HUGH DALZIEL DUNCAN'S ADVOCACY FOR A THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

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Abstract

During the 1960s in the United States, Hugh Duncan produced several accounts of a forgotten theory of communication, accounts in turn forgotten in the theory's country of origin. There, American communication studies well before the twentieth century drew to a close knew of its label, "symbolic interactionism," but its perspective and sensibility were largely forgotten, at least twice during the century. Duncan's thesis of communication and social order was not generally recognised for its sustained effort to bring the study of authority, hierarchy, and power into the centre of communicative interaction. A way to develop a communication theory of society, Duncan's work became a critique of communication research in the wake of the forgotten tradition he attempted to resurrect. The field had conceptually forsaken the idea of communication to disconnected concepts, for which Duncan equally faulted seminal European scholars who, nevertheless, offered the best explanations for the ordering of society until the arrival of symbolic interactionism and its cousin, philosophical pragmatism. This essay highlights Duncan's communication theory as a theory of society, and proposes a critical appropriation of this alternative in the history of ideas, one that warns of assumptions risked whenever communication is theorised without and with attention to power.

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During the late 1960s, in the United States, what often passed for textbooks on communication theory were atheoretical compilations of topics rather than sustained articulations of the idea, communication. For the most part, "communication" was treated as a vehicle with attention to pathways and their contents, carriers of "messages" sent and deposited without regard for their symbolic ties to interactive experience. Yet in the academy, nothing circulated that approached a sustained case for a communication theory. Instead, "communication" had its territories set as strategic and tactical interplays of professions and abstracted processes, where message-bullets, if softened at all during the parallel rise of influence-industries (Schiller 1973), were hardening categorical divides between interaction and meaning: Nearly everywhere, Wilbur Schramm's *Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (1954) enjoyed a two-decade lifespan introducing new graduate and undergraduate students to a topic set of obsessions with "effects" of "messages" through distribution systems, even to the point of making people part of the strategic stream (Katz and Lazarsfeld). Nothing had really changed, it turns out, since the days of psychological warfare (Simpson 1994), when WWII "senders" were out to manipulate "receivers," however circuitous the route(s), however acceptable the practice then or now.

Power was described as influence owing to efficiencies of dissemination and receptiveness, administrative interests concealed behind dispassionate descriptions that knew nothing, it seemed, of the dramas of societal interaction that, in an earlier time in the United States, were rather the point of communication theory when George Herbert Mead's social psychology, John Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, and Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory attempted to "get inside" the human conditions shaping urban experience amid frontiers turned to farmland. The time when a sociological sensibility was developing a theory of society grounded in communicative interaction radiated from Chicago during the earliest decades of the twentieth century—and then. . . didn't. Hugh Dalziel Duncan noticed.

Duncan's Account of Forgotten Communication Theory

Duncan knew of a cast of intellectual characters who made differences at least since the early 1900s. He reminded his readers that the English-speaking world had a heyday of theorising that, "by 1925," had created the possibility of "a social theory of communication." A compilation, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Park & Burgess 1969), had become the "standard work used widely by American sociologists from 1921 to 1940." The Park and Burgess reader was a powerful candidate for a communication theory textbook in Duncan's view. It placed symbolic action at the theorist's centres of attention, by analysing "communication as a constituent factor in society" (Duncan 1969, 193). The text's orientation was summarised by Duncan via a now-famous quotation supplied by Dewey: "Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common community in communication" (1916, 4-5). Like many quotations made famous, it had ceased to make a lasting difference – this time, for communication theory. The sentiment and sensibility was in the air until the 1940s. Duncan informs us, though, that it was virtually a dead sensibility and research practice after 1940 in the United States:

> *The frame of reference in American social theory before Parsons's adoption of an equilibrium model was an action frame, and it was an action based in communicative experience, or what we now call "symbolic action." For reasons which must concern the historian more than the theoretician, the social and cultural contextualism of Dewey and Mead was abandoned by American sociologists from 1940 to 1965.... [T]he belief that symbols constituted social relationships, was rejected* (Duncan 1969, 197).

Duncan aimed to bring it back to life, through efforts that re-charted the history of ideas as the emergence of theorists of society who, one way or another, would be joined – even across oceans – to the program of Chicago School sociology and pragmatism where "symbolic interactionism" had its coalescence.

