sciences during this period as independent from the interests and influence of the state and the society. As a temporal backdrop for the overarching influences in the social sciences generally, the Cold War provides a useful lens for inquiry into the intellectual development of professional social research and the study of mass communications, particularly for a generation of scholars of which Carey was a part.[66] But there is more to the story.

The politically expedient forms of ideological obfuscation among academics during the Cold War do not explain entirely the rise and influence of neutral, "value-free" quantitative social science, which includes the field of mass communications. The explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 signaled the power of the scientific method in altering the material world; and from this power the idealization of the scientific method as a model for all intellectual endeavors to follow in the post-war period in the United States became institutionalized and cemented. This idealization, added to the establishment of social scientists as an eminent professionalized class, encouraged their desire to win for themselves prestige and influence among public and

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[65] Theodore Porter, "Positioning Social Science in Cold War America," in *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature*, eds., Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[66] For a detailed explication of the influence of state prerogatives on communications research during the Cold War, see the aforementioned book by Simpson, *Science of Coercion.*

government administrators. This desire led them to even further embrace and advocate objectivity.[67] Therefore, the "effects tradition" drew its values of scientific objectivity from historically and culturally contingent conditions in the United States. Carey's advocacy that we "talk less about rigor [in research] and more about originality" was both a brave and intellectually necessary prescription for new approaches to the study of media and communications.[68] By the time Carey became a professor of communications in the journalism department at the University of Illinois in 1963, the positivism within his discipline was well entrenched, and it was not long before Carey began to outline an alternative.

As philosopher and biologist Richard Lewontin noted, "[s]tudies of human society become 'social sciences' with an apparatus of investigation and statistical analysis that pretends that the process of investigation is not itself a social process."[69] Carey understood this point well, as he formulated the same idea in his essay "Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies." In this essay, he suggested that the search for "a positive science of communication, one that elucidates the laws of human behavior and the universal and univocal functions of the mass media," should be abandoned for a more interpretive approach that includes both historical and cultural investigations.[70]

The fact that a "science of society" has never been established, that the Newton of

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[67] Porter, "Positioning Social Science in Cold War America," ix-xv; See also Richard C. Lewontin, "The Cold War and the Transformation of the Academy" in *The Cold War & the University*, ed. Andre Schiffrin (New York: The New Press, 1997) 1-34.

[68] Carey, "Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies," 71.

[69] Richard C. Lewontin, *It Ain't Necessarily So: The Dream of the Human Genome and Other Illusions* (London: Granta Publications, 2000), xx.

[70] Carey, "Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies," 68.

communications has never appeared, would not have surprised John Dewey, who was telling us in 1927 many of the same things that Carey told us in the 1970s. As Dewey put it,

> The prestige of the mathematical and physical sciences is great, and properly so. But the difference between facts which are what they are independent of human desire and endeavor and facts which are to some extent what they are because of human interest and purpose, and which alter with alteration in the latter, cannot be rid of by any methodology. The more sincerely we appeal to facts, the greater is the importance of the distinction between facts which condition human activity and facts which are conditioned by human activity. In the degree which we ignore this difference, social science becomes pseudo-science.[71]

Here, Dewey gives us the justification for the type of historical, interpretive, cultural investigations that Carey advocated. A simpler way to express Dewey's idea is that there is an intrinsic difference between a blink and a wink. This example was made well-known by Clifford Geertz, who borrowed it from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle (the philosopher who also provided Geertz with his famous method of "thick description").[72] A blink is the result of a physiological process that can be explained in terms of causal processes independent of "human desire and endeavor." But a wink is no such process. A wink cannot be understood in terms of causal relations but rather must be classified as a practice; in Carey's terms, a wink's meaning must be culturally diagnosed and understood. In other words, a blink can be explained, a wink must be interpreted.[73]

Nevertheless, a full discussion of Carey's opposition to the implicit behaviorism and explicit positivism in his discipline must include one very important caveat to his

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[71] Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 7.

[72] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6.

[73] See Neil Postman "Social Science as Moral Theology," in *Conscientious Objections* (New York: Vintage Books 1992).

admonishment of these research traditions. In terms of the "media effects" research and its associated positivism outlined thus far (by which I mean a commitment to methodological rigor adopted from the natural sciences, statistical reasoning, and a reliance on quantifiable data), it is not simply the case that the production of this social data is merely an ideological predilection towards scientism that has no practical application. Even Carey, in his more ecumenical moments, acknowledged that methodological rigor in the production of quantified social data had its place. To this point he wrote, "[t]o abandon the effects tradition does not entail doing away with research methods, including the higher and more arcane forms of counting, that take up so much time in our seminars…[n]o one, except the congenitally out of touch, suggests we have to stop counting…"[74] This point is obvious but necessary to make.

For example, the unemployment rate, to give one example, is the result of a survey and its importance as a metric for social well-being is difficult to overstate. Of course, such labor statistics are rooted in a progressive history that had a telos for the improvement of society, not for establishing a disinterested science of it. Yet the ability for a population to point to basic quantitative facts about itself is essential to the political functioning of a modern society. No one, except "the congenitally out of touch," would argue that proper methods for obtaining facts, as accurate as possible, are important because the alleviation of social ills requires information to guide progressive action towards effective solutions. The problem arises when quantifiable answers begin to be given to purely qualitative questions, or worse, when larger social questions concerning culture, history, and the like are simply ignored in order to focus on small scale problems

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[74] Carey, "Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies," 71.

that are more congenial to standardized methods.

Indeed, the effect of these methodological commitments has led to a rather impoverished view of the term "empirical" in the social sciences, which has limited it to meaning only the abstracted statistical data about individuals as conceived by researchers. Empiricism means to learn from experience, to reach conclusions only after viewing relevant evidence, and in this way a historian looking at the diary of a president is no less "empirical" than a sociologist examining the outcomes of a survey.[75] What must be emphasized is that such empirical observations of either the historian or the sociologist are tied, whether implicitly or explicitly, to human "desires and endeavors" regardless of their empirical merit. But the questions remains: "If not a science of society, then what?" In the following chapter I will investigate the "cultural turn" in communications research that Carey advocated and what he meant with the vague term "cultural studies" as his alternative to the positivist effects tradition in mass communications.

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[75] On the curious use of the word "empirical" in American Social Science, see discussion in Postman, "Social Science as Moral Theology," 9-10.

CHAPTER 3

A CULTURAL APPROACH: TRANSMISSION AND RITUAL

As the story goes, Carey began to advocate for a cultural turn in mass communications scholarship in the early 1960s. By the 1960s, the positivist and behaviorist paradigms in the social sciences writ large were coming under attack from a variety of directions. Even in the natural sciences, the post-positivist movement, as exemplified by Thomas Kuhn, Larry Laudan, Paul Feyerbend, and others, was successful in dismantling the positivist notion of the internal logic of "pure science" (the honorific name for physics) that saw science as a naturally progressing process of constantly improving methods and knowledge of exact reality. The political and cultural turmoil of the decade spelled even more trouble for the social sciences, including mass communications, as the standard cookbook of sociological methods taken from the natural sciences came under scrutiny for its apparent reductionism and inadequacies in confronting what were inherently political issues.

Of course, what are now fashionably called qualitative methods have long had their place in the history of what may more broadly be described as social inquiry. But the dominance of quantitative methodologies in mass communications, and elsewhere, has emerged because science and quantification have played a unique role in American culture to a degree not encountered elsewhere.[76] Yet, faced with the emerging challenge

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[76] The reasons for the scientism of American intellectual culture are numerous. For an extensive review and possible explanations for this uniquely American situation, see Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

by qualitative and more interpretative methods that dealt explicitly with more overtly political issues, the knowledge monopolies of positivist and behaviorist modes of inquiry slowly gave way to alternative forms.[77] This qualitative challenge was the result of a long-standing academic dispute, of course, between literary-minded social critics and quantitative social scientists, but it finally exploded as the result of changing political realties outside of the academy. In journalism and mass communications, this dispute was present in the early stages of the discipline and was epitomized by the very short-lived collaboration between the quantitative researcher Paul Lazarsfeld and critical theorist Theodore Adorno.[78] But qualitative research became more viable as American political turmoil made larger political and cultural questions more cultural resonant and seemingly necessary. During the era of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, institutional self-introspection became more feasible as the fantasies of domestic Cold War tranquility of the 1950s faded and American society came face-to-face with its own hypocrisies and downfalls.

As American political culture transformed and the social sciences began to shift their epistemological positions under the weight of internal criticism, these shifts were accompanied by an increase in the reach of popular culture. The success of Keynesian economics and the postwar boom gave way to a newfound prosperity for a generation of baby boomers. The forms of consumer culture that had taken shape during the "roaring twenties" thus became more accessible to younger Americans with more disposable income. The significance of popular culture increased in tandem with consumerism as

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[77] The debates over methodology in social science are a favorite academic pastime. For an overview of these debates in sociology and a critique of the "abstracted empiricism" of positivist social science see C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[78] Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 400.

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younger generations began to define themselves increasingly by their tastes in music, movies, and television.[79] Naturally, this increased importance of popular culture in national life attracted interest on behalf of academics witnessing these transformations, especially for scholars of media.[80]

As Lawrence Grossberg has observed, in North America cultural studies began to show up in communications and education classrooms even before it appeared in those of anthropology, literature, or American studies.[81] The confluence of changes in the American political and cultural environments that led to the aforementioned academic "cultural turn" opened the doors for academic studies into American popular culture with the critical methods used to analyze the western literary canon. Cultural studies in the American context saw the field grow tremendously from the 1960s onward, and in the field of mass communications, it was Carey who was one of the academics most credited for the North American flavor of cultural studies that found its way into communications and media studies classrooms in the U.S.

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[79] By the 1960s, the modern forms of consumerism embedded in socio-cultural relations within state capitalist development became a common target of critique by the emerging New Left and that of the Frankfurt School. One such Frankfurt School member, Herbert Marcuse, produced one of the more penetrating, if not lugubrious, observations of the situation when he wrote "people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced." See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 9.

[80] See discussion in Gitlin, "The Anti-Political Populism of Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies* in *Question*, 25-38; also, Daniel Czitrom, "Does Cultural Studies Have a past?" in *American Cultural Studies*, 13-22.

[81] Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing It all Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 276-281.

A Decidedly "Ethnocentric" View: Carey and North American Cultural Studies

Carey took inspiration from a wide variety of scholars, including the work of British academics such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, members of the Chicago School of Sociology such as John Dewey, Robert Park, and Charles Cooley, as well as the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, to name a few. His idea was to create a multi-disciplinary approach to what was by its nature a very large, if not vague, topic. In an interview published in 2006, Carey described what he meant in his original proposal for the creation of cultural studies:

> Cultural Studies was then little more than a term to describe the perceived commonalities in the work of Joe Gusfield, Jay Jensen, Erving Goffman, Thomas Kuhn, symbolic interactionism and the Chicago School of Sociology, Kenneth Burke, Leslie Fiedler and a small group of literary critics, and, of course, Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, along with those Marxists willing to associate with a group largely affiliated in opposition to positivism and positive science. This was a strange group to patch together, against their will if they know about it, but nevertheless I carved out a section of proseminar under the label "cultural studies."[82]

The group he wanted to patch together was so large and diverse, representing such a vast area of inquiry and theoretical perspectives that it threatened to dissolve the boundaries of Carey's discipline completely. But given Carey's views about academic boundaries in the first place, he would most likely have greeted such criticism with a shrug. Carey's move in the beginning was explicitly tactical; his picking of a such a general term, "Cultural Studies," for his program of study was meant to be as all encompassing as possible in order to mount a successful attack on positive social science.

