

## CHAPTER 18

# ORGANIZATIONS AND THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

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SOCIOLOGY'S interest in organizations is customarily traced to three sources: the Harvard-based human relations school, the Weberian tradition descending from Parsons through Merton at Columbia, and the more formal and economic approach associated with March and Simon at Carnegie Tech. Omitted from these lineages is the dominant body of sociological thinking in the inter-war period, the Chicago School.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, organizations play a small role in the canonical image of Chicago sociology. This absence did not involve any lack of interest in social organization more broadly, about which the Chicagoans wrote a great deal. But by 'social organization' they meant 'the organizing of social life': a gerund rather than a noun, a process rather than a thing. The study of fixed pieces of social structure such as bureaucracies and other formally enacted groups was not for the Chicagoans a separately delineated body of inquiry. They wrote about such things, as we shall see,

<sup>1</sup> Because this chapter refers to dozens of works, it could easily have consisted largely of bibliography. But I have listed only central or specifically quoted works. Where published versions of dissertations exist, I have used the published title rather than the dissertation title. Finally, to my knowledge, the only prior work on the topic of the Chicago School and organizations is Burns (1980). For some contemporary work explicitly in the Chicago theoretical tradition, see the various essays in Abbott (2001).

but not under the guise in which they are now familiar to us, as 'organizations' in the sense of given entities.

In this chapter I shall first sketch the Chicago School and the organizational world it confronted. I then turn to social and formal organization as they actually appear in the Chicagoans' writings. I close with a discussion of the lessons organization theory today might take from the Chicago sociological tradition.

## 18.1. SCHOOL AND MOMENT

The Chicago School was the dominant voice in American sociology from the 1890s until World War II. Already declining in the late 1930s, it was eclipsed in the war and post-war period by the 'grand theory' and survey-based sociology associated with Harvard and Columbia. The emerging orthodoxy came to view Chicago sociology and its descendants in characteristically political terms as a 'loyal opposition'. It was indeed this opposition status that led the inheritors of the Chicago tradition to decide that there had been such a thing as a Chicago School and to begin to write its history.

According to most versions of that history, the Chicago School proper endured from 1915 to 1935 and comprised Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and a remarkable group of their graduate students whose dissertation books remain compelling reading today. Chicago sociology was rooted in three things: the Park and Burgess textbook of 1921 with its processual view of the social world, the concept of the city as a laboratory, and a methodology of direct, personal involvement with that laboratory via anything from ethnography to institutional analysis.

We now know that these Chicago themes began not with Park and Burgess but with the founders of Chicago sociology, Albion Small and Charles Richmond Henderson, and their first generation of students, in particular George Vincent and W. I. Thomas. In Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, published 1918–21 in five volumes, the Chicago School had a symbolically central work: substantively important, comprehensively theoretical, universally read, and enormously influential. It was indeed the reading of Thomas and Znaniecki that inspired the great students of the 1920s.

I shall therefore here use 'the Chicago School' to label the entire tradition of Chicago sociological thinking from Small and Henderson in the 1890s up through Thomas to Park, Burgess, and their students in the 1920s. All these had a unified and fairly cohesive view of social life. Social life consisted not of structures and roles and norms, but of groups and processes, perpetually pushing on each other in contact, conflict, and accommodation. Social facts were always local in time

and space, always shaped or even determined by their context. Social organization, disorganization, and reorganization were perpetual processes, and groups were in perpetual turnover and transformation. 'The world', in the ringing phrase of the Chicagoans' philosopher colleague George Herbert Mead, 'is a world of events.'

The Chicagoans' methodological insistence on studying social life up close makes it puzzling that there are no works focused on bureaucracy and formal organizations in the usually accepted Chicago canon. After all, formal organization and bureaucratic experience were beginning to reach into average American life by the 1920s via postal banking, income taxes, military service, and vehicle registration. Yet average American experience remained free of formal organization. One-third of America's workers worked on farms, which averaged only 2.13 workers in 1920. The average 1920 textile establishment had only 130 workers, most of whom would have been subcontracted by foremen. Nor were non-work aspects of daily experience much more bureaucratized. In 1920, only 65 percent of children ages 5 to 19 were in school, and there remained over 190,000 one-teacher public schools. Most of the nation's 30,000 banks were small, local affairs. There was no health insurance beyond a few union and workplace programs.

By contrast, after World War II well over half the labor force could recall spending the war years in giant organizations: 16.5 million of them in the military, 19 million in large-scale war industries, and 3 million in the war-swollen federal government. Upwards of 70 percent of military-age white males enjoyed GI Bill benefits through the rapidly growing Veterans Administration, Housing and Urban Development, and other government bureaucracies. In the National Labor Relations Board, the New Deal had spawned an agency directly impacting the daily life of the majority of American workers. Bureaucratic employment regimes were now the norm, and unionization was rapidly increasing nationwide. The spread of health insurance and home ownership brought more and more of the population under the rule of claims, mortgages, and payments. That post-war America was such an extraordinarily bureaucratized society makes it unsurprising that bureaucracy and formal organization should then become focal topics of sociology. Modern organization theory grew and developed in that era because the thing it studied grew and developed in that era.

The relative absence of bureaucracy and formal organization from the Chicago canon may thus reflect their relative absence from American life during the heyday of the Chicago School. But on closer inspection, this argument fails. Chicagoans were prescient about urban disorganization, consumption patterns, ethnic and racial conflict, and revolutions in communications. Why did they miss bureaucracy and formal organization? As early as 1905, there were twenty-three railroads employing at least 10,000 employees apiece, ranging up to the Pennsylvania Railroad's 165,000 workers. Manufacturing concerns like the Ford Motor Company, Western Electric, and US Steel employed tens of thousands of workers

apiece. The countryside was dotted with state-sponsored formal organizations such as prisons, universities, and mental hospitals. And government employment was enormous, from the hundreds of thousands working for the post office and for the military to the tens of thousands working for various state and local governments.