During a seven-year period between 1962 and 1967, he produced a series of essays (Duncan 1967a, 1967b, 1967c) and books (Duncan 1962, 1964, 1965, 1968, 1969) that spoke of sociologists as communication theorists whose work had been forgotten. Throughout these years, Duncan articulated threads of "symbolic analysis" as the relation of "form to social content," of the structures of society known and cultivated through symbolic interaction. The symbolic experience of structure and authority in society included for Duncan even the aesthetic, in general (often via Dewey 1958), in particular, a range from music (Zuckerkandl 1956) to film (Kracauer 1947). "Symbolic interaction" in Duncan's hands aimed to bring story and medium into the "history of a nation producing it," to speak of the symbol always in the same breath as power. Thus, for example, Kenneth Burke's best-known *Grammar* and *Rhetoric of Motives* (Burke 1945, 1950) are juxtaposed to his lesser-known *Attitudes toward History* (Burke 1959), just as George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead 1968) and *The Philosophy of the Act* (Mead 1938) were seen as the culmination of *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Mead 1936). "My debt to Kenneth Burke is a heavy one," Duncan wrote (1969, vii), especially because "Burke stresses that social interaction is not a process, but a dramatic expression, an enactment of roles by individuals who seek to identify with each other in their search to create social order" (Duncan 1962, 5). The theme of social order was Duncan's contribution to a symbolic interactionist principle that Mead had helped clarify: "In the uniqueness of the present are born the past and futures of all history" (Duncan 1969, 213). Because we had at our disposal a theory that "placed the act squarely in time," a communication theory of society was positioned to explain the social as "both temporal and spatial," but emphasising finally in the history of social thought itself "the temporal quality of the act" that made any social self possible. "Sociality," Duncan would always insist, borrowing the term from a European (Simmel 1968) this time, "emerges in the present," not "simply a moment of time cut off from passage, but a moment of becoming in which temporally real events occur." Correcting Simmel, as Duncan frequently did, he faults "Simmel's forms of sociation" for their derivative status, as though sociality itself were "determined" by "social forces that are "like atoms'" (1962, 2). History and self both are events in Duncan's inherited theory of communication, "emergent" inside, instead of derivatives of, abstracted "processes of change, continuance, or disappearance" (1969, 213). Thanks to Burke, sociality can now be explained as a "form of symbolic experience … a dramatistic form which is determined by the resources of language (Duncan 1969, 259-260).

The revision was typical of Duncan's work, and it was applied to virtually every European theorist of society who contributed to the role of symbols in society-- from Simmel to Dilthey, Weber to Marx, Mannheim to Freud. Duncan saw European social theory to be more concerned "with the social function of symbols" while sharing "a singular lack of congruence between structure and function in their models and images of society." European theory "never makes clear just how the structure of 'existential' thought functions in communication. The Freudian libido, like the actor in Parsons' system, cathects, but does not communicate" (Duncan 1962, 2). Yet Duncan is attracted to these European sociologists for their attention to "authoritarian order" and the interest in themes of equality that animate such theoretical attention. Nevertheless, he considers them blinded by notions that elites keep "their people under control through fear of force, or by the kinds of mystifications common to religious belief." Symbols and power interact, but only within a framework where "order functions through a hierarchy of superiors and inferiors." In Duncan's view, Burke offered a better analysis, where even "equality *is* a form of authority, comparable in power to social order determined by elitist conceptions of superiority and inferiority." We need to redirect European analyses of authoritarian order in order to make even authoritarianism a feature of sociation itself. Only then, Duncan writes, can we "know what kinds of social bonds *sustain* relationships among equals," and face the idea, which "I have pointed out in my previous writings, [that] some moments of equality are necessary to social order, even in authoritarian states (Duncan 1969, 284-285). Lest this be regarded as a reflection of American romanticism, Duncan cautions against the image of social actors as harmonious actors. He argues that in complex societies we move

> *from old to new, and finally replace the old with the new. We do the first through such symbolic processes is as "desanctification" and victimage; the second we do through metaphor (and all kinds of bridging devices) by which we pass from one set of meanings to another; and finally, we sanctify symbols we believe are necessary to uphold community order. But we do this under conditions where many institutions are in open conflict. Symbols are, for modern man, both positive and negative, and the "content of situation" is characterized by recurring argument, disputation, joking, ridicule, cursing, blessing, obscenity, blasphemy, disagreement, competition, rivalry, conflict, and war. At best, in our society, agreement is a resolution, and a precarious one at that, of deeply conceded difference, hostility, and hate* (Duncan 1969, 231-232).