As Carey recalled in a reflective essay published in 1997, his chosen name for his approach, "cultural studies," was meant to seem "innocent"; he meant that, in the

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[82] Carey and Grossberg, "From New England to Illinois," 21.

beginning, at least, he had no definite program in mind and was attracted to the impartiality of the term. The name was an allusion to Max Weber's "cultural science," but of course the word "science" had little appeal to Carey. Carey chose "cultural studies" instead of "cultural science" because he did not want to pick a word that had already been taken by those he wished to contest. So "cultural studies" became his term for a very speculative enterprise. It was speculative because, at first, Carey had only one real goal: to shift the direction of the discipline of journalism and mass communications.[83]

Carey began forming his conception of cultural studies by reading the "usual suspects," members of what came to be the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, founded by Richard Hoggart and his colleagues in 1964. One of the founding texts of this uniquely British cultural approach was Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* published in 1957, a semi-autographical work that examined the role the contemporary popular literature of the working class in England in its forming a culture and a working class identity. The book was a break from traditional literary studies of "high culture." Hoggart demonstrated that there was an authentic working class culture that deserved academic attention. One of the major topics of this now classic text was how a more authentic working class literary culture came to be threatened by an invading American popular culture. Hoggart's approach was significant because his analysis broke away from traditional left wing accounts (Hoggart called these accounts "middle class Marxist" interpretations) of the working class that either pitied or patronized them. Hoggart's self-reflection on his relationship to his subjects was a marked aspect of his

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[83] Carey, "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies in Question*, 4.

brand of cultural studies that one also sees in Carey's work.[84]

Carey admired very much Hoggart and his Centre's approach, beginning with its avoidance of the term "mass communication" to identify its scholarly subjects. In his essay "Mass Communications and Cultural Studies," originally published in 1977, Carey gave a lengthy exposition on the reasons that Raymond Williams, and by extension he himself, avoided the term mass communication in an attempt to refocus their attention on the broader topic of media and culture. Williams avoided the term because it was too specialized towards mass media like broadcast television, film, and popular literature, all of which were communications that come from a very specific modern and commercial context, and avoided the common realms of speech and writing. Besides this narrow focus, the use of the word "mass," most importantly for Carey, limited the questions that could be put towards these topics of media and culture.[85] As Carey put it, "because the audience was a mass, the only question worth asking was how, and then whether, film, television, or books influenced or corrupted people."[86]

Yet for all of the influence that British cultural studies had on Carey's thinking, Carey was determined that his version of cultural studies have a distinctive North American foundation. His argument for this "ethnocentrism" was straightforward. For Carey, the work of scholars like Marx, Weber, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and Richard Hoggart came from a distinctive time, national formation, and cultural context, a context in which they were embedded and, for Carey, had to be understood. In Carey's approximation, it was the "ethnocentrism" of Hoggart and Williams – or rather, that their

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[84] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special References to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

[85] Carey, "Mass Communications and Cultural Studies, 29-52.

[86] Ibid., 32.

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work was embedded in, and acknowledging of, a local cultural context – that added to the strength of their claims. This characteristic of their scholarship allowed them to adjust to local circumstances.[87]

Carey never changed in his position that an effective cultural study must begin its investigation with an appreciation of the cultural uniqueness of the nation state in question. To this point, Carey wrote that "the natural home of cultural studies, at least within 'developed cultures,' is the nation state."[88] This was not nationalism but more or less common sense. That nations differ in natural resources, theology, cultural attitudes, and political circumstances is obvious. Carey, for example, citied the "tragic situation of African Americans" in the United States, a claim that needs no review here, as one of the many unique aspects of American culture that must be taken into account should one seek to understand the culture's predicament.[89] To examine culture, then, one must begin with the acknowledgment that the situation is both complex and difficult to generalize, and that it is typically a localized phenomenon contingent on local understandings and practice.

This "ethnocentrism" led Carey to turn to North American thinkers to begin building an American version of cultural studies akin to Hoggart's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. This point of view led him to unearth elements from the famous University of Chicago's school of sociology as he searched for a distinctly North American starting point. As discussed in the previous chapter, Carey's alternative history of communications research inserted the "Chicago School of Sociology" (Carey's

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[87] Carey, "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies," 16.

[88] Carey, "Afterword: The Culture in Question," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 311.

[89] Ibid., 310.

reference to the work of Dewey, Park, and Cooley) as the genesis of a more complete version of the history of research into media and society. The so-called "Chicago School" and its symbolic interactionism, including a considerable influence from the work of John Dewey, provided the backbone for Carey's version of cultural studies that he wished to be carried forward.

Indeed, Carey's own critical analysis of American journalism was a throw back to a unique blend of pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, and historical criticism that was indebted to the work of Chicago School pragmatists like George Herbert Mead in the first part of the twentieth century. Symbolic interactionism views human beings as uniquely capable of creating, manipulating, and interpreting symbols in order to communicate what are complex ideas of culture and history. Within this theory, humans are seen as necessarily interactive; there is no solitary self because the self's formation takes place in relation to others and exterior systems of symbols. Erving Goffman, for instance, examined the seemingly simple process of an individual walking into a room of others, and concluded that the intricate processes of impression management involved on behalf of the person walking into the room and the others looking on him gave the "self" a fluid, complicated, and dialectic character contingent on social circumstances.[90]

Accepting of this a priori notion of the interactionist self, Carey's critique of contemporary journalistic practices, for example, stemmed from his theoretical standpoint that a stable society must exist in a comprehensible symbolic environment. As Carey understood it, journalists were "active participants" in the creation of this symbolic

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[90] Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," in *Symbolic Interaction: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, eds. Nancy J. Herman and Larry T. Reynolds (New York: General Hall Inc., 1994), 199-207.

reality who were nevertheless frequent victims of the forces around them rather than being the steady stalwarts of the public interest, as they commonly believed. Carey's critique of the contemporary situation was that American journalism had evolved, for various reasons both ideological and institutional, to a state limited to the transmission of incoherent, ephemeral, and disconnected information. Carey described this ephemeral information environment nicely when he wrote that "everything seems to have the life span of a butterfly in spring."[91] Given this situation, American journalism increasingly did not provide coherent explanations or narrative detail necessary to provide an individual with an accurate sense of the political and cultural world that surrounds him, or address the persistent structural realties of class, race, and gender that are always lurking beneath the news of the day.[92] Therefore, such a problem becomes salient when one acknowledges the necessity of interaction with one's symbolic environment with one's formation of the self.

In addition to his indebtedness to the Chicago School and its symbolic interactionism, Carey drew much from cultural anthropology. The next most important source of inspiration for Carey's cultural studies was Clifford Geertz. Geertz, a cultural anthropologist, was one of the strongest voices in Carey's essays along with John Dewey and Harold Innis. Geertz's methods drew from the Weberian *verstehen* tradition (a German word that translates loosely to understanding), which sought meaning through interpretation and empathy. Geertz, in a comment Carey was fond of quoting, used a metaphor to explain what this process of interpretation involved. As Geertz put it, "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun." Geertz took

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[91] Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 187.

[92] Ibid.,144-188.

"culture to be those webs."[93] And his goal was to search for meaning in these cultural webs and interpret the processes within them, or, as he put it, "[i]t is explication that I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical."[94]

Following Geertz, Carey's methods for analyzing culture also borrowed heavily from the *verstehen* tradition and also from Geertz's well-known technique of "thick description." Geertz wrote, "[Alfred North] Whitehead once offered to the natural sciences the maxim 'Seek simplicity and distrust it'; to the social sciences he might well have offered 'Seek complexity and order it.'"[95] In much of his work, Carey took this advice. Carey's cultural approach to media and communications sought an understanding of the complex web of human communications that was both historically grounded and interpretive. Carey was not a historian of course, he was a philosophically minded essayist that incorporated an eclectic synthesis of academic literature in his own scholarship that appreciated and even took delight in the complexity of culture.

Much of Carey's brand of American cultural studies involved what Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner called the "anthropological perspective," which "allows one to be a part of his own culture and, at the same time, to be out of it."[96] Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, for example, was written from this point of view in that it analyzed working class culture empathically on its own terms. In Carey's discussion of cultural studies, this perspective was implicitly the point of view that underlined the methods and processes that Carey felt an investigator into society, culture, and its media should take.

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[93] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 5.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 34.

[96] Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), 4.

This anthropological perspective, or rather ability to remove oneself enough from the surrounding culture in order to see it more clearly, provided the lens through which Carey viewed the intellectual history of the discipline of mass communications. The dialogic character of Carey's work—it was both critically introspective and engaging—provides a good example of the type of positionality that an observer should take when searching for cultural meanings when surrounded by that very culture. For example, Carey's essays on the "effects tradition" were written by a scholar that took his very discipline as his subject and engaged in an empathetic conversation on methods and ways of knowing much the same way an anthropologist like Geertz looked on a cockfight, that is, both from within and from outside of it.

Although, if searching for meaning and understanding sounds rather vague, without predetermined steps or methods for inquiry, this is because this is largely the case; as Carey put it, cultural studies has "far more modest objectives than other traditions. It does not seek to explain human behavior in terms of the laws that govern it or to dissolve it in the structures that underlie it; rather, it seeks to understand it."[97] This was a distinctly interpretative enterprise. Understanding is much different from the goal of behavior modification or a search for natural laws; there are no experiments that can be performed on a culture in order to diagnose it, as Carey put it.[98] Interpretation is more of an artful process, and one that must necessarily rely on a liberal arts education in literature, philosophy and, history to be successful. In this way, Carey was attempting to shift the ground on which the conversation about methodology in the social sciences was taking place.

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[97] Carey, "Mass Communications and Cultural Studies," 43.

[98] Ibid.

However, Carey did not leave his readers without an example as to how an investigation in cultural studies might proceed. His well-known discussion of an ersatz conversation about death served as his most trenchant example of the use of the *verstehen* tradition. Carey asked his reader to imagine a conversation between four people about the nature of death and when it takes place. First, Carey gave us the example of the contemporary physician who determined that death took place as soon as the brain waves ceased. Then, there was the typical middle American who argued that death occurred when the heart stopped beating. Then there was the Irish peasant who argued with the former two that death did not occur until three days after the cessation of the heartbeat, when the person had been completely removed from the community. And finally, there was the tribal mountain man who said that death occurred seven days before the cessation of the heartbeat, right at the moment food could not be found.[99]

Carey's point was to challenge his readers to think critically and expansively about the problems of interpreting human phenomenon. The point was to first "undress" the scene or "text," that is, to remove the words and read the actions of how the death was assessed (the measuring of the brain waves or heartbeat) as a text. The point was to treat the phenomenon as a collection of symbolic actions, in order to understand what was taking place. If the peasant did not believe that death had occurred until the body was carried away, the point was not to find a causal variable for his mistaken belief but to interpret the setting and context of his belief and then to understand it by engaging it.

A fuller example of such understanding and interpretation can be found in Geertz's famous analysis of a Balinese cockfight. Consider the following analysis:

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[99] Ibid., 44.

What sets the cockfight apart from the ordinary course of life, lifts it from the realm of everyday practical affairs, and surrounds it with an aura of enlarged importance is not, as functionalist sociology would have it, that it reinforces status discriminations (such reinforcement is hardly necessary in a society where every act proclaims them), but that it provides a metasocial commentary upon the whole matter of assorting human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks and then organizing the major part of the collective existence around that assortment. Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves.[100]

This purely interpretive analysis of the meaning of the Balinese cockfight situated it within a social context and explained it without reducing it to a cause and effect analysis. In addition, notice that it explicitly avoids the functionalist sociological analysis of the type that would have emphasized the role of the cockfight in forming a consensus for the proper functioning of the larger community. This nuanced analysis showcases Geertz's method of interpreting the meaning of the cultural practice "as a story they [the Balinese] tell themselves about themselves," in this case a cockfight, by finding the underlying meaning of the practice at first not visible through mere observation, but made visible by contemplation and interpretation.

The Transmission/Ritual Views of Communications

The most well-known concept of Carey's unique brand of cultural studies was of course his famous ritual/transmission binary. This binary is an overall theme for his cultural media analysis and embodied his analysis of the way media systems, technology, and content were conceived in the U.S. Contained within this binary is both criticism of the transmission model of communications research and advocacy of an alternative path in the ritual model of communications research. Carey's ritual view is marked by a unique intellectual optimism.

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[100] Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 448.

For Carey, the lived reality of a community was a mutually formed creation by individual actors in conversation with one another.[101] This "ritual view of communication" celebrates the fact that social reality is created within the symbolic interaction of a community. Carey's friend and student Lawrence Grossberg aptly described the ritual view in this way: "[t]he concept of ritual communication drew upon the common roots of communication, community and communion, to explore the ways communication constituted symbolic reality but also defined common ways of living and participating in that reality with others."[102] One can see here the clear relationship between Carey's ritual view and that of the symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School. To demonstrate how a ritual view of communication might inform the actual analysis of communication, Carey offered the problem of studying newspaper reading:

> A ritual view of communication will focus on a different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed.[103]

In other words, human communication, in this case, reading a newspaper, is a habitual and ritualistic practice that both proscribes and establishes the conditions of lived reality-- i.e., the shared social, cultural, and political meaning among its members. According to Carey, the newspaper gives its audiences confirmation about the social world rather than

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[101] To this point Carey observed that, "[r]eality is a product of work and action, collective and associated work *and* action. It is formed and sustained, repaired and transformed, worshipped and celebrated in the ordinary business of living." Carey, "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media'," 66.