Moreover, the Chicago sociologists had large organizations right on their doorstep. In the 1920 census over half of Chicago's 403,942 manufacturing workers worked in the 259 establishments with over 250 workers apiece, and more than one-quarter in the forty-one establishments with over a thousand workers apiece. Indeed, Western Electric's Hawthorne works had passed 25,000 employees in 1917. The City of Chicago itself had 34,604 employees in 1923, its Board of Education alone employing 11,097 teachers for 452,257 students. The Archdiocese of Chicago, whose thousands of clergy ministered in 1915 to over a million Roman Catholics in 215 parishes, ran in addition dozens of hospitals and homes, hundreds of schools, academies, and colleges, and two universities. No one can say that Chicago lacked large organizations for the Chicago sociologists to study!

It turns out that on close inspection the Chicago School did indeed write a great deal about organizations. As we shall see, that work disappeared from the history of organization theory largely because the human relations school writers—Elton Mayo and Lloyd Warner in particular—seem to have consciously decided to set Chicago sociology aside. But the Chicagoans also connived at their own dismissal. For the post-war Chicagoans embraced their opposition status in sociology by founding their identity completely on the urban field research tradition, thereby themselves ignoring the important body of work their own predecessors had done on organization and organizations.

It is that work I aim to recover here. Because the Chicagoans lacked an explicit theory of organizations, it is useful to bear in mind, as we reread their work, three families of themes that can organize our reading: (1) static aspects of the interiors of organizations, (2) diachronic aspects of single organizations, and (3) aspects of relations among organizations. Under the first of these headings come topics like organization structure, line and staff issues, and executive function and decision making, as well as informal organization, the irrationality of bureaucracy, and the specific problem of professionals in bureaucracies. Under the second come the various versions of institutionalism, both the paleo-institutionalism of Selznick and the neo-institutionalism of Meyer. The focus on mimicry in the latter bridges directly to the third general family of themes, on relations among organizations. Under this heading come analyses of organizational fields and ecology, on the one hand, and of resource dependency—relation to external supports—on the other.

As we seek those themes in Chicago work, we shall find World War I a sharp dividing line, partly because of the war's own impact on American thinking about organizations, but more because the war marked the intellectual defeat of

progressivism. Intimately linked with progressivism, pre-war social science derived much of its unity from its politics. The defeat of this unifying force led to sharper disciplinary lines as foundations invested in disciplinary social science, as the disciplines themselves matured, and as the new emphasis on 'science' made interdisciplinary differences more explicit (see Haber 1964; Ross 1991: ch. 10). All these forces mean that the pre-war and post-war constellations of 'organizational' ideas were quite different.

## 18.2. ORGANIZATIONS IN CHICAGO REFORM ERA SOCIOLOGY

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In early social science, the themes just sketched out—static organizational analysis, dynamic and institutional analysis, and analysis of external organizational relations and fields—are scattered in various places. There is, to be sure, a literature on what by 1920 was called 'business administration' that had taken shape shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. This literature, which falls under the first of my themes, typically took a principal's eye view of the problem of structuring and running a business organization. It was to this audience that scientific management was in the first instance addressed. But there were other areas where organizational issues were debated, and two were particularly central in sociology: municipal and civil service reform and management-labor relations. The political slant of these literatures should be clear. Sociology's early view of organizations was thoroughly reformist, as the discontinuity between Taylorism and the sociological literature on management-labor relations makes clear. To be sure, as Haber (1964) and Nyland (1996) have shown, scientific management had its own ties to reformism and even at times to organized labor during the years before World War I. But scientific management had little impact in sociology: in the first thirty years of the *American Journal of Sociology*, only six articles have the word 'efficiency' in their titles.

In the eyes of pre-World War I social science, therefore, the issues that we think of as 'organizational' were largely perceived through the reform agenda. On these issues, the primary writers at Chicago, as elsewhere in academia, were outside the sociology department. Charles Merriam of Chicago's political science department wrote a definitive analysis of municipal financial systems in 1906 and a classic description of primary elections as political institutions in 1908. Merriam's position as a reform alderman made him Chicago's foremost authority on organization in government. On capital and labor issues, the leading Chicago

writers were in economics. Department chair J. Laurence Laughlin's text gave a cursory handling of the labor question as a part of 'Descriptive Political Economy', but his younger colleague Thorstein Veblen's 1904 work on the theory of business enterprise coupled its revolutionary analysis of the new finance capitalism with an analysis of the impact of the machine process on workers. After Veblen left, his follower R. F. Hoxie wrote a long string of articles on labor issues from 1907 onward, culminating in a celebrated report of 1916 that condemned scientific management.

Within the sociology department, the chief writer on 'organizations' was neither Small, the general social theorist, nor Thomas, the social psychologist, but rather Charles Richmond Henderson, the Christian reformer. Henderson's explicit combination of religion and reformism with social theory has exiled him from the list of sociological classics, but in fact he wrote an enormous amount about organizational issues.

Like most of the Chicago sociologists, Henderson located what we now call organizations as one among many types of 'institutions'. The concept of institutions was general at the time, denoting any body of social behavior or structure dedicated to carrying out what we would now call a function of society. 'Crescive institutions' were our 'naturally-evolved' institutions like the family and the legal system, while 'enacted institutions' were our 'organizations' (more properly, 'organizational forms', see Sumner 1906: 53-4). Henderson was extremely explicit about organizational matters when he chose. He discusses in detail the advantages and disadvantages of various ways to administer charity in *The Needy and their Problem: An Introduction to the Study of the Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes* (1893). Although Henderson does not see the topic as a theoretically unified body of inquiry, he considers a wide range of internal, synchronic organizational matters, embedding them within a reformist, evolutionary rhetoric that expects 'efficient' bureaucracy to solve most problems. In *Modern Methods of Charity*, a 1904 collection covering charity policies and systems in eighteen countries, Henderson (1904: 439 ff.) provides a detailed analysis of the function of charity organization societies. These precursors of modern social work were essentially coordination systems, bringing together relief organizations and needy clients. They should in Henderson's view not only identify needs, connect individuals with services, and sort out imposters but also organize services where they are lacking, pressure employers to provide welfare, and further the cause of municipal reform. Henderson was thus proposing a model of coordination that was neither the market coordination being extolled by the rising discipline of economics nor the bureaucratic rule structure of the continental systems of charity (ibid. 36 ff.), but something in between. We now know that this coordination would ultimately be turned into a professional expertise—social work—rather than an organizational form, losing its reformism in the process. But Henderson pre-dates this shift and hence proposes the charity

organization societies as a model of a new organizational form combining rationality and 'morality' (that is, benevolence), and working not only to coordinate activities across complex boundaries but also to educate both the givers and the receivers of charity in the process. As an argument about social organization, this was sophisticated indeed.