Still, optimism survives this rebuff of romanticism, where conflict and power do not "mould" communication. Communication for Duncan was resistant to all the variations of "correspondence theory" that would have symbolic life conditioned by ids or systems, dominant ideas or natural processes such that "impressions and things correspond to each other" (p. 233). Duncan's revisions of European theories of society and communication must lose all inner and outer mysteries for the theorist, to be replaced by dramatic action as the struggle to define one's and others' shifting roles in society.

Thus history and social change are seen always from inside the movements of constantly emergent selves as the drama of symbolic acts passing through time and through roles, the roles of the inferior, the superior, the equal. Duncan resituates

power in that stream of human experience and drama. He thereby outlines his preference for the American "Chicago School" of sociology, just as he had, during his dissertation years, favoured the "Chicago School of Architecture" and the reshaping of the Chicago literary world centring on the University of Chicago. For him, "Between 1895 and 1910, the University of Chicago was a creative literary environment" where "the relationship of the campus to creative artistic life in America was probed constantly" (1964, 119). In a revision of his doctoral thesis at the University of Chicago (1953), in an essay titled "Struggles for Control of the Chicago Image," Duncan already was looking to his *alma mater* as the producer of what "William James called a 'Chicago School' of philosophy, and the social thought of Dewey who came to the University in 1894 (Duncan 1964, 69). As an introduction to Duncan's republished story of Chicago architecture (1965) saw Duncan's orientation, a city was "inventing architecture for *democratic* man"; cities were "stages on which the drama of democracy was lived out," and "the building was an *act* whose function was to be a scene, a stage, for other actors to use" (Greer 1989, xv). By the time of *Communication and Social Order*, Duncan would stress "*Scene* as the *symbolization of time and place*, the setting of the act which creates the conditions for social action," where all people have the status of Burke's "*Agent*," that "name for the kind of actor groups selected to carry out specific social functions," "chosen [or] barred, [or] not eligible to enact certain roles (for whatever reason), [which] tells us much about a society." Their "*Roles*" are the kind of actors felt necessary to community survival," "honoured in all kinds of community presentations" (Duncan 1962, 433). Democracy itself was the playing out of these dramas for Duncan Communication as the push for social order was also the competition of roles enacted symbolically.

By 1967, Duncan had virtually codified his blend of European social theory through the Chicago theoretical lens, with a decisively literary bent indebted to Burke. All such figures contributed to his "The Symbolic Act: Basic Propositions on the Relationship Between Symbols and Society" (1967c). If the European traditions "taught us how to think about the structures of social experience," he wrote, Dewey, Cooley, Mead and Burke taught us to think about how the structures function in communication within the act" (1969, 202-203). Each theorist had by then been brought into the project to theorise modernity as a symbolic theory of society with concepts inviting entry into psycho-social dramas among inferiors, superiors, and equals. Attempting to recover this forgotten literature, like all such attempts, culminated as a kind of partisanship for irreducible principles of communication. Behind the formalities of scholarship, but always at the edge of scholarship, Duncan's was an effort to recover a forgotten sensibility with which to interpret human communication and the limits systematically demanded of it. The major theoretical knot was to grapple with structures of power and not confound our understanding of them with the power of symbols alone, even though we really have no choice, he argued, but to see all human experience as symbolic experience. To grasp power as the symbolic acts of authority and hierarchy demanded that theorists avoid both romantic celebrations of a symbol's power and a divorce from power to analyse communication.

His works constitute a massive annotated bibliography of symbolic theorists, but with a case made throughout to view all social phenomena through the idea of the act with persistent attention to its forms and consequences in action. Via a

section titled "The Emergence of the Act in Pragmatic Theory," Duncan poses this question:

> *If we say that symbolic action takes place in forms, the forms of interaction in society we call communication, what is the structure of such action? What is the function of the structure, and how does the structure function to create and sustain social integration? In the present state of [scholarship] is it possible to develop a theory of symbolic action? Has enough been said on the social nature of symbols, and the social structure of symbolic action, to warrant confidence in the development of a sociological theory of symbolic action?* (Duncan 1969, 203).