[102] Lawrence Grossberg, "The Conversation of Cultural Studies." *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (March 2009): 177.

[103] Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication," in *Communication as Culture*, 16.

supplying them with a false consciousness from which they must escape. For Carey, the news is not information but drama, habitually consumed and negotiated.

Within the ritual view of communications, Carey emphasizes the importance of community, participation, communion, and conversation for societal maintenance and replication. Much of Carey's work thus seems to embody Dewey's nostalgia for and idealism about the small town, middle class community. Absent from Carey's ritual view is the language of power and domination found in much of the critical literature in mass communications regarding the United States, its culture, and its media. Carey favored the insights and optimism found in Dewey over the emphasis on conflict and exploitation found in Marx.

Although Carey was criticized for not properly addressing issues of power in his cultural approach to media studies, he understood that power plays an important role in any study of the mass media, even though many of these issues faded quickly into the background in much of his own work. Nevertheless, he argued, for example, that in matters concerning interpersonal communications, the political is less salient and easily avoided, but that this is "[n]ot so with the mass media, where questions of political power and institutional change are inescapable and usually render hopelessly ineffective the standard cookbook recipes retailed by the graduate schools."[104] These "recipes" were the standard quantitative methods taught in the effects tradition, which Carey was well aware avoided integral questions about institutions and politics.

A careful reader might see in Carey's original essay that formulated the ritual view the intellectual lineage of the ideals of Deweyan participatory democracy. Dewey

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[104] Carey, "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media'," 53.

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believed that democracy ethically obligates its members to promote and establish

communities where resources are available for all individuals to realize their full

capacities and where all are afforded the opportunity to bring these capacities to fruition

through active participation in political and cultural life.[105] The need for an individual's

active participation in political, social, and cultural life is axiomatic in Carey's ritual view

of communication and thus his view of an ethical democracy. Within the ritual view, to

begin an analysis of communication with an emphasis on ritual and community is to

privilege, in Carey's words, "the oral formation of culture" rather than "technological

forms of transmission."[106] In other words, Carey used a conversation as a metaphor for

the ethical principles of a democratic community that are realized by the active and equal

participation of the public in conversation with one another. According to John Dewey,

this participation, based in communal life with an active acknowledgement of others,

provides "[t]he clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, [that]

constitutes the idea of democracy."[107]

        In later work, Carey acknowledged that the ritual view of communication was

mainly his response to a conceptualization of communications within the behavioral

sciences "as a form of transmission for the pursuit of power (influence was what it was

called) or the release of anxiety."[108] Carey asserted famously that the transmission view

of communication had dominated intellectual approaches to mass communications in the

postwar United States. Within Carey's binary, the view of communications as a social

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[105] See discussion in Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), xv.

[106] Carey. "Afterword," 314.

[107] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 149.

[108] Carey, "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies," 11.

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ritual is in dialectical opposition to its transmission counterpart; where the ritual view sees communications as social maintenance and creation, the transmission view sees it as social management and conquest over geography.

With an emphasis on spatiality, temporality, and their conquest and management, the transmission view of communication concentrates efforts on the efficient transport of messages and information over a vast geography for the purposes of persuasion, socialization, and behavior modification. This view of communication is congruous with a vertically integrated communications system, in which elite opinions are broadcast for consumption by a mass public and the progress of the country can be measured empirically by opinions that are thus successfully managed. Intellectually, the transmission view concerns itself with research that focuses on the effects that messages have on the receiver—for example, the "effects tradition" of mass communications research. This form of effects research, embodied in the positivist, quantitative research model in mass communications, owes much to the legacy of Paul Lazarsfeld whose work pulled communications into the realm of psychology more than any other.[109] Carey's work wanted to make central a more empathetic process research, even if to more jaded readers his advocacy of a more democratic community may seem quixotic in the face of sustained attacks by neo-liberal forms of capitalist development on such communities.

Carey, Cultural Studies, and Power

As might be obvious by now from my discussion of Carey's brand of cultural studies, the type of research that Carey wrote himself and advocated for was not explicitly political. Unlike much of the work done in a more leftist tradition from the

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[109] Jefferson D. Pooley, "An Accident of Memory: Edward Shils, Paul Lazarsfeld and The History of American Mass Communication Research," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006).

likes of Stuart Hall and others at the Centre of Contemporary Culture, and much of the work done from continental thinkers like Foucault and Althusser, Carey essentially wanted to avoid a cultural studies that could be clearly identified as coming from an explicit political ideology. Throughout much of his life, Carey viewed Marxism and work in political economy in general with a constant skepticism. This skepticism was the result of a number of factors, some personal and some intellectual.

This is not to say that Carey disdained work in the Marxist tradition. He was no friend to neoliberal forms of capitalism and the effects of the privatization of media on the democratic forms of dialogue he admired.[110] Carey was clearly a man of the Left if we must pick labels. His work was parallel with Innis, and others, in that it contained a critical point of view that admonished the imperial aspects of the economics of mass communications and the effects tradition of research. Yet Carey, for the most part, was careful to avoid traditional Marxist language and theoretical positions about ideological superstructures because he was uncomfortable making class or the issues of power relations in society the central point of analysis.

Therefore, for all Carey's radical views towards positivist research traditions, his politics were not explicitly radical. Carey wanted to uphold many of the traditions of western liberalism and democratic community that many Marxists ignored or, in terms of western liberalism with its market economies, would have been content to let fade away. Carey admired the emphasis on community he found in Innis and Dewey, and he chose to focus his efforts on the possibility of a revival of democratic communities rather than on how they were being attacked. Carey's real target for his cultural studies was positivism in the social sciences, not the asymmetrical power relations in his society.

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[110] E.g. see Carey, "Communications and Economics," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 60-75.

Carey's personal reasons for his skepticism towards Marxism must be accounted

for. But before these personal reasons are discussed, it is important to point out that

reading the details of an author's biography into that author's work is always fraught with

potential errors. To try to find elements of Carey's biography in his theoretical positions

risks simplifying his arguments and making connections that Carey would have never

endorsed or intended. Nevertheless, Carey's comments concerning his relationship to

Marxism were revealing. They seem related, if only in a tentative way, to his more

theoretical critiques of cultural studies that took inspiration from the Marxist and neo-

Marxist traditions.

The comments in question took place in an interview with Lawrence Grossberg in

2006. Grossberg began his line of questioning by asking Carey if his relationship to

Marxism was affected by former Marxist professors whom Carey did not remember

fondly. In Carey's view, these professors were perfectly willing to engage in fiery

revolutionary rhetoric in academic circles while relying on others to go out and risk their

bodies for these political ideals.[111] While Carey acknowledged that his views on Marxism

were certainly shaped by former Marxist professors, he suggested that the tension

between himself, Marxism, and his theories of culture came from an early experience he

had as child in terms of Marxism and religion. Carey recounted this experience in the

following way:

> I'm really attributing a mature thought to an immature mind; I understand that.
> But, I know that the old IWW I came to admire later on, and my family admired,
> had the slogan that said 'If you don't come in on Sunday, don't come in on
> Monday,' meaning Sunday does not belong to the church but to the party. That
> was the attitude of the Communist party as well. And, like Stuart Hall much later,

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[111] Carey and Grossberg, "From New England to Illinois," 23-24.

I think that was a gross misunderstanding of the practical role religion at large played in people's lives. Where to hold political meetings? We held them in the basement of the church. I mean, it was the only space available to us. I mean, they gave space to the Communist Party to come harangue us when they wished to do that. But, religion answered, in addition to metaphysical questions like what happens to me after I'm gone; it answered questions like: How do you bury the dead? How do you consecrate the ground? How do you retain memory of people? These are practical questions when your grandparents are dying, and you have to ask, how are we going to do this? The CP had no answer for that.[112]

Carey went on to explain that his family members were not dogmatic, theological Catholics. Instead, he referred to his family as "ritual Catholics," meaning that they found a certain level of satisfaction by participating in the rituals of their church and its organization.[113] Carey and his family needed religious rituals to produce meaning and comfort during difficult times. There is nothing pedantic or theoretical to point out about such matters; Carey was merely pointing to a fact of ordinary life which religion was able affect positively. Marxism's explicit dismissiveness of this practical application of religion made Carey suspicious of it throughout his career.

Carey, however, was not dismissive of Marxism, which is evident by the sophisticated criticism he leveled at it. Such criticisms could have only been produced by someone who confronted the claims of Marxism directly. In terms of his personal views, Carey's religious background left him feeling that Marxism was without an adequate theory of religion and the purposes it served. As he became an academic, Carey's views on religion were shaped greatly by Emile Durkheim and his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. For his part, Durkheim took religion more seriously than Marx and considered it to be an important aspect of social maintenance, unlike in Marxism, where religion served merely as an opiate that numbed people to social conflict. Writing in

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[112] Ibid., 25.

[113] Ibid.

1915, Durkheim observed that "religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities."[114] This view of religion, as a collective expression of social meaning, permeated Carey's ritual view of communication and informed his views of symbolic interactionism as well.

Carey's critique of Marxism and media theorists that drew from political economic analysis was that these forms of analysis were reductionist; they reduced culture to ideology and analyzed society on purely economic foundations. Carey believed that the analysis of economic Marxism and American political economists simply could not adjust to local circumstances because they attempted to view culture through the lens of economic laws that applied to both everyone and no one in particular; in this way, Carey's critiques of Marxism paralleled his critique of the search for the natural laws of society in positivist social science.

Carey felt that the strength of American cultural studies overcame the limitations of political economic analysis because of its "ethnocentrism":

> The strength of cultural studies, of the revolt against formalism and economistic Marxism, was precisely, I want to insist, this ethnocentrism. Intellectual work, including both cultural studies and political economy, is always and everywhere decisively touched and shaped by the national formation (along with class, race, gender, and so forth) within which it is produced…Nothing discredited Marxism more than its rigid inability to adapt to local circumstances, which meant in practice an inability to understand local knowledge whether of a religious, familial, aesthetic, or political sort.[115]

In a deliberate attempt to show the importance of such local circumstances, Carey relied on no less of an authority than Karl Marx himself to point to the unique cultural situation

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[114] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 22.

[115] Carey, "Abolishing the Old World Spirit," *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* 12, no. 1 (1995): 85.

of the United States. Carey quoted Marx's comment about the religious impulse in American life: "[t]he feverish youthful movement of material production, which has to make a new world of its own, has left neither time nor opportunity from abolishing the old world spirit."[116] As Carey pointed out, Marx expected this old world spirit to fade away, but of course, it never has. Carey used Marx to show contemporary Marxists that their analysis should take into account cultural aspects that even Marx himself understood.

Indeed, Carey had a point about the inflexibility of some of the Marxist inspired political economic analysis and about the problematic reduction of culture to ideology. Culture, for Carey, was much more than a false consciousness. Borrowing a metaphor for T.S. Eliot, Carey considered culture to be like a spiritual organism that could only be found in its specific context and not through an analysis of economic conditions.[117] Nevertheless, for all his analytic power, Carey essentially avoided all questions of power in its relationship to culture even though such questions are extremely important in our contemporary situation. The contemporary attack by the neoliberal right on the interests of the poor and the working class has taken place in the midst of one-sided class war from the top on the classes below, and these trends must be understood in terms of both political economy and culture.[118] As Robert McChensey has pointed out, institutional

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[116] Carey, "Afterword," 311.

[117] Carey and Clifford G. Christians, "The Logic and Aims of Qualitative Research," in *Research Methods in Mass Communications*, eds. Guido H. Stempel III and Bruce H. Westley (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 349-350.