Henderson's colleague Albion Small was less specific about organizations. Small and Vincent's textbook of 1894 took an evolutionist viewpoint, following 'the natural history of a society' from the family on the farm to the village, the town, and the city. In this, it followed the near universal experience of late nineteenth-century Americans. But the rest of the work was—in contemporary terms—largely functionalist and ignored organizations. Elsewhere, indeed, Small was at some pains to deny the reality of organizations altogether. There was only process:

Association is activity, not locality. Like states of consciousness, it has to be known in terms of process, not in dimensions of space. (1905: 505)

Institutions are but the shell of social activities. Analysis of them simply as institutions is necessary; but that sort of analysis is merely a step toward more real analysis of the place which they actually occupy in working social arrangements, and of the social content which their operation actually secures. (1905: 529–30)

That further analysis led Small to some quite radical strictures on capitalists ('The social problem of the twentieth century is whether the civilized nations can restore themselves to sanity after their nineteenth-century aberrations of individualism and capitalism', 1914: 440). But it never led him to investigate the nature of organizations for their own sake.

A more intimate sense of the early Chicago thinking about organizations comes from the dissertations done under Small and Henderson.<sup>2</sup> Of the thirty-one available, nine have some relevance to organizations.

Four of these are organizational censuses, three of them within communities. C. J. Bushnell's 1902 dissertation analyzes the stockyards community, giving as its main organizational content a discussion of the butchering and meat-processing system itself, which is compared to the military. Yet the welfare aspects of meat-packing firms are also discussed as are the churches and other local organizations. J. M. Gillette's 1901 dissertation discusses the various organizations in a steel community, with an interesting discussion of the 'straw boss' system of hiring and

<sup>2</sup> The department lacks a single master list of dissertations. The most comprehensive count (one including dissertations under Henderson in the Divinity School as well as in sociology) is forty-one dissertations before 1916. Of these, ten have disappeared. Among the others, I have scanned all with any relevance to organizations. The latter portion of the paper concerns dissertations up to 1935. I scanned all dissertations in that period (about another seventy) with possible relevance to organizations. I have also referred to a number of works generally taken to be in the Chicago canon that are not dissertations, e.g. Donovan's *The Saleslady* and Anderson's *The Hobo*.

a complete community census of churches, schools, fraternal and secret organizations, and so on. F. G. Cressey's (1903) dissertation is a questionnaire-based exploratory survey of the churches' methods for reaching young men. All three of these show an awareness of organizations and even to some extent of the ecology of organizations in a community. But that awareness is not central to their understanding of the organizations, which are seen mainly in terms of successful or unsuccessful performance, following the usual reform standard of 'efficiency'. 'Inefficiency', at least implicitly, was what would later be called 'bureaucratic irrationality' and under that name would obsess the literature on informal and formal relations in bureaucracy in the 1950s and 1960s. These dissertations thus combine work in the first and last of my thematic families: internal organizational functioning and interorganizational ecology.

A 'census' of a different kind is Fleming's 1906 study of all the magazines ever published in Chicago up to his time of writing. Although Fleming sees the issues that would later preoccupy Glenn Carroll and colleagues—the basics of organizational ecology—he provides only the statistics (on durations and foundings). He does not really conceive of the spread of magazines in the abstract as the development of an organization form or of an organizational population.

By contrast with all of these, the dissertations of Hannah Clark, Hector MacPherson, Samuel Reep, and Edwin Sutherland are recognizably modern organizational analyses. Clark's 1897 study of the Chicago school system recognizes the importance of organization charts and the flow of political power both through and around that structure. The problem of professionals (teachers) in organizations is also clearly recognized as such (Clark points out how teachers waste their time on 'elaborate bookkeeping'). The analysis of resource dependence is particularly interesting, the schools being supported partly by taxes under political control and partly by rental income from an enormous but decreasing real estate endowment. Hector Macpherson's 1910 analysis of the cooperative credit associations in the province of Quebec is an explicit study of the spread of an organizational form. Like many early dissertations, it bears the sign of progressivism; Macpherson clearly wants such associations to spread in the United States. But there is much attention to how and why a particular organizational form can work in a particular organizational and community environment.

With Samuel Reep's 1910 dissertation we come to an explicitly theoretical organizational analysis. Its title, 'The Organization of the Ecclesiastical Institutions of a Metropolitan Community', nicely captures the Chicagoans' processual use of the word 'organization', as opposed to their use of 'institution' where we would use 'organization'. Not only does Reep provide a denominational history of the city, he couples this with a questionnaire-based analysis of the politics, institutional activities, ecclesiastical and lay charities, and Sunday schools of the dozens of denominations in Chicago. He concludes with a theoretical chapter on 'ecclesiastical

organization and the social process'. In that chapter, he argues that ecclesiastical structures that are dogmatic and centralized tend to be controlled by the past and by distant communities. Religious professionals in them acquire specific interests of their own in preservation of structure, and the means (the structure) gradually becomes an end in itself. This conflicts with the adaptability of the larger structure to new situations and places. This is a purely theoretical, thoroughly modern, argument about organizations.

