
Theory

The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory
International Sociological Association
Autumn/Winter 2012

Board

Chairs

Ronald N. Jacobs
Giuseppe Sciortino

Secretary/Treasurer

Agnes Ku
Division of Social Science, Hong Kong
University of Science and Technology.
Clear Water Bay, Hong Kong
Email: soagnes@ust.hk

Board Members

Jeffrey Alexander
Gianpaolo Baiocchi
Patrick Baert
Mabel Berezin
Fuyuki Kurasawa
Philip Smith
Frédéric Vandenberghe
Gilles Verpraet
Seung Kuk Kim
Kiyomitsu Yui

Associate Board Members

José Maurício Domingues
Brad West
Ken Thompson
Eduardo de la Fuente
Marcel Fournier
Sang-Jin Hang
Elisa P. Reis
Edmond Wright
Consuelo Corradi
Alexander Filipoy
Homa Zanjanzadeh
Filipe Carreira da Silva
Margaret Archer

Editors of *Theory*

Craig Browne
E-mail: craig.browne@sydney.edu.au
Paul Jones
E-mail: p.jones@unsw.edu.au
Department of Sociology and Social Policy
A26, The University of Sydney, NSW, 2006,
Australia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Craig Browne and Paul Jones: Editors' Introduction.....	1
From the RC Presidents.....	2
Call for Nominations	2
Robert van Krieken: Theorizing Celebrity Society	3
Paul Jones: Introducing Paolo Mancini and 'Media System'	5
Paolo Mancini: Social Theory and Media System Analysis	8

Editors' Introduction

We are certain that all attendees of the Research Committee's mid-term conference in Trento found it a most intellectually stimulating and convivial event. The R C Presidents' introduction eloquently conveys our gratitude to the conference organisers and we will publish a few pieces deriving from the mid-term conference in this and the next issue of *Theory*. In this issue, we are pleased to be able to publish an edited version of Paolo Mancini's presentation that began the mid-term conference. Paul Jones has written an appreciative introduction to Mancini's text and Mancini's work more generally. The background Jones sketches will be particularly valuable for those less familiar with the field of media studies and especially debates in the

area of political communication. In fact, Jones demonstrates the important role that sociological theory has played in the development of theoretical and empirical work on the media. The resonance that this field has with other strands of sociological theory is evident from the first paper in this issue by Robert van Krieken. Robert van Krieken's book on Norbert Elias would be well known to members of the committee and his recent book on *Celebrity Society* brings Eliasian and other theoretical figures to bear on this most topical of contemporary themes.

Craig Browne & Paul Jones

From the Presidents

The Research Committee on Sociological Theory's (RC16) interim conferences are held at the halfway point between ISA World Congresses, providing an informal, intimate and intense experience that combines intellectual work, socializing, and learning about a host country and city. In recent years we have had wonderful conferences in Rio de Janeiro (2004) and Pusan, South Korea (2008). Our most recent mid-term conference was held in Trento, Italy, a beautiful city in the Adige Valley. The conference was held at the University of Trento, which is one of the leading universities in Italy.

The Trento conference was organized by our co-Chair Giuseppe Sciortino, and was the largest mid-term conference we have ever held. Conference participants had their choice of twenty-one different panels, with nearly 100 paper presentations. As always, the papers were sophisticated, and the discussions were animated. Participants came from all over the world, and included a mix of regular faces and new members of RC 16. When the conference was not in session, we were able to enjoy the many restaurants and cafes that lined the Piazza Duomo, in an exquisite and picturesque Alpine setting. For those who were not able to attend the conference, we strongly encourage you to consider the next mid-term meeting, which will be held in 2016.

We are currently organizing the RC 16 program for the World Congress of Sociology, which will be held in 2014 in Yokohama. As one of the largest research committees in the International Sociological Association, we will have an extensive program with 26 different panels. Be sure to look for the call for papers in the next issue of *Theory*.

Finally, please note the call for nominations for the positions of Co-Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, and Executive Board member, for the term 2014-2018. Nominations and self-nominations are due by March 1, 2010. The Nominations Committee will announce the final slate of candidates in a future issue of *Theory*.

Ronald N. Jacobs & Giuseppe Sciortino

Co-Chairs, RC 16

Call for Nominations

RC 16 welcomes nominations and self-nominations for the positions of Co-Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, and Executive Board member, for the term 2014-2018. All nominees must be members in good standing of RC 16. All nominations should include a brief, one-paragraph statement describing (a) the nominee's involvement with RC 16 activities during the previous four years, and (b) the reasons why the nominee wants to serve in the leadership capacity to which s/he is being nominated. Please send all nominations via email by **March 1, 2013** to all three members of the Nominations Committee:

Philip Smith (philip.smith@yale.edu),

Giuseppe Sciortino
(sciortino.peppino@gmail.com), and

Frederic Vandenberghe
(frederic@iesp.uerj.br).