[118] The best analysis of these trends in American political economy come not for Marxists but rather Keynesian economists and Nobel Laureates Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz. See Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007); and Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2012).

factors make the market the "mortal enemy" of the very concepts of community that Carey held in such high esteem. As McChesney put it, "[m]arkets encourage some of the worst traits of humanity and discourage some of our best traits, including selflessness and compassion."[119]

Carey's criticism of political economic analysis and its investigations of structural forms of inequality did not fully comprehend the fact that cultural forms, while important, are always already connected to material conditions and institutions. This is not to say that material conditions determine culture in total, but to neglect the role of power in American cultural studies is to miss a great deal of the interplay between structural forms of American capitalism and the more spiritual forms of culture that take place.

For example, in his well-known essay "The Problem of Journalism History" published in 1974, Carey rightly criticized the traditional versions of journalism history that celebrated the steady progression of technology across time and the great men of history who pushed the enterprise forward. Carey wanted to refocus the study of American journalism history on the "consciousness" that journalisms of the past analyzed and represented. Carey described a cultural history of journalism in this way:

> When we study the history of journalism we are principally studying a way in which people in the past have grasped reality. We are searching out the intersection of journalistic style and vocabulary, created systems of meaning, and the standards of reality shared by writer and audience. We are trying to root out a portion of consciousness.[120]

This form of analysis was essentially Carey's advocacy of a history from the bottom up, one that not only acknowledged the consciousness of the news creators but of the news

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[119] Robert W. McChesney, "What Happened to Cultural Studies," in *American Cultural Studies*, 86.

[120] Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 92.

consumers. Carey's critique of the state of journalism history did not go unnoticed, professional journalism historians responded to Carey's call for a more cultural approach to journalism history and debated how to "operationalize" his ideas. Indeed, digging for the consciousness of a people is no easy task and Carey provided no concrete methods for doing so. Nevertheless, as historian Richard Schwarzlose observed, "each time James W. Carey turns his attention to the state of journalism history, his views stimulate, challenge, maybe even threaten us. Patron saint or pest, Carey cannot be ignored."[121]

Carey's call for a more cultural approach to journalism history, and studies of communications more generally, was certainly an admirable goal, especially considering the dismal state of journalism history that Carey was criticizing in the early 1970s. But as journalism historian David Paul Nord pointed out, such a study of cultural history was weak in its attention to power because, unfortunately, the messages of the media do not reach their audiences from the bottom up but from the opposite direction.[122]

It can be conceded that Carey's anthropological notions of cultural studies, which included the symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School, continue to be a necessary form of analysis; the search for the consciousness of a people and an empathic understanding of their practices and relationship to mass media is a deeply humane goal. Nevertheless, Nord was correct in his observation that it would be a mistake to avoid the traditional analysis of institutional structures of media and their histories. While Geertz

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[121] Richard A. Schwarzlose, "First Things First: A Proposal," *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (1975): 38; For more responses to Carey's critique of journalism history see, Marion Marzolf, "Operationalizing Carey—An Approach to the Cultural History of Journalism," *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (1975): 42-43; David A. Weaver, "Frank Luther Mott and the Future of Journalism History," *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (1975): 44-46; David Paul Nord, "James Carey and Journalism History: A Remembrance," *Journalism History* 32, no. 3 (2006): 122-127.

[122] David Paul Nord, "A Plea for Journalism History," *Journalism History* 15, no. 1 (1988): 10.

was right that man found himself entangled in webs of meaning he himself had spun, as Nord pointed out, this was only half of the story: "[t]he other part is that men and women are suspended in webs spun by others."[123]

Therefore, while Carey's push for a cultural understanding of social meaning was laudable, much of the "ethnocentric" forms of cultural studies he advocated were blind to larger institutional factors. While it is important not to diminish the agency of an audience in creating their own meanings through industrially produced products, there are still unavoidable institutional factors that go into their production and the messages that they contain. A political economic analysis shows the basis for material factors whose gravitational pull can distort even the most authentic culture. While Carey was right to seek out the meanings peoples attached to symbols, those symbols were still produced by those with more power than those below them.

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[123] Ibid., 11.

CHAPTER 4

JAMES CAREY AND TECHNOLOGY

This final chapter will address Carey's ideas about "technology and ideology." Much of Carey's concern with communications technology sprang from his interest in the work of Canadian academics Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis and their analysis of the various forms of communication media. Carey's attention to technology and its relationship to political culture, education, and the larger society is a major theme in his scholarship. His work on technology included two important approaches: first a critical approach, most notably in essays with co-author John Quirk, in which they provide an iconoclastic critique of technology as an ideological category, what he and Quirk called the "electronic sublime." With this critical approach to technology, they sought to expose the widespread belief that technology progresses naturally and independently towards improving the human condition as a harmful cultural mythos.[124] Second, in his analysis of communications technology, like Innis before him, Carey focused on how the physical structure of a technology like the telegraph influenced its use and its effects on culture and journalism. With this materialist analysis, Carey focused his attention on historical changes in what Neil Postman called our "information environment," the aggregate of communication technologies that make up our symbolic world.

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[124] Carey and John J. Quirk, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution," in *Communication as Culture,* 103.

Inquiries into the "media environment" are attempts to observe how changes in that environment affect the ways we communicate and receive information. In his well-known essay on the telegraph,[125] Carey argued that the telegraph had "reworked the nature of written language and finally the nature of awareness itself"[126] and shifted journalistic styles away from more long form, nuanced, and detailed news reporting in favor of the transmission of bits of information. Put another way, for Carey the introduction of the telegraph altered our information environment such that as the form and style of messages sent over vast distances changed, our awareness of the world changed along with it. In this chapter, I will outline, critique, and classify the origins of Carey's views on technology and how he integrated them in his specific brand of North American cultural studies.

Innis, McLuhan, and Carey: The "Bias" of Technology

Carey's analysis of communications technology, specifically the telegraph, was rooted in a distinctly North American intellectual tradition sometimes called the Toronto School. This school of thought most commonly refers to the work of the Canadian scholars Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. Of the two, Innis was the greater influence on Carey. Innis was a Canadian economist who became well known for his distinct brand of communications theory that focused on what he called the spatial or temporal medium "bias" in different communications technologies. This line of thought is sometimes referred to as "medium theory," and it refers to the effect of a communication medium's form on the information it presents, as well as a medium's influence on political and

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[125] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," in *Communication as Culture*, 155-177.

[126] Ibid., 162.

cultural organization. Understanding Innis's work on communications technology is essential in understanding Carey's own views on these topics. Not only did Carey write extensively on Innis and his work, but he also borrowed much from Innis' language and theories in his own historical studies of the U.S. communications system. Of course, although Innis' brand of communications theory provided much of the background for many of Carey's ideas, there are also subtle differences that I will outline later in this chapter.

Innis's theories and methods for investigating medium "biases" greatly impressed Carey. He wrote, "Innis' work, despite its maddeningly obscure, opaque and elliptical character, is the great achievement in communications on this continent."[127] Carey felt that Innis had rescued communications research from becoming just another branch of social psychology condemned to rely on methods taken from the natural sciences.[128] Innis' work, for Carey and others, represented an alternative route for inquiry that took the middle road between the dominant forms of socio-scientific and behaviorist research in mass communications in the U.S. and the postmodern forms of media and cultural studies in Europe.[129]

Writing of Innis' style and methodology, Carey praised it as a break from the traditional scholarly style of linear presentation and precise argumentation with something that was an "apparently disconnected kaleidoscope of fact and information" that flashed before the reader a wide range of historical events separated by wide swaths

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[127] Carey, "Space, Time, and Communications," 109.

[128] Ibid., 114.

[129] Megan Mullen, "Space Bias, Time Bias: Harold Innis, 'Empire and Communications'," *Technology and Culture* 50 (2009): 177.

of time and geography.[130] For Carey, such a wide ranging and seemingly fragmented style of argumentation allowed Innis "to capture the complexities of social existence and its multidimensional change."[131] This style, a kind of intellectual bombardment of facts and observation, can also be found in the "thick description" ethnographies of Clifford Geertz whose work was a heavily footnoted and interpretive analysis of events that occurred around him. The "thick descriptions" of Geertz and intellectual "kaleidoscopes" of Innis appealed to Carey's literary sensibilities, in particular, his desire for detail and the acknowledgment of social questions resistant to quantitative answers and certain solutions.

But most importantly perhaps, Innis' work represented for Carey a turning away from any pretense of a "value free" inquiry into human communications. Much of Innis's work contained an implicit, at times explicit, critique of his own society. Innis, in other words, wrote from a point of view. Innis castigated the nature of North American imperialism and its monopolies of knowledge; he was critical of the effects of mechanization and the undue power it gave specialized groups at the expense of others; and he called for universities to reevaluate their role in society in order to confront the problems of Western society.[132] Innis approached his subjects with an implied desire for a

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[130] Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," *The Antioch Review* 27, no. 1 (1967): 7.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Much like Carey, Innis had a consistent dialogic relationship with his profession as an academic in which he expressed views that were both critical and at times even radical. The core assumption in Innis' critique of the university system was that, as a uniquely conceptual institution, the university was in a special position to contribute to social well being rather than simply serving the interests of the status quo. For example, Innis declared in 1948 that "[t]he universities should subject their views about their role in civilization to systematic overhauling and revise the machinery by which they can take a leading part in the problems of Western culture." Innis despised the nature of specialization and professionalism insofar as they monopolized knowledge and privileged small groups of technocrats at the expense of the larger society. The university, he argued, should move to assuage this tendency of specialized knowledge to become monopolized by small groups by instituting a revitalized form of adult education programs to

more humane society. Although this desire was sometimes concealed by his abstruse language and difficult scholarly prose, Carey very much admired Innis' critical stance and humane desires. Carey wrote at length of how such a critical viewpoint separated Innis from the majority of postwar North American scholarship on communications, and how it came to influence the contemporary critical scholarship that was to come.[133] What Carey found in Innis was a congenial mind and a new vocabulary for investigating technological change and human communication. As mentioned above, a fuller understanding of Carey's brand of technological criticism requires a basic understanding of Innis' concepts; in the following pages, I will review these foundational ideas.

Innis' work in his *Bias of Communication* was a distinctive cultural approach to "media effects" research. His inquires focused on macro-historical trends in different ancient cultures such as the Egyptian empire and the city-states of Greece, and he examined the changes in the dominant mediums of communications in these civilizations and the political and cultural effects of these changes. He proposed that dominant communication mediums were central to these civilizations and that their respective "biases" determined the type of political systems and social organizations that took hold in a given culture. In this way, Innis was a conspicuous technological determinist; this fact was not lost on Carey, but Carey and other scholars bracketed this aspect of Innis's

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establish a stronger link between the university and the community. See Harold A. Innis, "A Critical Review," in *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 190-195; also, Innis, "A Plea for the University Tradition," The Dalhousie Review 24 (1944-45): 298-305. Carey's critique of higher education built on many of Innis' themes in an essay that not only borrowed from Innis' ideas but also its title, see Carey, "A Plea from the University Tradition," *Journalism Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1978): 846-855.

[133] Carey, "Space, Time, and Communications," 116.

work, justly or not, focusing instead on the originality of Innis' observations.[134]

Technological determinism is most often used as a pejorative because it implies an unnecessary reduction of human affairs to a single causal factor, in this case a technical form, and names it as the driver of social change. Indeed, some of Innis' claims about dominant communications mediums—in particular, his claim that the inherent biases of a given technology determined the characteristics of a civilization—were most likely overstated. And the fact that Innis focused very heavily on the civilizations of antiquity for which there was less verifiable evidence than more current examples was a weakness of his methodology. For example, Innis claimed that the "[t]he discovery of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century implied the beginning of a return to a type of civilization dominated by the eye rather than the ear."[135] Such a claim is intuitively pleasing but verification of historical literacy rates are notoriously difficult to ascertain. In addition, the adoption of a technology by a large number of people cannot be explained solely by the introduction of a new technology; historical studies of popular literacy in England in the sixteenth century and beyond, for example, suggest that individual reasons for learning to read were myriad and generally involved a motivation for access to the social world and information that print made available.[136] Nevertheless, Innis' intense focus on the social effects of communications mediums encouraged new and ambitious historical research that was both analytically inventive and culturally resonant in a society seeking answers in the midst of its own transition to electronic communications. Innis' major contribution was to illuminate changes in the present by

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[134] Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," 7.

[135] Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 138.

[136] See discussion in Thomas Laqueur, "The Cultural Origins of Popular Literacy in England 1500-1850," *Oxford Review of Education* 2, no. 3 (1976): 255.

examining those in the past. It is for these reasons that thinkers like James Carey, Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, and others venerated his work.