Finally, Edwin Sutherland's (1914) thesis studies the entire field of employment agencies nationwide, explicitly contrasting public and private agencies in terms of their clientele, missions, internal organization, and political determinants. Although Sutherland touches only lightly on internal matters, his analysis of the ecologies of these organizations, their competitive nature and their various resource dependencies is truly extraordinary. Sutherland is particularly deft in his discussion of unanticipated consequences and of the conflicts between trade-based unionism and the inter-occupational mobility necessary to effective placement of the unemployed and between locally provided relief and the need for inter-local mobility. Although not explicitly theoretical, his discussion is of an extraordinary, quite modern analytical subtlety.<sup>3</sup>

Like the work of the professors who supervised them, these dissertations betray a number of common themes vis-à-vis organizations. Although the synchronic issues of organizational chart irrationalities make an occasional appearance, the focus is much more on dynamics: institutionalization, ossification, change, and evolution. The second of my three families of themes (institutional dynamics) dominates, along with a considerable admixture of the third theme (interorganizational relations).

It is important to note, too, that with the exception of Bushnell's dissertation on the stockyards, Emory Bogardus's (1912) on industrial fatigue, and Sutherland's on employment organizations none of these early dissertations is even remotely about work and industry. The main organizations with which Chicagoans were concerned were those of charity and the city. Small was concerned with capitalism, but only abstractly, and he supervised no empirical work. The empiricist was Henderson, whose prime interest was charity organization. This is perhaps another reason for the invisibility of the Chicago tradition in later organizational analysis. The dominant organization of the post-World War II literature was the large corporation, whereas the organizational writings of the Chicago School mostly concerned non-commercial organizations—churches, employment agencies, schools, libraries, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> A good indicator of the loss of the Chicago organization tradition is the fact that Peter Blau's 1955 classic *Dynamics of Bureaucracy*, an internal synchronic study of one employment agency, does not cite Sutherland.

### 18.3. WAR AND TRANSITION

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The 1910s were a period of great transition, both nationally and for Chicago sociology. Nationally, the decade brought the fruition of progressive urban reform in the commission/manager form of government and the concurrent triumph of civil service bureaucratization over machine politics (Schiesl 1977). By contrast, after a sudden vogue early in the decade, scientific management had relaxed after Taylor's 1915 death into a less visionary, more business-oriented program for industrial management (Haber 1964). Thus were the great foci of progressive thinking about organizations settled into the more comfortable framework of 'efficient management,' losing their connection with democracy and liberalism in the process. The war effort itself was viewed as a triumph of economic management, providing strong models for business in the 1920s. The 1919 Boston Police Strike and the echoes of the Russian Revolution brought a brief red scare. Politics moved decidedly to the right.

At Chicago too there were great changes, both in structure and in personnel. The crucial structural change was the founding of the School of Social Service Administration (SSA). SSA combined two ventures. One of these was the 'philanthropic section' of the College of Commerce and Administration (PSCCA; the college would later become the Graduate School of Business). This was a major for undergraduates planning to enter social work or charity administration, a major whose very existence testifies to the interest of the pre-war sociology department in organizations. Virtually all of the sociology faculty were on the PSCCA masthead, although Henderson and Bedford contributed the most courses. But PSCCA also involved extensive courses from political economy (Marshall and Hoxie) and political science (Merriam and Freund). The other ingredient of SSA was the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy (CSCP), a free-standing school dating from 1908 and run, to all intents and purposes, by Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, who were simultaneously long-standing Hull House reformers and Ph.D. faculty of the university in Household Administration and Sociology, respectively. SSA embodied the transition of social work from radical organizational form to delimited professional expertise.

The founding of SSA was closely tied to personnel changes in the sociology department. Charles Henderson died in 1915, and W. I. Thomas—another reform stalwart—was fired in 1918. That left Robert Park and Ernest Burgess as the dominant figures in the department, both of them inclined to 'scientize' sociology and loosen ties with reform. There had been changes elsewhere as well. In economics, a dominant voice of institutionalism was removed when Robert Hoxie committed suicide in 1916; Frank Knight, who would dominate the department intellectually, was much closer to the mainstream (Ross 1991: 424 ff.). In political science, recent graduate Leonard White emerged as the key voice on municipal institutions. Unlike

Merriam, he was not a reformer but a technocrat. This transition at Chicago echoed that of the social sciences nationally, as a generation without the unifying force of progressivism began to settle their research practices into a more permanently differentiated academic establishment.

In this new division of academic labor, a topic that did not go to the sociologists was organizations. The study of municipal bureaucracy at Chicago was, as elsewhere, located firmly in the department of political science, where it was dominated by Leonard White, who played the scientist to Merriam's continuing reformism. As late as 1933, Merriam was still hoping for a visionary reorganization of Chicago on a regional basis, but the younger White's masterful study of city managers (1926) was a more measured, dispassionate work. White's 1925 survey of morale in Chicago municipal employees is a recognizably modern analysis of a classic organizational problem, little different from Michel Crozier's book on French *fonctionnaires* forty years later.

Studies of work and industry (or of capital/labor, to give the area its progressive name) were located even more firmly in the department of political economy, which changed its name to economics in this decade. Coming to Chicago in the same year as Hoxie's death, Harry Millis in effect replaced Hoxie with another institutionalist labor economist. Millis's students produced a number of important dissertation studies in the 1920s: for example, on the Chicago Labor Federation (T. C. Bigham, 1925), on industrial relations in the Chicago building trades (R. E. Montgomery, 1927), on the Illinois State Federation of Labor (E. Staley, 1930), and on black workers in the slaughterhouses (A. Herbst, 1930). All of these are rich, finely textured ethnographic accounts of their topics, combined with quantitative and, in Herbst's case, extensive demographic analysis. To the modern reader, they look like the work the Chicago School sociologists could have done on industrial workers, but did not.

The theoretical side of this inquiry was also located in the economics department, where L. C. Marshall published in 1921 an enormous reader (*Business Administration*) in exactly the same format (and even the same typefaces) as Park and Burgess's famous *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* of the same year. This was Marshall's third such work; the first was an elementary economics reader in 1913 patterned after W. I. Thomas's *Source Book for Social Origins*, the second an enormous compendium of institutionalist economics (*Industrial Society*) in 1918. Marshall was thus the university's mainstream business administration theorist through this period.