His short answer would probably be "yes," so long as we sustain the link between communication and power and be clear about it.

Duncan's Critique of Communication Studies

Now forty years after Duncan's contributions, his own work joins the ranks of the forgotten theorists he once complained about. No doubt due some revision as well, thanks to efforts since the 1960s by many to uncover symbolic interactionist conceptualisations for theories of communication and of society, it is worth pausing a moment to recall the situation of Duncan's introduction to the American scene of symbolic interaction during the 1960s.

The reduction of meaning to message had, in Duncan's eyes, overtaken symbolic interactionism since the 1940s. Symbolic interactionism was now an "alternative" perspective on communication in need of resuscitation. While we may say in 2006 that symbolic interactionism did enjoy something of a revival in U.S. communication inquiry, thanks especially to its connections to philosophical pragmatism (cf. Dickstein 1998; Joas 1993), its status for living generations remains an "alternative" against the background of reductive moves that Duncan himself was describing decades earlier. Among them were free-floating celebrations of textuality, reflected in content analysis without form, a reification of symbols that would confuse dynamics of power for our understanding of communication. The analysis of culture as an approach to communication risked reductions into pure ritual, disconnecting past, present and future. Effects of messages missed the lives of those actors whom we all are. "Static" concepts "so prevalent" should be abandoned, because, "if culture is symbolic it has both form and content, and neither can be studied without the other. It is in the realm of the social that form and content meet in communication" (Duncan 1969, 139). Symbolic interactionism, according to Duncan, should be an answer to such travesties committed against the concepts "symbol" and "form" by any sort of reductionism. Many had been committed in communication studies during his lifetime. Elsewhere, too, communication had been reduced to, as Duncan put it, "message tracks," a reduction to "some power 'beyond' ... which is then used to explain." In the context of an analysis of Max Weber's works on art, Duncan points to Weber as one of the few major social theorists who, unlike communication theorists even within the dramaturgical tradition of Burke and others, refused to "reduce art to a message track through which sex, magic, ceremony, politics, economics, or religion 'flows,' 'manifests itself,' 'realizes itself,' and so forth (Duncan 1969, 89)." Europeans were enlisted to help stem the reduc-

tive thinking wherever Duncan could find aid. Duncan was complaining about a variety of reductions that took the heart out of interaction in the name of processes and disembodied meanings. Thus he advocated for a "sociological model of communicative action," understood "as a symbolic act" defined through structures "of dramatic action" (1962, 433).

Ultimately, though, Duncan pressed against the loss of the sensibility that a symbolic act was dramatic action shaping society in the present through structures intersecting with the past. His review of major social theorists in *Symbols and Social Theory* includes his several "plays" on another of his book titles, *Communication and Social Order.* In the chapter on Weber we find the subtitle "Convention and Social Order," to be followed in a chapter on Tönnies that begins with the subtitle, "Custom and Social Order" (p. 49). A subsequent chapter, though, warns against "The Reduction of Aesthetics to Ritual" (p. 80) in the attempt to bring cultural analysis to the study of symbolic action as the creation of order in society.

Duncan's diagnosis was, then, theoretical fresh air during the 1960s when, five years after *Communication and Social Order*, a compilation of essays emerged as a new offering for students of communication theory against the fare supplied by "the dominant paradigm" of effects research. *Human Communication Theory: Original Essays* (1967) aimed to redirect the theoretical landscape with alternatives mindful of that pre-WWII history now relegated to pre-history. From the philosopher John Searle (1967) to the cultural anthropologist Dell Hymes (1967), Duncan was the sole author accorded two pieces in a volume much less than half the size of usual textbook predecessors: "The Search for a Social Theory of Communication in American Sociology" (1967a) and an annotated bibliography (1967b) for those whose memories or research training began after the 1940s.