The physical form of a communications medium was important to Innis because, as he put it, "[t]he relative emphasis on time or space will imply a bias of significance to the culture in which it is imbedded."[137] Innis argued that communications mediums could be placed on a continuum based on their bias toward the control of either time or space. Innis understood that civilizations were appraised by their duration and control over territory, and so he argued that a communication medium's bias towards either control over time or space would determine the character of its ruling institutions. A dominant medium's "bias," for Innis, affected the nature of the authorities that made use of the medium and the manner by which these authorities disseminated and controlled technical information. He called these forces "knowledge monopolies." Innis examined in detail how new communications technologies tore apart old knowledge monopolies and replaced them with new ones. For Innis, technological change was not politically neutral; new technical apparatuses gave power to groups that were skilled in their use and manipulation, while taking power away from groups skilled in older technologies made obsolete by newer ones.[138]

Innis explained medium "bias" using the example of a stone carving. The carving was a form of media that was not easily transportable but was durable and long lasting; therefore, the carving was "biased" towards a temporal orientation rather than a spatial one. A stone carving's messages were sent through time rather than space; the

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[137] Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 33; see also Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 12-25.

[138] See discussion in Neil Postman, *Technopoly*, 9.

communicative power of a carving rested on its messages to posterity. Thus, this time-biased medium was useful for the maintenance of tradition and a shared history. A time-biased communications system had less capacity for the expansion of secular authority through space, Innis argued. It was better suited for the continuation of hierarchy and religion rather than empire. On the other hand, the essential features of space-biased mediums, like paper and papyrus, were that they were light and transportable and thus better suited for the management of large areas. According to Innis, space-biased media were essential to the establishment of secular bureaucracies charged with the management of the state's affairs and its territory. A civilization's over reliance on space-biased media conferred a "bias of significance" towards the conquering of space and hence the establishment of an empire. Carey interpreted this time bias/space bias taxonomy to mean that the "dynamic of social change" could be found in a type of search for alternative modes of communication between those supporting the "kingdom of God or man" respectively.[139]

To illustrate these concepts more concretely, a brief review of Innis' analysis of ancient Egypt and how he applied the concept of technological "bias" to his historical interpretations is necessary. Innis examined the changes in communications mediums in the ancient Egyptian empire and argued that changes in their dominant forms of communications led to the decline of the autocratic monarchy. Innis chose autocratic Egypt as the archetypal "time-biased" civilization because the divine monarchy had emerged as the unified force that was necessary to utilize the periodic flooding of the Nile. The Egyptian religious authorities that controlled the knowledge of astronomy, the calendar, and related time-biased media became that culture's emergent knowledge

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[139] Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," 9.

monopoly. With control of such knowledge, the priestly class monopolized the means necessary to predict the river's flooding, the cornerstone of ancient Egypt's agricultural economy.[140] Thus, the autocratic authorities of Egypt became heavily concerned with the management of time, continuity, ritual, and religion—and, according to Innis, overly reliant on time-binding media.

The resulting time-biased information environment in Egypt culminated in the erection of the pyramids and the mummification process that emphasized the monarch's immortality. Yet the "monopoly of knowledge" held by a priestly class that was technically proficient in complex hieroglyphs and their time-biased mediums, such as stone carvings and pyramids, came to be challenged by increasing competition from paper and papyrus that were lighter and more easily transported. As the use of papyrus increased, so did written culture, and this led to the emergence of a professional class of scribes concerned with the bureaucratic necessities of the state and increased more secular forms of thinking. The practicality and usefulness of papyrus eventually took the "monopoly of knowledge" away from the priestly class and situated it in a more secular bureaucracy concerned with the expansion of secular authority and the administration of political power through space. Innis' major thesis was that changes in communication media had the effect of diminishing the power of the religious authorities and increasing those of the state.

It is important to point out that Innis did not favor time-biased media over space-biased media or vice versa. For Innis, mediums competed for cultural domination. I have bracketed many of the dense historical details of Innis' time bias/space bias continuum,

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[140] Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 33-60; for more commentary on Innis' analysis of Egyptian technological change see Vincent di Norcia, "Communications, Time and Power: An Innisian View," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 23, no. 2 (1990): 335-357.

but Innis's major point was that a culture's reliance on one medium of communication over the other (spatial or temporal) put a culture in a state of imbalance.[141] Innis understood that all civilizations were shaped by time and space bias, but he emphasized the necessity for balance or equilibrium. In Innis' terms, the bias of one communications technology could be counterbalanced by the bias of another. This idea that civilizations required some sort of equilibrium appealed to Innis' sensibilities as an economist and it was a residue of the "society as a social organism" metaphor that was characteristic of the thought of sociologists such as Robert Park and Charles Cooley, who were scholars at the University of Chicago when Innis was a student there.[142] Yet, as Carey correctly pointed out, Innis' work was a turn away from the more romantic aspects of the University of Chicago School Of Sociology's "society as organism" metaphor that glazed over historical facts of the asymmetrical power relations inherent to imperial civilizations.[143]

Carey was greatly influenced by Innis' concept of the intimate relationship between space-biased media and empire. Carey, for example, pointed out that the first uses of writing and printing were not in the high-minded matters of literature, holy books and art, but rather in the practical matters of bookkeeping and in imperial matters of warfare, empire, and the state.[144] Printing and its space-binding capacity, for Carey,

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[141] Paul Heyer, *Harold Innis* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2003), 59-73.

[142] On the influence of the Chicago School of Sociology on Innis, see James W. Carey, "Innis 'in' Chicago: Hope as the Sire of Discovery," in *Harold Innis in the New Century*, eds. Charles R. Acland and William J. Buxton (Montreal: McGill-Queens University press, 1999), 81-104; see also Megan Mullen, "Space Bias, Time Bias: Harold Innis, 'Empire and Communications'," 179.

[143] Carey, "Space, Time and Communications," 116.

[144] Ibid., 121.

"encouraged the coordinated and systematic expansion of European empires."[145]
Therefore, following Innis, Carey sought to remind his readers that printing and writing came with both positive and negative consequences, encouraging expression while at the same time encouraging the expansion of authority and empire.

Speaking of newer technologies such as satellites and cable television Carey commented that "[w]e are witnessing the imperial struggle of the early age of print all over again but now with communications systems that transmit messages at the extremes of the laws of physics."[146] Like Innis, for Carey our society's overreliance on space-biased media reveled a new consolidation of powerful forces, such as the even larger federations of power growing out of the nations-state in that of multinational corporations. As he put it "multinationals could not exist without jet planes, advanced computers, and electronic communication."[147] Carey saw in electronics the possibility for the "indefinite expansion of the administrative mentality and imperial politics."[148] Like Innis, Carey was not optimistic about the changes he saw in his society and the technologies that were becoming dominant. But the bias of media towards the forms of authority that were encouraged was not the only form of analysis Carey utilized. Carey also wrote about the more individual consequences of technological change drawing from yet another, perhaps more well-known, Canadian scholar.

A somewhat similar notion of medium "bias" was also articulated in a less historically detailed way in the work of the wildly charismatic Marshall McLuhan. The

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 130.

[148] Ibid., 131.

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basic premise of his path-breaking book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) is that the

medium is more important than the content it presents: "the medium is the message."

McLuhan argued that different mediums encourage different habits of mind; for example,

he argued that the invention of print encouraged people to consume information in a

linear, orderly fashion, while seated alone at a table, thus emphasizing individualism,

specialization, and linear forms of thinking. According to Carey's articulation of this line

of argument, the printed page encourages a particular type of logic of experience, "the

desire to break things down into elementary units (words), the tendency to see reality in

discrete units, to find casual relations and linear serial order (left to right arrangement of

the page), [and] to find orderly structure in nature (the orderly geometry of the printed

page)."[149] McLuhan theorized about the impact of a medium's presentation on sensory

experience, but Carey ultimately rejected McLuhan's argument, because he did not

believe that the effect of media on sensory organization was automatic or subliminal or

that it occurred without resistance.[150] Carey was suspicious of McLuhan's claims, but he

was nevertheless influenced by them when he claimed that the telegraph changed

language use and the "structures of awareness,"[151] but such observations faded in his later

work as he came to focus more on technology's larger social impact.[152]

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[149] Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan,"19.

[150] Ibid., 37.

[151] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 162

[152] See, for example, Carey's analysis in his 1997 essay on the computer's social impact on education, "Salvation by Machines: Can Technology Save Education?" in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 292-307; also, Carey, "Everything that Rises Must Diverge: Notes on Communications, Technology and the Symbolic Construction of the Social," in *Beyond Agendas: New Directions in Communications Research*, ed. Philip Gaunt (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 171-184.

In the 1960s, McLuhan's influence was small among the larger academic community, although he was popular in the wider public. He viewed the emergence of the electronic age as a welcome change and believed it encouraged the establishment of, in his optimistic phrase, a new "global village." The promise of electronic communications for McLuhan was to tear down the obstacles to human interaction and extend the human psyche through space. His work did influence the thought of some scholars, including not only Carey but also the communications theorist Neil Postman and the historian Elizabeth Eisenstein. Postman relied on McLuhan's theories of medium in his analysis of the impact of television on public discourse, an influence he saw as being both corrosive and even dangerous.[153] Eisenstein incorporated McLuhan's theories on medium as a starting point for her massive historical analysis of the wide-ranging impacts of the printing press in Europe.[154] Yet, these scholars differ from McLuhan in their approach and conclusions; Eisenstein added historical rigor to McLuhan's theories, while both Carey and Postman incorporated his ideas in a way that deemphasized his optimism concerning the positive social outcomes of newer electronic media.

Both Innis' and McLuhan's influence on Carey can be seen in his essay on the impact of the telegraph. Carey argued that the telegraph encouraged the transmission of bits of information—simple facts in "telegraphic" language—instead of long-form essays. This form of soft form technological determinism, in which the structure of a communications technology such as the printed page or the telegraph is believed to influence intellectual habits, led Carey to inquire about the uses and "bias" of

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[153] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

[154] Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

communications. He took from Innis and McLuhan the method of applying hermeneutic insights to material objects in order to analyze the impact of communications technologies and the deeper relationship between technology and ideology. But it was Innis that was the stronger voice in Carey's analysis; in Carey's view, McLuhan was the "fallen angel of the Harold Innis legacy."[155]

McLuhan, for Carey, simplified the social impact of communications technology by focusing primarily on the sensory consequences of communications technology. Even though Carey's analysis of the telegraph's impact on journalistic style—in its favoring of the concise transmission of telegraphic information—owed to McLuhan's the "medium is the message" thesis, this was not Carey's major focus. As Carey put it, "[m]y argument is simply that the most visible effects of communications technology were on social organization rather than sensory organization."[156] Carey's investigation of the telegraph was thus primarily an Innisian work, which can be seen clearly in his comment that "[w]ith the development of the railroad, stream power, the telegraph and cable, a coherent empire emerged based on a coherent system of communication."[157] Carey's focus on the telegraph's expansion and coordination of commercial, national, and imperial interests was due to his internalization of Innis' space bias of media, and from here he added his own from of thought on technology as a ideological category.

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[155] Carey, "Interpreting McLuhan," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 3 (1993): 187-193.

[156] Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," 26.

[157] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 166.

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From Time/Space Bias to the Ritual/Transmission Binary

As I have already outlined, Innis' work was a significant influence on Carey's thought. I have taken care to review Innis' work on communications in order to begin to show the level of influence Innis had on Carey's concept of the transmission and ritual views of communication and his attitude towards communications technology in general. The relationship between Carey's transmission/ritual binary and Innis' medium "bias" is not completely parallel, of course; Carey's binary embraced two alternative views of communication present in American society, while Innis' concepts were more of an analytic lens for examining the material dynamic of a communications medium and its consequences. Nevertheless, thematically the concepts are closely related.

Both concepts—Innis' space/time medium bias and Carey's transmission/ritual binary—divided communications into two realms: (1) the realm of the secular and the state, and (2) the realm of ritual and the sacred. Furthermore, both concepts emphasized the tension and competition between these two realms, but Carey held the necessity for ritual's role in the production of culture and social life in higher esteem than did Innis.[158] Unlike Innis' concepts, in Carey's transmission and ritual binary, the ritual view served as the antidote to the imperialism and desire for social control contained in the transmission view. Whereas Innis hoped for equilibrium and balance, Carey hoped for a paradigm shift.