Thus, the dominant topical areas in which organization concepts had been discussed during the progressive era fell in the post-war period into the jurisdiction of other departments. It is likely that the Chicago experience was paralleled at Columbia and other major training institutions. Indeed, the closeness of pre-war Chicago social science to reform may have kept Chicago sociologists closer to organizational topics than their peers. And in the event, a surprising amount of Chicago

School research in the 1920s bears on topics that today lie within organizational studies. It is to that research that I now turn.

#### 18.4. THE PARK-BURGESS CHICAGO SCHOOL AND ORGANIZATIONS

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Students of the Chicago School examined a wide variety of organizations during the 1920s. They did not have a concept of 'organizations' per se, but they moved away from the absolute processualism of Small and began to recognize particular organizations as important entities, even though, as we shall see, their basic conception of these entities remained fundamentally dynamic.

The new faculty leaders had different interests from Small, Henderson, and Thomas. Robert Park was fascinated by the city as a phenomenon and in particular by the mixing of different cultures and races, by questions about communication both symbolic and practical, and by what we would now call the cultural structure—both emergent and individual—of the consumer society taking shape in that decade. Ernest Burgess was interested in the family and more broadly in how individuals evolved through the life course in the social world of modernity. Both of them seized on ecological metaphors to understand these various processes, with a consequent emphasis on geography, social location, and typical sequences of contact, conflict, and other social processes.

Chicago students were also strongly influenced by the teaching of Ellsworth Faris, who insisted on the detailed reading of Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. 'Organization'—in the Chicago sense of 'the task of organizing'—played a crucial theoretical role throughout that work. Social organization, disorganization, and reorganization were for Thomas continuous processes, happening at all times in all societies. Yet in this world of flux, Thomas was by no means silent on the topic of what we today would call organizations. The first part of volume 2 of *The Polish Peasant* contained long sections on the press and cooperative institutions in Poland, while the latter part (on America) discussed local organizations such as churches and the press, as well as more national organizations such as the Socialist Alliance and the Polish National Alliance. In the Wladek life history that concluded volume 2, literally dozens of workplaces and their internal structure (in Poland, where Wladek was an itinerant baker) were described. These organizations were, however, not judged in terms of their own internal logic, but in terms of their relation to their constituents, employees, and objects. In this sense, *The Polish Peasant* was continuous with much of the industrial psychology literature contemporaneous with it, only far more theoretically grounded and

empirically broad. (The Hawthorne researchers' discovery of the embeddedness of work in society would not have surprised them had they bothered to read *The Polish Peasant*.)

The work for which the Chicago School is most prominently known comprises the dissertations written in this stimulating intellectual environment. Broadly speaking, there were three kinds of dissertations that touch on organizations: about kinds of events, about types of people, and about types of social institutions.

#### 18.4.1. Dissertations on Types of Events

Dissertations about kinds of events are exemplified by works such as E. T. Hiller's *The Strike* (1928) and Lyford Edwards's *The Natural History of Revolution* (1927). Such dissertations located themselves absolutely within the department's processual world-view; as Edwards's title implies, both works are structured around the typical sequence of occurrences in the larger events they describe. Focused on images, beliefs, activities, and social control, Edwards's book says nothing about the organization of revolutionary groups beyond scattered comments on topics such as mobs, control of the military, and reformist organization of illegal governments. Hiller's analysis, by contrast, regularly pairs analysis of the symbolic and emotional unfolding of strikes with analysis of their organizational sources and consequences: organizations make and are made by the process of striking. Another dissertation loosely of this type—focusing on historical change—is John Mueller's 'The Automobile' (1928), which studies the effects of the automobile on traditional means of social control (e.g. illicit sex becomes easier because people can easily cross city lines). Aside from considering the new forms of social control aiming at these new forms of social disorganization, Mueller says little about organizations per se. In general, the 'event' dissertations are not strong contributors to the Chicago 'organizations' tradition.

#### 18.4.2. Dissertations on Types of People

Organizations in the modern sense play only a slightly larger role in the large collection of Chicago work on types of people. Dissertations such as Samuel Kincheloe's 'The Prophet' (1929) and Everett Stonequist's 'The Marginal Man' (1930) work out the details of certain positions in the social structure, but do not study the organized section of that structure from which marginal men and prophets are excluded. Organizations are similarly tangential in the long (and famous) list of Chicago works about deviant types and social problems: Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* (1923), Ruth Cavan's *Suicide* (1928), Clifford Shaw's *The Jackroller* (1930) and *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career* (1931), Edwin Sutherland's *The Professional Thief*

(1937), and R. E. L. Faris and Warner Dunham's *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas* (1939). Some of these works give important views of organizations (prisons, missions, delinquent homes, and so on) as they are traversed by hobos and criminals. But in others (e.g. Cavan and Faris and Dunham) organizations are only part of the background, evidence of ongoing 'social organization' and 'disorganization' in their processual, Chicago senses.

Because their fascination with social disorganization led Chicagoans away from mainstream types, it was a peripheral member of the Chicago school who captured the explicit experience of bureaucratic employment. Frances Donovan was a widow who returned to school to complete an undergraduate degree at Chicago in 1918 (studying under Park among others) before becoming a full-time schoolteacher. In the summers, Donovan did participant observation as a waitress (*The Woman Who Waits*, 1919) and as a saleswoman (*The Saleslady*, 1928). She also eventually wrote up her own occupation (*The Schoolma'am*, 1938). While not sociologically theorized, these works are all fluent personal accounts of work in multiple settings with multiple types of people. Rewritten into separated quotes and larded with theory, they would be recognizable today as solid organizational ethnographies. But that is not their real place in the Chicago work of the time. The mainstream sociology of work would become a dominant theme of Chicago sociology only much later, under the post-war leadership of Everett Hughes. By contrast, Donovan's two earlier books were both about the consumption world that so fascinated Park. Their real importance is to yoke that consumption world to the experience of work, to give a social psychology of consumption work, and above all of women's place in that social psychology.