Dance's compilation appeared about the time Duncan had recalled the loss of symbolic action theory that he urged theorists of communication to remember. Now 40 years later, the Dance reader comes off the shelf as a roster of forgotten theorising as well, with perhaps only one of its authors (Gerbner 1967) recognisable to the youngest among a communication professoriate whose own mentors never heard of it. With that loss of memory, in the context of a century that had seen pragmatism become vulgar pragmatism (Kaplan), professors and scholars no longer profess or include communication as a theory of social action informed by power and its drama in human experience. From forgotten annual reviews of the literature to textbooks with sometimes less than a theory chapter, we face unarticulated decisions to wrap up the range of conceptual practices and possibilities. Perhaps crossroad works like Dance's, and Park's & Burgess's before that, create threads, if only thin threads, from one academic generation to the next as industry and their symbiotic relationships with Ph.D. programs heavily invest in administrative, corporate research. Even as they may have attempted to maintain that critical distance vital to owning the means of inquiry (Schiller 1989; Smythe 1981), the "power academy" re-remembers through its own lenses, forsaking independently generated theories of communication for literally rewarding reproductions of prevailing norms and practices. There, "critique" within acceptable limits engraves the power of symbols and limitations on their power. Hugh Duncan's work was a consistent reprise of that fact as it professed a theory of communication that would take symbolic interactionism into a recurring articulation of power in society.

It remains, of course, purely an agenda item to associate the range from philosophical pragmatism to symbolic interactionism with a communication theory capable of addressing issues of power in society. Duncan's word is not the last word, of course, and it is a controversial set of claims, to say the least. The significance of the idea of "communication" did not for the pragmatists and original symbolic interactionists depend on a discipline or a field of study, itself a refreshing situation. The general orientation was an effort to account for the ways in which society re-creates itself within the confines of, or with the burdens of, or, as Duncan would have it, through the making of history. His reviews of symbolic interactionism managed to situate the question of symbols within a framework of the genetic production and persistent reproduction of order as the contest of power among hierarchically connected individuals and groups, including those he considered enjoying equality with one another. Why that effort to bring power to acts of communication should have been forgotten as a symbolic interactionist's *desideratum* is itself an interesting matter for the intellectual historian of communication studies. That may help explain Duncan's status today as a forgotten or, at best, minor theorist of communication in the American symbolic interactionist tradition.

Critically Appropriating Duncan's Critique Today

While we should revisit Duncan's work to reincorporate a discussion of power, a critical appropriation is worth pursuing. Duncan himself would approve, of course, insofar as he did the same. Today, the project to understand communication in relation to power is, actually, well underway, with the aid of some of Duncan's favourite sources, but in Europe more so than in America. Where Duncan discovered eyes blind to "form" emergent in the symbolic act, others might well see Duncan retreating from power on the score of sheer expressibility. For Duncan insisted that "our knowledge of the systems of expressions" is limited to those expressions (1962, 4). He distrusted reductions to non-communicative realms "so familiar in the work of Freud, Marx, Frazer, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Pareto, and Durkheim" (Duncan 1962, 90). He closed the door on the possibility that symbolic practices can be levelled or systematically suppressed by processes beyond our ken, beyond our ability to symbolise what's happening or has happened. In this, Duncan joins a range of theoretical perspectives adhering to the principle that we can tell all that we know, including, ironically, the logical positivist. In the end, Duncan, too, remains the optimist in a forgotten strain of American communication theory. But he is a wiser optimist than most: Power must never be confused with symbolic content. Symbolic form – its structuring of relations – is Duncan's key. Yet the forms of power appear to require more than this to become available to the symbol by any account.

Moreover, Duncan's communication theory restricts ideas of democracy to the American experience. This is to be expected, since power is truncated to the culture of its articulation. Other theorists of democracy who are, arguably especially to American ears, also theorists of communication and democracy – Marx and even Lenin (Lenin) – find their status as "enemies of democracy," through faint praise: "Pareto, like Marx, Engels, and Lenin, have *more* to tell us about the ills of democracy than do our friends (Duncan 1969, 113). The point resonates to contemporary ears in ways Duncan no doubt had anticipated, but, as is the life of the dramatic

symbol, it redefines in history. Then and now, Duncan typified one strain of the American symbolic interactionist and pragmatist traditions in spite of efforts at times to the contrary: a horizon limited by the culture of reproducing symbolic practices already underway, contests notwithstanding. It is the progressivists' blind spot on the matter of power.