Carey's ritual view of communication highlighted the role of the prayer, the chant, and the ceremony rather than the sermon or religious instruction because these

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[158] Concerning the "ritual view," see Carey's comments in "A Cultural Approach to Communication," 15.

communal actions emphasized one's place in the larger whole.[159] Notice that none of the aforementioned acts of communication were technologically mediated but rather required the presence of bodies, which was very important for Carey. From Carey's perspective, the *embodied* form of communication, by which he was referring to a conversation, required a base level form of democracy as both speakers are required to acknowledge one another in order for a conversation to take place. Carey argued that to emphasize the importance of ritual in the study of communication forced one to focus on the "oral formation of culture" because in ritual and conversation "signs have intrinsic agency" by "embodying and acting out the claims symbols have on us."[160] A simpler way to put this is to say that these forms of communication—conversation and rituals—encompass the entire sensory capacity of a person simply because of the body's necessary presence.

Moreover, like Innis, Carey privileged the oral tradition over printed and electronic communications because technologically mediated communications like print gave rise to syntactical complexity and specialization easily monopolized by small groups. Oral traditions, on the other hand, could not be so monopolized.[161] In much of Carey's technological criticism, then, one finds a romantic desire for a return to a more oral culture in order to counterbalance the imperial "biases" of electronic media. Carey's emphasis on dialogue, conversation, and debate as the proper means for democratic practice was also indebted to John Dewey. For Dewey, "[v]ision is a spectator; hearing is

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[159] Ibid., 313-316.

[160] Carey, "Afterword," 314.

[161] Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication," 15; for Innis' views on oral culture, see Innis, "A Critical Approach," in *Bias of Communication*, 92.

a participator."[162] He meant "vision" to refer to the reading of a newspaper and "hearing" to refer to a dialogue between the members of a community. In Dewey's formulation, "social intelligence" was most effectively transferred by word of mouth because this form of communication emphasized the need for not only a tightly woven local community but also the greater participation of its members.[163] Carey looked on such ideas fondly, for he had the same veneration for community as Dewey. A firmly established practice of democratic dialogue, in Carey's view, remained safe from the influence of imperial interests and commercialism, and it promoted a more primitive and necessary form of equality.

When viewed in light of his privileging of the oral tradition, Carey's analysis of the invention of the telegraph, then, was based on a firmly critical foundation. The invention of the telegraph marked the beginning of the modern era of communications; for Carey, to perform an archeology of electric communications in the U.S. was to uncover the telegraph beneath the subsequent "revolution" in telecommunications. Carey understood that all communication technologies were built on the technologies that preceded them, or as he put it, "when you peel back radio, you find the telephone; telephone the telegraph; telegraph the railroad; railroad the canal and turnpike; and beneath the turnpike early patterns of land and water commerce from the early days of exploration."[164] In Carey's analysis, it was the telegraph that began the major acceleration of human triumph over space, and this acceleration culminated in the so-called "electronic revolution" that only further emphasized American cultural tendencies for

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[162] John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 217.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Quoted in Daniel Carey, "Life's Work: James Carey (1934-2006)," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 174.

"expansion, spatial control, commercialism, and imperialism."[165] In this sense, drawing from Carey's observations, the "electronic revolution" was not a revolution at all, for it merely extended the status quo rather than overturning it.

Carey argued that the telegraph was the technology that changed forever the way communication was viewed in the American cultural context. The telegraph established an essentially centrifugal force that "displaced older religious views of communications" and replaced them with the secular views for transmission;[166] using Innis' terms, the telegraph made for a new form of knowledge monopoly that served the interests of the emerging forms of American state capitalism and increased the administrative powers of the state and the coordination of its military. Carey's emphasis on the "ritual view of communications" as positive counterweight to the transmission view—embodied by the telegraph and subsequent technologies—does not imply that Carey proselytized for the expansion of organized religion as a solution to the secular forms of technocracy. He did not. But he did express frustration at the culture's overreliance on space-biased mediums that minimized face-to-face interaction.[167] Carey felt such face-to-face communication was essential to a fully functioning democracy and the maintenance of fuller and more authentic culture.

To younger readers, such a desire for a return to an oral culture might seem unreasonable, if not overtly quixotic. In this way, Carey was unapologetically old-fashioned. He was also Hellenistic, as he admired the orality of ancient Homeric Greek

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[165] Carey and Quirk, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution," 104.

[166] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 156.

[167] It should be noted here that Carey was, unsurprisingly, a deeply religious man yet surprisingly little commentary has been produced with regards to Carey's faith and its relationship to his scholarship. For more on this relationship see Quentin J. Schultze, "Communication as Religion: In Memory of James W. Carey, 1935-2006," *Journal of Media and Religion* 6, no. 1 (2007): 1-15.

culture.[168] The oral culture of the ancient Greeks has, of course, disappeared, and the advantages of a print culture gave rise to many of the modern advancements that we have today. For instance, even though Carey admired his work,[169] Ong was not a major influence on Carey's own scholarship. One reason for this was that Ong highly privileged the advantages of literacy over those of orality. Like Carey, Ong understood the essential communal nature of an oral culture and the alienation and necessary solitude inherent in the ways of knowing embodied in the written and printed word; nevertheless, Ong argued that literacy "is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also of history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language (including oral speech) itself."[170] Also, it must be noted, Eisenstein also interpreted the rise of print culture to be integral to the spread of western forms of natural science—integral, because rationalism is embedded in the printed word in the following way: the printed word is a demanding medium that requires the reader to think in a linear fashion, slowly making judgments of truth and falsehood about the claims being made before him in the text. To read takes a certain form of discipline that requires of one to be seated at table and read in quiet contemplation. [171] In this way, the psychic effects of reading are to encourage rationality; to read *is* to reason. Additionally, as to its social consequences, Ong argued that literacy intensified one's sense of self and that an enlarged sense of one's being made for a "more conscious interaction between

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[168] See Carey, *Communication as Culture,* 2-3.

[169] Carey, forward to *Media Consciousness and Culture: Explorations of Walter Ong's Thought*, ed. Bruce E. Gronbeck et al. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991), vii-x.

[170] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1984), 15.

[171] See Neil Postman, "Media as Epistemology," in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 16-29.

persons."[172] The expansion of consciousness that literacy encourages enlarged one's worldview and, in Ong's view, made for more meaningful social interaction.

This is not to say that Carey explicitly denied the positive effects of print or other space- biased media. As an academic, Carey himself was immersed in an information environment heavily influenced and dominated by the biases of print. The truth claims of print and exposition are heavily valued in academic circles and rest in the fact that in the process of writing a document—such as the thesis before you—an author is forced to place heavy consideration on the words used, the claims made, and the information presented. Moreover, print makes it necessary for an author's claims and the evidence for them to be presented precisely and in a linear fashion. Carey's thesis was that technological change could not solve problems that were intrinsically political or cultural, he paid close attention to technological change like McLuhan, Ong, and Innis before him, but overall he chose to view these changes from a higher point of view in order to detail its larger social impact.

Space-Biased Technology: Nationalism and Empire.

In terms of their historical impact on social consciousness, writing and printing are the most important communication technologies inventions to date. Nevertheless, the status of writing systems and the printed word as technologies has faded from view in the age of telecommunications and more impressive electronic media. Writing and printing have become seemingly natural parts of our daily lives. We forget that printing, writing, and alphabets had to be invented, that children must be educated at a very early age in

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[172] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 179.

order become acclimated to these technologies.[173] Yet printing and writing are technologies with long histories, and much has been written about both their positive and negative consequences.[174]

As to the negative consequences of print, for example, Carey was well aware of the relationship between the rise of nationalism and the rise of print culture. Not only was Carey informed by the "space bias" notion of Innis that tied a space-binding medium's form to the rise of statist imperial interests, but he was also informed by Elizabeth Eisenstein's McLuhanesque analysis of the effect of print culture on nationalism in Europe. Eisenstein's historical research pointed to the fact that typographic fixity had made prominent the differences between the various "mother tongues" of Europe. The standardization of vernaculars brought about by the printing press built "walls of language" around territorial lines; in other words, changes brought about by the printing press in sixteenth century Europe's information environment planted the seeds of nationalism by a purification process of national literary cultures.[175] Similar observations can be found in Benedict Anderson's study of the origins of nationalism that linked capitalism and print culture together as being integral to the establishment of a national mode of consciousness.[176] The invention of print conquered space in such a way as to unify and divide along the lines of newly established discourse communities colored with

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[173] See discussion in Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), 75-76.

[174] See Innis, "Paper and the Printing Press," in *Empire and Communications*, 141-170.

[175] Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report," *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 1 (1968): 1-56.

[176] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983); for evidence of the influence of Anderson's ideas on Carey see "The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 240-241; see also, Carey, "The Sense of an Ending: On Nations, Communications, and Culture," in *American Cultural Studies*, 196-237.

the identity of the nation-state. In both Anderson and Eisenstein existed the type of analysis that was the cousin of Carey's insights into the unique culture of American nationalism as the product of space-binding communications networks.

Carey's analysis of American communications systems, from the telegraph forward, commented on how the epistemology (way of knowing) of medium changed the way individuals related to the "imagined communities" outside of their immediate experience and how they fitted into a newly integrated whole. Mass communications, as Carey put it, "allowed individuals to be linked, for the first time, directly to a national community without the mediating influence of regional and other local affiliations."[177] This observation was not unique to Carey, but sometimes-obvious points must be made. In Carey's view, a national consciousness in an individual was best conceived as a ritualistic process more akin to a religion rather than the byproduct of political economy;[178] but it was these ritualistic processes that were made possible by the material forces of technology that overcame geographic boundaries and shaped the language and style of messages communicated. Carey's analysis of communication as it related to national consciousness, then, contained a structural analysis of social organization characteristic of Innis and an analysis of the effects of a medium on individual consciousness characteristic of those like McLuhan, Eisenstein, and Anderson.

Carey's synthesis of thinkers like Innis and McLuhan produced his multi-pronged approach to studying the changes made by the telegraph in the mid-nineteenth century. Much like Innis' work on technological change, Carey focused first on the economic and

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[177] Carey, "The Communications Revolution and the Professional Communicator," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 129.

[178] Carey, "Afterword," 312.

political impact of the telegraph and then moved on to its more psychic effects on language use and style. For example, in terms of its economic impact, the telegraph broke up the early forms of capitalist "city-states" in the U.S. (that is, urban industrial centers) and altered the ways they were managed before the telegraph's separation of transportation from communication.[179] The development of national communications networks in the United States, of which the telegraph and the railroad were the cornerstone, centralized business interests by finally linking together and coordinating large and geographically divided industries. As a result, business relationships became impersonal as pre-telegraph modes of personal business correspondence faded as the speed of transactions increased and were made more standardized.[180]

On a more general economic level, the telegraph had the effect of altering the forms of American capitalism in terms of its operation and organization. Carey pointed out that a new body of law and political organization became necessary to accommodate the new ecology of communications and transportation coordinated by the telegraph and the railroad.[181] Note here that in Carey's analysis of state, capitalist, and imperial transformations, he did not draw explicit boundaries as to the effects of the telegraph on those of private power and those of the state. This is because the rise of modern forms of industrial capitalism could not have occurred without the nation-state and its desire for the expansion and preservation of its power. Capitalism, in other words, rose in tandem

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[179] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 157.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid., 158.

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with the state as the existence of one necessitated the existence of the other;[182] thus, the telegraph merely expanded the already existing space bias of American state-capitalist development.

At the individual level, Carey argued, local concerns were displaced by national ones with the spatial conquests of a national network of communications established first by the telegraph and then extended by film, radio, and television.[183] Carey noted how the telegraph demanded a style of communication that stripped language of all local colloquial habits so that messages were uniform and standardized for the smooth transmission of messages from coast to coast. This disciplining of language by the telegraph changed the nature of journalism and created the well known from of "cablese," a style of reporting stripped of all linguistic adornment. This style of analysis, attentive to the linguistic impact of the medium, was indebted most clearly to McLuhan, although Carey did not share the same technologically deterministic tendencies characteristic of McLuhan.[184]

Carey's analysis of the effects of the telegraph on American society were thus a mixture of both economic materialism and philosophical idealism insofar as he examined both material and non-material aspects of the consequences of technological change. Carey managed to avoid the hard forms of technological determinism more characteristic of thinkers like Innis and McLuhan. This is more true of his later work on technology than of his earlier work with John Quirk, which contained, at times, deterministic language inherited from Innis. By the 1990s, Carey was careful not to reduce cultural

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[182] Currently, the best articulation of this point can be found in David Graeber's impressive book *Debt: The first 5000 years* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2011).