### 18.4.3. Dissertations on Institutions

The third general type of dissertation concerns what the Chicago school called institutions. As noted earlier, these were bodies of social organization the Chicagoans imagined as loosely related to certain kinds of social functions and necessities. There were really five types of such institutions: the family, entertainment institutions, communication institutions, communities, and, finally, organizations proper. The family dissertations—Ernest Mowrer's *Family Disorganization* (1927) and Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932)—like the Cavan and Faris and Dunham works, say almost nothing about organizations. Organizations in the modern sense are simply one part of the 'organization' and 'disorganization' (i.e. organizing and disorganizing) of the community that drive family demoralization, which is the focus of both books. Organizations are similarly absent from Herbert Blumer's *Movies and Conduct* (1933; Blumer's dissertation was purely theoretical), which simply asks about the social psychological effects of movies, another

step in the Parkian analysis of the social psychology of modern consumption society.

By contrast, the other Chicago works on entertainment institutions—Paul Cressey's *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (1932) and Walter Reckless's *Vice in Chicago* (1933)—are first-rate organizational studies. Cressey's analysis of types of dance halls touches on the resource dependencies of the dance halls, the evolution of different types of halls, competition and specialization among them, and, of course, locational patterns. About the only main organizational topic not covered is the internal structure and executive difficulties of the dance hall, although the problem of maintaining a roster of good dancers is considered to some extent. Reckless's book on brothels is not quite as organizationally focused, but it has careful analyses of the emergence of the cabaret and the roadhouse as alternative organizational formats for prostitution. And like Cressey, Reckless does the organizational and locational ecology of brothels in great detail.

As a former journalist, Park had a specific interest in journalism, to which testify both his own monograph on *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (1922) and a number of dissertations. Much of this work is focused purely on content. *The Immigrant Press*, as well as K. Kawabe's *Press and Politics in Japan* (1921) and F. G. Detweiler's *The Negro Press in the United States* (1922), all focus entirely or primarily on content. Detweiler and Park devote some attention to the basic ecology of newspapers—readership, external resource supports and alliances, rates of turnover, and so on—but these are not major foci. By contrast, H. E. Jensen's massive study of 'The Rise of Religious Journalism in the United States' (1920) analyzes the ecology of religious journalism in great detail. Jensen develops period mortality tables for religious journals, discusses resource dependency issues and imitation patterns, and concludes with a profoundly organizational interpretation of the effects of the press on denominationalism as an organizational system. Like Cressey's book, this too could pass muster as contemporary work.

A considerable number of Chicago dissertations can be thought of as studies of communities. Like the earlier community studies of the pre-1918 period, these nearly always list the organizations in their communities and sometimes go on to study particular aspects of organization. But their main focus is on the functions of organizations in constituting communities, a theme that would go underground until the Putnam social capital controversy of the 1990s. Thus, Harvey Zorbaugh's famous *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929) taxonomizes the rooming house as an organizational form, as well as the betterment organizations and missions that respectively characterize the gold coast and the slum of its title. But the main story is one of organizations fluctuating and developing within a community ecology. Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1928) and Pauline Young's *The Pilgrims of Russian Town* (1932) both concern specialized types of communities as themselves a kind of organizational form, a social structure of defense against both threat and assimilation. D. Sanderson's 'The Rural Community' (1921) lists many of the organizations found

in rural settings and considers how they contribute (or not) to the organizing (i.e. social organization in the Chicago sense) of rural life, but does not consider those organizational forms as interesting in themselves. Similarly, Albert Blumenthal's *Small Town Stuff* (1932), although an unsung classic, does not go beyond what is essentially a Parkian portrait of the social psychology (and social disorganization) of its author's home town.

A final work of this type is Edwin Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927), probably the ultimate Chicago statement of organizations as things that are always in transition. For Thrasher, gangs are rooted in communities, and thus are evidence of ongoing 'social organization'. But for us, Thrasher's study provides clear evidence that the organizations Chicagoans found most interesting were those that were the most transient. Again, one senses Robert Park's dominating interest in the evanescent social psychology of modern life. The same themes, in fact, characterize a work that a reader expects to be primarily organizational, Norman Hayner's 'The Hotel' (1923). Like Mueller's 'The Automobile', this dissertation is about an experience of modern living—in this case living in a hotel. Disappointingly, there is only minimal interest in the complex organization necessary to run the apartment hotel, then a revolutionary organizational form.

The Chicago School did, finally, write some work that would be recognized today as explicitly about organizations. Stuart Queen's *The Passing of the County Jail* (1920) is about the death of an organizational form, but is cast within the earlier reform rhetoric. I should also mention the only two Chicago sociology works that lie explicitly in the industrial relations tradition, Floyd House's 'Industrial Morale' (1924) and Walter Watson's 'The Division of Labor' (1930). The latter is a general review of the already huge literature on monotony coupled with some interesting data on loggers and reporters and their particularly intense job satisfaction, an early version of Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow'. House's work is a broad and sophisticated review of everything then known about employee satisfaction, which it tries to theorize under the Chicago concept of 'social control', and then to merge with the war-born concept of 'morale', a buzzword of the 1920s roughly equivalent to 'human relations' in the 1950s. The work is sophisticated, even at times profound, in its grasp of the complexities of the organizational experience of work in America in the 1920s. But in the end, House does not have the tools with which to theorize the new economic world. He is unwilling to accept the employers' account of it, as would be Mayo and his followers. But he has no effective alternative.

On a less theoretical plane, Samuel Kincheloe's papers on the 'The Major Reactions of City Churches' (1928) and 'The Behavior Sequence of a Dying Church' (1929) are two classics of organizational ecology, which taken together precisely characterize the succession of organizational forms in the religious ecology of the city. W. A. Daniel's 'The Negro Theological Seminary Survey' (1925) delves into resource issues, considers problems in internal leadership, analyzes complex

organizational environments, and nicely portrays a desperate ecology of failing organizations. It lacks the theoretical explicitness of Reep's earlier work but raises a whole agenda of familiar organizational issues. Everett Hughes's 'The Chicago Real Estate Board' (1931) is a more explicit study of organizational emergence. Like many of the Chicago studies, it looks at the 'organizing' of something, in this case land exchanges, rather than at the result of that organizing—the Chicago Real Estate Board itself. Much of the focus is on the complex of social organization surrounding land rather than on the board itself, and the work feels very descriptive. But it is, nonetheless, an explicit analysis of the emergence of a particular organization in the midst of a complex of relationships.