To invite reading all perspectives, but to be suspicious of the notion that symbolic life can at the same time be systematically constrained life outside our symbolic view underplays, among other ineffables, sheer economic and political power exercised, so to speak, outside the purview of – or, as Habermas (1970) put it when introducing the theory of symbolic action for the first time in English, "over the heads of" practices of participation and other forms of experience. One wonders what Duncan would have made of efforts to link American pragmatism and symbolic interaction from the direction of German theories of society, where one major work seems already to have taken a cue from Duncan without mentioning him. There, social structure is not only symbolic expression and action, but is often beyond symbolic veils. There, "system complexity … outflanks traditional forms of life, it attacks the communicative infrastructure," requiring "a reflexive sociology" that, because it is required, shows that there is much we do not and cannot see, that, in order to bring into symbolic view the hiddenness of power in history and in daily symbolic actions, meaning without consequence to power is a real experience, too (Habermas 1987, 375). The role of symbols in social order still required a larger circle of theoretical friends than Duncan seemed willing to allow, and it required a revision of roles inside, so to speak, the interactionists' conceptual universe. As we remember Duncan's call to bring power to the theory of communication, this revisiting no doubt will insist that all action is not communicative action.

The argument to embrace a symbolic interactionist framework is mediated today from outside and within American culture. Themes of power stand alongside reductions of all societal dramas to literary forms (see Bernstein 1990, for this debate). Still, the argument can benefit from remembering Duncan's criticisms against as well as affirmative arguments for the communicative act as a constituent of hierarchy. Above all, Duncan taught us to use American symbolic interactionist theory and philosophical pragmatism to treat power as a central focus of communication theory. Such an effort, he always maintained, was the communication theorist's claim to the analysis of democracy from an interaction point of view. The argument on behalf of a view of democracy is not only a forgotten dimension of Duncan's communication theory; that argument reminds us of the vast disparity between this communication theory and the practice of democracy in Duncan's preferred country of origin. As he complained about the loss of an interactive dimension to the study of communication, he no doubt today would extend the complaint to the erosion of democratic participation.

These are the starting points for communication theory. On the score of participation, symbolic interactionism may discover that Marxist analysis has been "friendly" all along to an understanding of symbolic action in relation to social order. The last line of Duncan's *Communication and Social Order* expresses what Duncan attempted to unpack in several volumes: "We must return the study of man in society to a study of communication, for how we communicate determines how we relate as human beings" (Duncan 1962, 438). In 2006, such a return will not be sufficient given developments in what remains a set of marginalised theories of communica-

tion which attempts to connect democracy to communication and communication to power. Habermas brought Mead and Dewey into the German rationalist and Marxist traditions to include, rather than to exclude (Habermas 1991, 2002); Hans Joas was pivotal for the recognition in German sociology of George Herbert Mead and John Dewey as philosophers providing conceptual correctives to some of the excesses that even Duncan had mentioned in his own work, while stressing themes of authority, hierarchy, and democracy (Joas 1997, 2000); Karl-Otto Apel was significant for shifting the debates over forms of reason and the conduct of metascience, through analyses of Piece's symbolic analyses tied to human interaction (Apel 1975). All attempt to remind us that the history and evolution of societies is part of the story of form and symbol, a story that systematically for all of us lies outside the purview of experience even as experience is inevitably interpreted symbolically in the course of one's biography. These developments suggest again that, to deal with power systematically and more historically, another specific relation besides the relation of symbol to form must be incorporated into interactionist theories of communication: The relation of symbol to the unoverviewability of history is a real experience in the lifeworld, the wider society, and in academic efforts, to supply meaning. To the extent that part of our experience is due to the hiddenness of history, we find that all symbolising activity is not, in Dewey's word, "consummated" (McLuskie 2001). Rather than reject Freud or Marx for their assertions that the human experience includes states or acts of ignorance – expressed but never fully enough as reflections on compulsion beyond the symboliser's control and understanding – theirs is a rich explanation for Dewey's and Duncan's valuable insight that experience yearns and tends toward consummation. Duncan was quite correct to assert that in the experience of consummation, in the ordering of communication, authority is exercised and maintained. The question is always on behalf of whom. The tougher question is who get to become aware. The even tougher question is whether awareness has, in a favourite word of the pragmatist, "consequence."