[183] Carey, "Afterword," 322-323.

[184] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 162-163.

changes to purely economic terms or technological change, a charge that he leveled at Marxist-inspired cultural critiques and at McLuhan.

Carey appreciated the chaos and complexity of the social world in a way that widened his view of technological change and, like a good pragmatist, avoided the search for any philosophical system in which to examine it. Therefore, G. Stuart Adams' comment that "Carey's [philosophical] system is complex" is simply nonsensical flattery, because Carey was not a systematic philosophical thinker but simply a very engaged social critic.[185] Therefore, it can be argued that some of Carey's most important work was his more explicitly moralistic analysis of technology and ideology, work that sought to counter the contemporary advocates of the "technological sublime" who believe that technology will solve the major problems of society in all realms both technical and cultural.

"Technology and Ideology"

The most interesting aspects of human communication for Carey were its ritualistic forms; in Carey's framework, rituals were essential to a culture's replication and continuation. So to read Carey's critique of communications technology is to encounter a sense of loss and frustration as Carey's "transmission view" of communication represented the encroachment of secular, national, and monopolistic interests on more authentic forms of cultural life, ritual, and democratic practice. For Carey, American culture contained an ideological notion of unlimited progress and "manifest destiny", and this ideological stance was manifested in the physical embodiment of the "space biased" communications systems – these were extensions of

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[185] G. Stuart Adam, Foreword to *Communication as Culture*, xvii.

ideas that he inherited from Innis. But unlike Innis, who was a writer that searched for explanations for the imperial aspects of his own civilization by looking at the economic and communications systems of civilizations in the past,[186] for the most part, Carey focused instead on his own civilization with an eye towards its history and culture. Carey held the view that the U.S. was unique from other nations ideologically, geographically, and politically. For Carey, the U.S. was especially afflicted by the ideological presupposition towards technology as a self-perpetuating mode of technological progress, another component of his transmission view of communications.[187]

Carey's exploration of the tension between the more ritualistic forms of communal life and modernity is a well-trod area of criticism. Technological criticism itself is indeed its own literary genre. One of the most well-known examples, albeit one of the most pessimistic, can be found in the French intellectual and lay theologian Jacque Ellul's *The Technological Society*, a book that contains much lamentation about the encroachment of technology and modern technique on moral and spiritual life.[188] Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine* gave us similar gloomy prospects for the future based on his analysis of the overall trends of technological epochs throughout history.[189] Such technological criticism, including Carey's, focused its attention on issues of technology and morality—how technology shapes human behavior and organization, how a technology changes the way a society views itself and its goals, and finally, how it changes the metaphors a society uses to understand the world.

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[186] See Innis' comments about examining the bias of past civilizations in order to "see more clearly the bias of our own." Innis, *Bias of Communication*, 34.

[187] See Carey, "Afterword," 317.

[188] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).

[189] Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1967-70).

The introduction of the telegraph, for example, represented for Carey a technological change that had displaced older religious views of communication and replaced them with more secular views parallel with the interests of capital and centralized power. He once commented that "an essentially religious view of communication - or one cloaked, at least, in religious metaphors - is a mediator - a progressively vanishing mediator between middle-class aspiration and capitalist and, increasingly, imperial development."[190] Such was his articulation of the boundary between the sacred and the secular, a boundary eroded by the encroachment of a new electronic "knowledge monopoly."

The best examples of Carey's technological criticism were of course his essays written with his enigmatic student, John Quirk. Carey and Quirk's work in this area stands as some of Carey's most moralistic and didactic essays from a scholar who was known for his intellectual level-headedness. The type of criticism that Carey leveled against what he and John Quirk called the promise of the "technological sublime" was some of his most radical criticism of the culturally resonant notion of natural technological progression. Carey and Quirk taught their readers that technology should be viewed with skepticism as it always comes loaded with ideological presuppositions, unexpected consequences, and outcomes that benefit some in society at the cost of others. The type of social research that Carey and Quirk engaged in sought to confront this myth of coming technological utopia, not, incidentally, to add to the prestige of their discipline or discover anything new. There is indeed nothing new in Carey and Quirk's critique of "mythos of the electronic revolution"; their points had been made before and will mostly

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[190] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 161.

likely be made again. To this point, it is hard to resist quoting Neil Postman on this type

of social research:

> Like moral theology, social research never discovers anything. It only rediscovers
> what people were once told and need to be told again. If, indeed, the price of
> civilization is repressed sexuality, it was not Sigmund Freud who discovered it. If
> the consciousness of the people is formed by their material circumstances, it was
> not Marx who discovered it. If the medium is the message it was not McLuhan
> who discovered it. The purpose of social research is to rediscover the truths of
> social life; to comment on and criticize the moral behavior of people; and finally,
> to put forward metaphors, images, and ideas that can help people live with some
> measure of understanding and dignity.[191]

It is not difficult to find the same type of criticism in Carey and Quirk's observations

about the American ideology of technology written by writers that came before them. For

instance, Alexis de Tocqueville noticed Americans' peculiar notions about the

possibilities of new techniques and technologies when he set about to explain American

democracy to his European peers in 1835:

> "[t]he American lives in a land of wonders; everything around him is in constant
> is in constant movement, and every movement seems an advance. Consequently,
> in his mind the idea of newness is closely linked with that of improvement.
> Nowhere does he see any limit placed by nature to human endeavor; in his eyes
> something that does not exist is just something that has not been tried…Choose
> any American at random, and he should be a man of burning desires, enterprising,
> adventurous, and, above all, an innovator."[192]

Carey and Quirk's essay, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution," explored this

aspect of the American character in more depth. In this essay, Carey and Quirk

researched the work of a wide array of writers whose optimism for the future produced a

quasi-religious faith in a coming electric utopia. One such example of this temperament

was the nineteenth century economist Henry Charles Clay, who saw in the promise of

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[191] Neil Postman, "Social Science as Moral Theology," 18.

[192] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1969), 404; See also, Postman, *Technopoly*, 52-54.

technology a way around the industrial nightmares of European wage slavery and environmental pollution.[193] In their essay, Carey and Quirk took it upon themselves to "demythologize" such utopian rhetoric, and they used Innis' notion of medium bias as an analytic tool to do so. Using more deterministic language, Carey and Quirk condemned all future intellectual endeavors towards the elaboration of proper technological application as inadequate because such attempts did not take into account the inherent "bias" of these technologies against "dispersed use and small-scale control."[194] This is because for Carey and Quirk, the space bias of electronic technologies would only build on the on the centralized, commercial, and national interests that previous technologies like the telegraph had expanded.

Yet, as is the case with many social critics, Carey and Quirk were armed with more problems than they had answers. Consider the following comments:

> Modern media of communications have, however, a common effect: they widen the range of reception while narrowing the range of distribution. Large audiences receive but are unable to make direct response or participate otherwise in vigorous discussion. Consequently, modern media create the potential for the simultaneous administration and control of extraordinary spaces and populations. No amount of rhetoric will exorcise this effect. The bias of technology can be controlled only by politics, by curtailing the expansionist tendencies of technological societies and by creating avenues of democratic discussion and participation beyond the control of modern technology. [195]

Carey favored of communication that is in a more literal sense *communal*; one can see this in Carey and Quirk's wish for the creation of "avenues of democratic discussion" with an emphasis on *discussion* as the correct mode of communication for democratic practice. They wished for a new form of information environment to counter the

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[193] Carey and Quirk, " The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution," 93-94.

[194] Ibid., 106.

[195] Carey, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution," 105.

detrimental effects of electronic communications. But there was, of course, a problem. Because Carey and Quirk stressed the inherent bias of modern communications for social control, it is difficult to discern whether they believed that any form of electronic communication could be so conceived as to not emphasize any culturally imperial tendencies. Just because a technology has not been designed to increase democratic social tendencies does that mean that such technologies cannot be so designed (or so used). While it may be conceded that medium bias is at issue when it comes to communications, the authors did not mention in any detail the type of politics that might overcome technological bias towards anti-democratic practices and social control besides encouraging more discussion. Additionally, the possibility of avoiding the "control of modern technology" or rather the use of technology seems impossible in the contemporary United States, and the reader is left frustrated by an impossible situation, as the effects of modernity and mechanization are both ubiquitous and unavoidable.

The Non-Neutrality of Technology

Paul Goodman once noted that "[w]hether or not it draws on new scientific research, technology is a branch of moral philosophy, not of science."[196] Carey took this insight even further when he commented that "[t]echnology, as a character in the American social drama, acts as a higher authority adjudicating claims of both truth and morality. As I have said elsewhere, in America it is the machines that possess teleological insight."[197] One may counter that such conclusions are overdrawn, but consider that the

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[196] Paul Goodman, "Can Technology be Humane?" *The New York Review of Books*, November 20, 1969, accessed February, 2 2013, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1969/nov/20/can-technology-be-humane/

[197] Carey, "Afterword," 317

mere existence of computers has vastly altered the metaphors in which we describe the human brain as something that can be "programmed" or "deprogrammed." The computer has altered the way we conceive of human cognition such that humans are conceived as "thinking machines," a conception that signals our altered perception of human consciousness. The brain is of course not a computer, and the use of a computer metaphor places limits on our understanding of the mind/brain interface just as all metaphors shape our understanding of the things they describe.

Over time, Carey's stance evolved and he came to point out that technology was a physical embodiment of ideological propositions, moving away from some of Innis' more technologically deterministic theoretical positions. Carey was always much more hesitant than Innis to grant technological forms and institutions the causal status that they seemed to have in Innis' historical interpretations and his technological criticism became progressively more nuanced. By the 1990s, Carey viewed technology as a purely cultural phenomenon with a dialectical and reciprocal relationship to its users. For example, in 1997, Carey claimed that:

> To view technology as thoroughly cultural is an attempt to escape, rather than reproduce, the endless and unproductive arguments surrounding technological determinism. From a cultural viewpoint, technological artifacts are understood, at least in a provisional and hypothetical way, as homunculi: concrete embodiments of human purposes, social relations and forms of organization. Certain technologies imaginatively constitute, express, and compress into themselves the dominant features of the surrounding social world. A homunculus is a society writ small. It is also a human person writ small insofar as it serves not merely as a template or producing social relations but as a template for producing human nature as well.[198]

This language was a much softer form of rhetoric than Carey had used in 1970 in that it was analytically a much softer technological deterministic stance. The bias of technology

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[198] Carey, "Afterword," 319.

for Carey here was simply a matter of what the form of a technology embodied as inherited from its surrounding culture.

Yet Carey never abandoned the notion of the "non-neutrality of technology" to borrow language again from Neil Postman. Technology is the means that people use to alter their world, and it is a form of technique and little more. While this is no doubt true, anyone who has heard the cliché "to the man with a hammer, the world appears as full of nails" and nodded approvingly has a basic grasp of the type of analysis that one finds in Carey's meditation on the telegraph and of communication technology in general. The simple fact is that the material form that a technology takes has a significant impact on the uses to which it is put and the requirements it demands of its users. Atomic power plants, for example, require for their maintenance a hierarchal system of management equipped to respond quickly to a meltdown; in other words, its form limits its organizational possibilities and favors non-democratic over more democratic structures. Arguments over the causal factors of the hierarchical form that the atomic power plant encourages would be tedious, and perhaps unproductive, but the fact remains that its material form effects its organization and social impact—it is therefore not a neutral form of technology. This is a form of analytically soft-technological determinism that is useful so long as it does not obliterate the possibility for an alternative and leave its readers in a state of despair.