Finally, there are two Chicago works that are thoroughly modern in their explicit commitment to the theory of organizations and their mobilization of complex data to address theoretical questions about organizations. The first is E. T. Thompson's 'The Plantation' (1932), a quite surprising work that undertakes the historical sociology of colonial Virginia in a very modern style, drawing on an extraordinary breadth of secondary sources and a more limited quantity of primary ones. Thompson's theoretical aim is explicit throughout—to explain the emergence of a particular business and community form at a particular position in what we would today call the world system, as well as to theorize how that form in turn shaped the emergence of chattel slavery. It is a measure of the work's excellence that it cannot be summarized or easily characterized.

Even more extraordinary, however, is Ernest Shideler's 'The Chain Store' (1927). This is a comprehensive organizational analysis of the emergence of a new organizational form. The dissertation opens with a historical ecology of retail in the developing city, reviewing the forces that gradually led to the department store and the chain store. Shideler then distinguishes types of chains. He analyzes the spread of the chain form to different industries. He enumerates all the chains (and chain units) in Chicago. He considers the proportion of total Chicago business done with chains. He looks at the ecology of chains in a particular subcommunity. He analyzes the life history of a typical chain enterprise. He analyzes locational decisions. He analyzes the up- and downstream effects of the chain form in the economic system. He looks at the conflict between chains and department stores. He examines the impact of chains on communication, traffic, and even the social psychology of shoppers. The list goes on and on. This is organizational sociology of a comprehensiveness and theoretical sophistication that would not be seen again for another fifty years.

The writings and dissertations of the Chicago School thus show a consistent vision of social organization and disorganization as ongoing processes—a vision continuous from theorists like Albion Small in the 1890s to students like Wirth and Shideler in the 1920s studying the Chicago social landscape in the field. Above all, it focuses on organizing rather than organizations and on understanding change rather than stability. As a result there is relatively little Chicago writing on the

internal processes of organizations, the first of my thematic families. About my second family (institutionalization and organizational dynamics), there is by contrast a quite considerable amount. And about the third family (organizational ecology, interorganizational relations, resource dependency, and the evolution of organizational forms), there is an enormous body of work. Indeed, one can argue that although we have some empirical advance beyond the Chicago work in this third area, we are not really very far beyond it theoretically.

## 18.5. ECLIPSE AND LEGACY

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The Chicago vision was very much reduced after World War II. In part, this was a general transformation. For the first time, one could speak of a truly national, singular society, with national markets, national media, and a national persona. Social scientists both helped and chronicled this transformation, and it is little surprising that the theory of organizations—like all forms of post-war sociology—took its shape from the wartime experience and from the mass society and equally massive organizations that the war bequeathed. The conflictual, processual, local theories of the Chicago School made little sense in a world now conceived as grand, unified, and even static, a huge mechanism for steady expansion in a non-ideological, managed world. Not until the great conjunctural transformations of the late 1960s and 1970s would conflictual and processual theories of social life reemerge.

It is striking in this connection that most Chicago School studies of organizations involve small organizations like immigrant newspapers, brothels, churches, Negro seminaries, rooming houses, and taxi-dance halls. Only Shideler's 'The Chain Store' and Donovan's *The Saleslady* involve large-scale organizations. In part, this reflected Park's interests in communication and consumption, which were usually embodied in smaller organizations. In part, it reflected the inheritance of the progressive interest in churches and other community institutions. But as time went by, it also reflected a new reality. Large organizations had 'interiors' that could not be studied without permission; Western Electric, after all, had called in Mayo, not the other way around. Thus, for example, while there are a number of studies of particular churches and church ecologies in the Chicago tradition, there are no studies of the denominational hierarchies themselves nor of the enormous structure of Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish eleemosynary organizations that blanketed the city.

But there were more specific causes for Chicago's decline as well. The late 1930s had brought to the Chicago sociology department Lloyd Warner, a

Radcliffe-Brownian functionalist fresh from L. J. Henderson's 'systems theory' seminar at the Harvard Business School. Among Warner's fellow seminarians had been Elton Mayo, a philosopher-turned-social-psychologist ignorant enough of sociology to think the discovery of social effects at Hawthorne revolutionary, and the young Talcott Parsons, whose post-war thinking would soon flower in the functionalist jargon of *The Social System* (on Mayo, see Gillespie 1991). Although the Chicago sociologists did not know it, Warner had himself torpedoed any involvement by them in the Hawthorne research (Gillespie 1991: 155-6). With Warner came colleagues and students who shared his functionalism and the managerial viewpoint that went with it. One was William Foote Whyte, whose *Street Corner Society* is often misread as a Chicago School gem, but who in fact drew his theory from the organization charts of the human relations school. Along too came Burleigh Gardner and Allison Davis, lead investigators on Warner's project on 'human relations' in Natchez, Mississippi. Gardner had also worked on Warner's Yankee City project, which Mayo's Rockefeller money funded because Warner thought the areas around the Hawthorne works too disorderly to be 'real' communities, and he would spend five years as a section head of the Personnel and Research Counseling Section at Hawthorne (Gillespie 1991: 233).<sup>4</sup>

Along with Everett Hughes, a Park student who returned to Chicago in the late 1930s, the Warnerians created at Chicago in 1943 a Committee on Human Relations in Industry. The committee's 1946 joint volume on *Industry and Society* (edited by Whyte) is essentially a management how-to volume. Whyte's *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry* (1948), a sociological analysis of how best to run profitable restaurants, was funded by the National Restaurant Association and guided by 'the research program of the Western Electric Company' (Whyte 1948: 374). Indeed, Warner, Gardner, and others would soon create Social Research, Incorporated, a downtown business consulting firm that employed many of Chicago's post-war