Symbolic Interactionism and Democracy: An Unsettled Legacy

Duncan declared his work to have worked "in favor of democracy as the best form of hierarchy, because it minimised the power of priestly mystification which so often arises when authority is grounded in some kind of supernatural power" (Duncan 1962, 437). In 2006, a century after an inaugural movement to be known as "symbolic interactionism" offered a theory of society, friendly critics might well argue that a symbolic perspective on communication and society has, with Duncan and his American predecessors, imprisoned the notion of hierarchy within the symbolic act. That is itself a reduction, a powerful strain in the history of social theory. As Duncan spent much of his time criticising reductionism for the automatic features assigned to nature, human nature in nature's image, and in flights from nature into mysterious idealisms that Duncan saw leading to fascist utopian ideals, a reductive move is difficult to shake off here. Theorists of communication may return to Duncan's work for one of the few examples of suspicion within symbolic interactionism on the question of power and how to approach the notions of form and order as symbolic acts.

The idea that communicative interaction is the expression of democracy – both

factually and counterfactually – is today's pragmatist legacy. Duncan is a significant contributor, thorough in his presentation of the intellectual-practical story of an experiment yet really to be run by any country on the planet. That fact is both within and outside the purview of symbolic action, even as political movements demand – symbolically – otherwise. A key test for the pragmatic theory of communication is realising the consequences of actions, plans that, even if unrealised, spur the interaction called "communication." Yet the pragmatists warned that habit is the face of failures to see and to attempt to see, that blind action is a dimension of the human condition. There, the blind spot requires both the light of Duncan's work and the critique of pragmatism that brought the communication theory of society to a critical theory of society, by demanding a central role for communication in theories ranging from Marx to Dewey. Its defining notions are participation and action as interaction. The challenge is to take Duncan and Burke's human drama more decisively into theories of democracy. The price may well be treating, as Duncan did, equality as hierarchy. To give up that required notion inherent in an American progressivism that flourished in the Midwestern United States where Duncan studied and did his work would be a major shift. To move symbolic interaction beyond progressive politics may be the key problem, and requires taking lessons from, for example, Freud's idea that the struggle to bring into view that which was systematically hidden is primary (see the discussion of Freud in McCarthy 1978). Even Burke, Duncan said but let drop, held that "a communicative context . . . is not wholly verbal," allowing for a non-communicative set of actions or processes that "have a nature of their own" (Duncan 1962, 109).

One of his students tried to remind sociologists and communication scholars of Duncan's work, especially because his communication theory of society "deals directly with the influence of power on symbolic interaction" (Malhotra 1979). That was his contribution and may be seen as his albatross, now the risk of a nevertheless sympathetic debate within a symbolic theory of society cast as a critical theory of society. Whether the European analysis incorporating symbolic interactionism and pragmatism survives in both Europe and America; whether the next wave of academic textbooks features them and the debates that accompany such attempts at cross-fertilisation; and whether anyone beyond the academy takes an interest; these, too, are conditions of the relation between acts of communication to hierarchy, authority, and power.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Communication and Peace

2007 EURICOM Colloquium on Communication and Culture
In cooperation with
World Association for Christian Communication
Piran (Slovenia), September 13-15, 2007

Communication and Peace is the topic of the September 2007 EURICOM colloquium in Piran, Slovenia. In a world divided by ideological, ethnic, and economic conflicts, communication functions as a vital means of exchanging ideas, addressing frictions, and settling hostilities. The colloquium invites participants to consider forms and functions of communication in the process of negotiating peace, to question the role of media in the (re)production of conflicts and their resolutions, and to reflect on the importance of dialogue in making sense of disharmony and producing closure. Who are the partners in communication and how do they use language (or imagery) to succeed or fail in their quest for peace and how does the process of communication unfold in local, national, or international arenas of human conflict?

The colloquium is dedicated to the memory of Michael Traber, a co-founder of Euricom and Editor of Media Development, who devoted his life to the idea of peace and communication.

Suggestions for papers are invited until January 15, 2007; final papers are due by July 15, 2007.

Send abstracts or any requests for further information to:

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