Therefore it is safe to call Carey's technological criticism a soft-form of determinism (as opposed to hard determinism—that is, he did not view technology as an independent and neutral driver of human society). What we can take from Carey and others in these matters is that the structure of a technology influences the uses to which it is put and that it can have unexpected consequences. This type of criticism is necessary in

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culture that is at many times oblivious to the material consequences that a technology has and becomes even more necessary as technological advances occur more quickly than a culture has time to keep up with its impact. The iconoclastic analysis of Carey and Quirk, and others, remind us that change comes with both positive and negative consequences; and also that we should look to the changes of the past in order to assess the technological hyperboles of today. What is gained from reading such technological criticism is the reminder that our situation is never so far removed from the past as we think.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In March of 1974, Marshall McLuhan wrote a short letter to Carey in response to Carey's essay with John Quirk, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution." McLuhan was responding to Carey's reading of him as a technological utopian, which he felt missed the nuances of his work. In his concluding remarks, however, McLuhan applauded Carey's efforts and wrote, "[y]ou are familiar with academic timidity and respectability. You are taking your academic life in your hands when you write about Innis and McLuhan. You must be a fearless character."[199] McLuhan had a point: Carey was willing to take chances in his academic career, but the greatest chances Carey took were not with his essays on McLuhan and Innis. This fearlessness, if we may call it that, came from Carey's willingness to have a constant and critical dialogue with the institutions in which he lived his life.

Upon his death in 2006, Carey's son Daniel Carey, now a professor of English literature, commented on the dialogic and critical nature of his father's work. Daniel Carey pointed out that his father's scholarship was intimately related to his role as both teacher and administrator. Carey's unique outlook, in that he was able to step outside of his role as a university professor and comment on the university from the point of view of an outsider, was connected to his personal biography. As discussed in the introduction, because of his congenital heart defect, he received little formal education before his mid-

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[199] Marshall McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, ed. Matie Molinaro et al. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 492.

teens. When he became old enough to attend college, Carey lacked the credits to pursue a degree in a topic that interested him, such as philosophy or history, so he began his college education with the aim of becoming qualified for office work; he thought that he was not healthy enough for factory work or the military. So Carey's undergraduate education at the University of Rhode Island consisted of classes in business and economics. After he finished his degree in business, Carey went on to the University of Illinois to get a master's in advertising with the expectation of entering the business world. It was only after finishing his master's degree that Carey decided to pursue the Ph.D.[200]

A combination of circumstance and chance led to Carey's entry into academia. In addition to his hard work and intelligence, the increase in journalism and communications programs in the postwar period presented many opportunities to the young Carey. Carey benefited greatly from the expansion of the American university system during the Cold War that is only now beginning to recede. Shortly after finishing his Ph.D., he was able to become a full professor at the University of Illinois at age 28. Carey found himself teaching in a field that valued professional experience in journalism or advertising, when, of course, he had none. Carey, in essence, began his career as an academic as a relative outsider, but one whose talent could not be denied. Because of his unique background and temperament, Carey came to be one of the most eloquent critics of the positivism and behaviorism in his field because he was able to think both within and outside of his position.[201]

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[200] Daniel Carey, "Life's Work," 170-171.

[201] Ibid.

The major intellectual antagonist that Carey fought against was, of course, the "effects tradition" in mass communications and positivism in the social sciences. Unlike critical theorists such as Theodore Adorno or Jürgen Habermas, who simply dismissed positivist social science for reducing large problems of political philosophy and society to abstract formulas, Carey confronted positivism head on. This confrontation was born of necessity; it was simply impossible for Carey to dismiss an academic tendency that surrounded him in order to make room for his style of inquiry derived from the humanities. In order to carve out a space for himself and others, Carey first had to deal with the "effects tradition" and explain why an alternative approach was necessary.

So Carey's alternative path became his unique form of cultural studies. In a review of his book *Communication as Culture,* Kenneth Cmiel aptly pointed out that Carey's project of cultural studies was a rather explicit reconstruction of American liberalism that steered between the lines of critical social science and behaviorism.[202] Carey was a type of pre-modernist who wanted to reconstruct, or at least make visible, older forms of communication that for him embodied a more authentic form of community and democratic discourse. Face-to-face interaction, conversation, community, and dialogue were the backbone of his explicitly liberal politics that sought to restore the "public" to the status of participant rather than passive observer. Walter Lippmann was thus his natural enemy. Lippmann viewed the public as simply incapable of managing their own opinions in an increasingly complex world; the role of the expert was to manage, with the aid of technical skill and science, the "bewildered herd."[203] As Carey

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[202] Kenneth Cmiel, "Book Reviews: Communication as Culture, by James W. Carey," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 2 (1992): 285-290.

[203] This rather harsh phrase was coined, of course, by Lippmann who wrote, "[t]he public must be put in its place so it may exercise its own powers, but no less, and perhaps even more so that each of us may live free

put it, Lippmann conceived of the public as "the objects rather than the subjects of politics."[204]

Carey's project of cultural studies drew from cultural anthropology and the Chicago School of Sociology's symbolic interactionism with an implicit goal of placing the public back into view. His goal was to raise the status of the communal ritual and the sharing and creation of symbols and to advocate an anthropological approach to interpret these processes. Max Weber's *verstehen* method and Clifford Geertz's interpretive ethnographies, among other projects, provided the inspiration for a way forward in research and an embodiment of his liberalism. In Carey's tradition, the public was no longer solely a subject to be assessed as to the effects that media had on it; rather, it was an active public with agency and intelligence that academics should seek to understand.

But there was a weakness in his theoretical point of view. Carey's veneration for ritual and community, partly inherited from Dewey, pushed into the background institutional forces, strong ones in fact, in which communities and rituals were enmeshed. Partly because he was distasteful of polemic, and partly because his early experiences with Marxism made him skeptical of research driven by adversarial politics, Carey avoided looking for the structural forces in the national media that shaped the conversation on the front end. Thus, Carey could seem hopelessly old-fashioned, a friendly and nostalgic old man who wished for the return of a communal existence that was not going to return. At worst, he appeared as someone completely oblivious to the major issues of asymmetrical power relations in his society. At best, he appeared as

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of the trampling and the roar of the bewildered herd." Quoted in Barry D. Riccio, *Walter Lippmann: Odyssey of a Liberal* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 70.

[204] Carey, "A Republic, If You Can Keep It: Liberty and Public Life in the Age of Glasnost," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, 219.

someone who simply avoided them. Even rituals can serve as a means to control others; American forms of consumerism, nationalism, and militarism all have their associated rituals. Carey's avoidance of these issues was the major flaw in his thought.

Nevertheless, one can take inspiration from the democratic conversations and community that Carey held so dearly. Even Robert McChesney, in his criticism that a cultural studies that ostensibly avoids the neoliberal forces that are attacking the authentic forms of community it cherishes, acknowledged implicitly that such things are valuable and need protecting. Even if one dismisses Carey as a quixotic dreamer, a man who wished for a world that was long since past—if it even existed to begin with—there is still a sense of optimism in Carey's work that those working in critical theory might learn from. Critical theory and some forms of neo-Marxist analysis of culture risk burying the public in an impossible situation from which they cannot escape. Carey's democratic liberalism at least offers a glimpse of a possible form of salvation. Forging new communities and face-to-face communications with one's neighbors are still the most powerful forms of political practice—Twitter notwithstanding. Protests and demonstrations of the Occupy Movement and other social justice movements draw much of their power from the fact that they are able to bring people together communally in a single space; Carey, had he lived to see the Occupy Movement, would have understood this. Carey's vision needed more critical theory, and critical theory needs a bit more of Carey's optimism. A combination of these two views would lead to a better understanding of communications, politics, media, and culture.[205]

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[205] For a good example of a productive combination of Carey's work and critical theory, see Chris Russill, "For a Pragmatist Perspective on Publics: Advancing Carey's Cultural Studies through John Dewey and Michel Foucault?!," in *Thinking with James Carey*, 57-58.

Carey's technological criticism was not, as some might assume, explicitly connected to his writings on cultural studies and his critiques of positivism. There were no grand philosophical systems implicit in his work. Carey's work on technology owed to his fascination with the work of Harold Innis, who for Carey exemplified the high point of a study of communications in North America. Carey's work on Innis stands second to none; a casual glance of the secondary literature on Innis will attest to this fact. In the literature on Innis, the name James W. Carey abounds. I have argued that Carey's work in technological criticism stands on the theoretical foundation that Innis produced. Although, Carey did not follow Innis into the harder forms of technological determinism that Innis often embraced, Carey's theories were a form of soft determinism in that he accepted tentatively the inherent bias of communications technologies from the telegraph to the computer. He held that such bias had real effects on literacy and even how people think. It is the position of this thesis that these forms of analysis are useful insofar as they are not overstated; the relationship to one's tools may be reciprocal, but they never necessarily determine human thought and action. Technology can be used many purposes, and it is the realms of culture and politics are the most determining factors of a technology's use, yet, the physical forms of a technology are nevertheless important and worth examining.

Most importantly, perhaps, throughout his career Carey remained committed to the idea that technological change has thus far only maintained the existing forms of social stratification rather than disturb them. In this thesis, I have attempted to show that these observations were Carey's most important contributions to our understanding of these issues. That is, for Carey, technology could not solve problems that are intrinsic to politics and culture. This observation was not new; indeed, other writers had said it many

times before in many different ways, but that makes it no less important. In this thesis, I

have attempted to show that Carey's most important messages were those that his readers

already knew, but as Neil Postman observed they needed to be told again. It was in this

way that Carey embodied the best of the public intellectual.

Carey's observations about the culture's technological utopianism with John

Quirk were powerful social critiques, but they were again all too blind to the institutional

conditions within which technology is produced. Nevertheless, Carey's soft-determinism,

his focusing on the outcomes that the forms of a technology produce, suggests a fact that

is not readily acknowledged: technology can have both positive and negative outcomes. I

agree with Lance Strate that Carey veered into the realm of "media ecology," Neil

Postman's name for the study of information environments. This turn put his work

alongside the likes of Elizabeth Eisenstein, Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Walter

Ong, and others who paid close attention to the subliminal ways that media affect how

information is both presented and consumed and who critiqued the cultural effects of

communications technology.[206]

An implicit question in this project has been, "Why ought one read James

Carey?" The answer lies in the admirable democratic ethos that underlies all of his work.

James Carey was deeply attuned to the tensions between his institutional role as an

academic and the greater society of which he was a part; that is to say, his work was

engaged with what it meant to be both investigator and participant in the culture that was

his object of study. In Carey's words, "[w]e are not just neutral observers of cultural

texts. Rather they confront us with claims and arguments about truth and rightness to

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[206] Lance Strate, "Understanding a Man in Time: James W. Carey and the Media Ecology Intellectual Tradition," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 2 (2007): 177-180; See also *Explorations in Media Ecology* 5, no. 2 (2006). This journal was a special issue devoted to James Carey's legacy.

which we must assent or dissent."[207] The point here is that Carey wanted to make clear that there is no real position of objectivity that can be taken in social inquiry; there is no neutrality when one is faced with social questions because there is no way to remove oneself from the culture. Instead, there are professional ideals for objectivity, ideals that must be strived for, but nonetheless they remain ideals.

Positivist social research must pretend that it can detach itself from the society that it studies in order to reach objective conclusions, even though this is impossible. Carey disliked positivist social research because he viewed it as antidemocratic and believed it implied that social knowledge is accessible only to those with the proper training. This impulse in Carey—a distrust of experts and a combative attitude towards those detached and morally disengaged forms of professionalism—was not mere populism but his adherence to a profound democratic ethos. A democratic ethos means paying very close, constant, and even painful attention to what one is doing and one's motivations for doing it. Carey understood that his work was both an analysis and product of the American culture that surrounded him and was honest about it. He embodied this democratic ethos in his work and life, and if for no other reason, this is why we should remember his example.

Carey's type of communications research may seem to some overly literary and philosophical, doomed from the start to failing Karl Popper's test of falsifiability. But to come to such a conclusion would be a mistake. Carey's type of thinking was original; there are few scholars who have reached across disciplinary boundaries with such a keen eye and productive synthesis. Carey offered no strict methodological process for studying the media, but instead provided an example of the values and attributes that a researcher

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[207] James Carey. "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies," 10.

should embody. That is, to study the media requires a strong curiosity, keen perception of detail, and an ability to order the enormous amount of complexity that confronts any communications researcher. Carey's scholarship was not without its flaws, but it engages its readers in conversations about media and scholarship that should never truly end. In this way, his contribution to scholarship was significant because the questions he left us have no final answers, as is the case with most truly important questions. It is up to us to continue the conversation.

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