<sup>4</sup> The central documents of the human relations school—Mayo (1933) and Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939)—make it quite plain that the absence of references to Chicago sociology is quite deliberate. In his 1933 classic, Mayo shows no sign of having read any Chicago work on organizations and rather strangely labels the Chicagoans he has read as Durkheimians (1933: ch. 6). Nor does he tell readers that the Harvard group decided to not to study the communities around the Hawthorne plant because they thought them to be pathologically disorganized. The only Chicago citation in Roethlisberger and Dickson is of Robert Park, for the somewhat uncharacteristic concept of social distance (1939: 359). The concept of 'attitude', which would have had to be cited to its Chicago inventors Thomas and Thurstone, was defined without citation (1939: 330). It goes without saying that dissertations like Floyd House's and Walter Watson's—both focused on topics with which the human relations school was centrally concerned—were overlooked by them. Yet despite his scuttling of Chicago School research in the communities around Hawthorne, Warner was polite about the Chicago School in the first volume of the Yankee City series (Warner and Lunt 1941: 4). Of course, by then, he had to be polite: they had hired him four years before. But the book itself has no trace of Chicago influence, even its chapters on community ecology being devoid of any reference to his new colleagues. The Chicagoans are seen only as analysts of social breakdown (ibid. 58). Warner's static, ahistorical approach would later make his work an easy target for Stephan Thernstrom's (1964) brilliant demolition.

graduate students on projects ranging from beer to automobiles (Karesh 1995). This was at a time when, as we now know, J. Edgar Hoover saw the retiring Ernest Burgess, along with W. E. B. Du Bois, as the two most dangerous Communists in American sociology.

The Chicago School itself went underground with McCarthyism, helping found the anti-establishment Society for the Study of Social Problems in 1950. Within the discipline, Chicago became identified with urban studies and ethnography and a kind of generic sympathy for underdogs, perhaps as reformist a line as was politically feasible in the early 1950s. The theoretical lineage of Chicago would not be re-established until Morris Janowitz came to the department in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

As for studies of formal organization more generally, the fog of structural-functional analysis descended with the human relations school, while Merton's students pursued the rather quixotic project of applying Weber's analysis of the Prussian civil service to mid-twentieth-century American commercial organizations. Even the Carnegie School had its roots in the wartime invention of operations research and control theory. It was not until the 1970s that population ecology reintroduced the kind of processual thinking characteristic of the Chicago School, of which it knew nothing other than what came through Amos Hawley, a student of Roderick McKenzie, a joint author with Park and Burgess of the 1925 classic *The City*.

What then are the lessons contemporary organization theory can learn from the Chicago organizations tradition and its vicissitudes? The most important lesson is that there is no necessary reason for seeing the social world as a world of organizations. The Chicago School's sublimation of organizations into an epiphenomenon of social processes reminds us that to see the social world in terms of organizational entities—as the human relations school did—is to take a quite historically specific view, one anchored firmly in the worldwide importance of large, stable bureaucratic structures in the years from about 1925 to 1975. Of that stable structure, the only real remnants today are national governments. The wartime army of eight million in which so many famous organizational sociologists served mustered only 400,000 effectives at the start of the Iraq affair. The gigantic commercial organizations of today are usually retail operations with transient labor forces and shallow divisions of labor. Since the great conjuncture of the middle 1970s—the end of Bretton Woods, the coming of OPEC, the legal transformations that led to globalization, the long-sought destruction of AT&T—we have in fact returned to the organizational world characteristic of the 1920s and earlier. It is

<sup>5</sup> Histories of the Chicago School often lay emphasis on George Herbert Mead, who was indeed a personal friend of Thomas, and whose courses (in philosophy) were routinely taken by students in sociology. But Mead's work was not relevant to the Chicago School 'organizations' work reported here, his popularity with such later organization theorists as Karl Weick notwithstanding.

a world of rapid turnover and change in organizations, a world of continuous organizational restructurings and financial prestidigitation, of networks and arm's length relationships, a world in which the employment and production structures that were laboriously built by scientific management and human relations have been deconstructed through outsourcing and offshoring, a world that deals with its human relations problems by denying and outrunning them. It is a world much better fitted to the ecological and processual 'organizing' theory of the Chicago School than to the organization theory we have inherited from the Warnerians and Mertonians.

If the Chicago School's first lesson is that the very idea of organization theory is historically contingent, its second is that what we used to call organizations must now be imagined as mere moments of processes. More than ever it is clear that an organization chart is just a fleeting snapshot of a structure perpetually in flux. It is tempting to think this revolution merely structural—a change of our basic idea of organization from bureaucracy to network. But we are not witnessing such a simple, synchronic transformation. The organizational world has changed because the new strategies of organizing activity aim at complex outcomes arrayed over extended periods. And the longer run forces that shape the system of commercial organizations—e.g. the location of cheap labor, the barriers of language and control, the varieties of governmental tax and benefit policies—all these things fluctuate steadily and strategically. In the new world, organizations respond to them not so much by changing organizational policies as by dismantling and reassembling what in mid-twentieth-century terms we would have called the organization itself: by selling it, loading it with debt, looting it, amalgamating it, spinning off parts, and so on. All this in order to lower labor force costs, or realize tax savings, or relocate profits to a new country, or shed pension obligations, or achieve technological returns to scale, or whatever. In many cases, it is not even clear what is the unit to which these various advantages are expected to accrue. Indeed, a crucial strategy of contemporary commercial organizations is to avoid accrual of resources in any one particular place because so located they become too easy to tax, expropriate, and so on.

All this creates a mathematical nightmare that organizational theory and its current major research paradigms cannot address because the changes involved are most often changes in the actual entities of the system. The assumption of constant units of analysis with fluctuating attributes—long a crucial fiction not only of organizational sociology but of sociology more generally—is simply nonsense in today's organizational world. It is difficult in such a world even to specify what is the right way to proceed, for most of us are uncomfortable with thinking about social systems in which there are no 'things', no ongoing actors. But such is the processual world we face. The Chicago School theorized about this, to be sure: 'Institutions are but the shell of social activity,' as Albion Small said. But they made only a beginning. The challenge remains.

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