Theorizing Celebrity Society

It is becoming increasingly clear that the operation of 'celebrity' requires greater sociological attention than it has received in the past, and that this is as much a challenge for sociological theory as it is for the kinds of topics taken up for sociological investigation. In the recent case of Jimmy Savile, the British television personality, for example, his capacity to sustain his predatory sexual relationship with young women and girls over a long period relied heavily on his status as a celebrity, and much of the soul-searching now taking place about his story concerns the kinds of emotional relationships with celebrities that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. In the political sphere, too, increasing attention is being paid to the cultural dimensions of politics, and the ways in which politicians as diverse as Vladimir Putin, Boris Johnson and Barack Obama draw on mechanisms of relating to their 'audience' that have an elective affinity to those utilized by celebrities in a variety of other spheres, such as music, television, or fashion.

However, we still understand very little about what different celebrities have in common with each other, what celebrity actually means, how its role has changed over time, and what its future development is likely to look like. The focus tends to remain on an endless parade of individuals at the expense of seeing what binds them together, what makes celebrity a historically specific social form, and how it should be conceptualized. I address these questions in my book *Celebrity Society* (van Krieken 2012), but here I would like to highlight just two aspects of how celebrity can be approached theoretically – the possibilities attached to thinking in terms of 'celebrity society' rather than 'celebrity culture', and the question of recognition.

First, when there is any attempt to understand celebrity in more systematic and analytical terms, the overwhelming inclination has been to turn to the concept 'celebrity culture'. The difficulty with confining ourselves to approaching celebrity as culture is that it remains useful to go beyond values, mores, attitudes, forms

of behaviour, cognitive orientations and ways of life, to understand the social, political and economic structures as well as the institutional foundations of what we experience as 'celebrity'. Thinking in terms of 'celebrity culture' tends to encourage a certain cultural pessimism, where one does little more than bemoan the 'cult' of celebrity and the popular 'obsession' with celebrities.

Writers working with the concept 'celebrity culture' will very often start with Daniel Boorstin's (1962) critique of the public relations manufacture of the 'pseudo-event', and his definition of a celebrity as someone 'known for their well-knownness'. Although this captures one aspect of celebrity, it misses a lot, too, and I would much rather begin with two specifically sociological accounts – C. Wright Mills' (1957) analysis of the role of celebrities in the structure and dynamics of power in *The Power Elite*, as well as Robert's Merton's (1968; 1988) discussion of the practices of scientists, and what he called the 'Matthew effect': the way in which scientific reputation can itself generate further rewards and resources. Both of these writers' provide much more useful foundations for the sociological analysis of celebrity.

My argument is that it is equally important to pay attention to the *social structuring* of celebrity, by which I mean the ways in which celebrity is assigned, distributed, organized and responded to as a part of a particular form of institutionalized social life. A useful alternative is thinking in terms of 'celebrity society', which for me is a reference to Norbert Elias's (2006) study of what he called 'court society', the particular structuring of social relationships characteristic of the royal and princely courts which emerged in Western Europe from the Middle Ages onwards. Elias saw the aristocracy and their modes of social interaction as far more than just a relic of tradition and feudalism, left behind in the transition to modernity. He argued that court society should be seen as a historically significant form of social organization, with a dual relationship to the

bourgeois society which followed it. As Elias put it, 'aristocratic court society developed a civilising and cultural physiognomy which was taken over by professional and bourgeois partly as heritage and particular as an antithesis and, preserved in this way, was further developed' (2006: 44). On the one hand, bourgeois morality and forms of life were developed precisely in opposition to those of the courts: particularly the distinction between public and private life, the organisation of life around criteria of instrumental, economic rationality, and the placement of a dedication to work at the centre of human existence. On the other hand, bourgeois rationality never actually won the battle with court rationality, and many features of the forms of social relations in court society continued into the modern world.

Just as there is a connection between aristocracy and celebrity, which is why we can say that celebrities are today's nobility, there is also a connection between court society as a specific social form and 'celebrity society' as its modern heir. Taking a closer look at court society is a counterweight to the tendency to see the history of subjectivity through the lens of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois conception of the boundary between the public and the private self (Sennett 2002) is only one possible perspective, and needs to be seen alongside that of its main competitor, the aristocracy, which has in many ways found ways, thanks to a large extent to the mass media, to reassert its conception of the self and social relations in ever-expanding forms and contexts.

To understand the basic principles and logic driving and underpinning celebrity as a social, political and economic phenomenon, then, it is useful to identify the ways in which we can see the world we live in today as a 'celebrity society' with its own distinctive, constantly changing social practices and structures, moral grammar, construction of self and identity, legal order and political economy organized around the distribution of visibility, attention and recognition.

It is possible, then, to look beyond celebrities as unique individuals and see the circuits of power which produce celebrity as a social phenomenon, one which has its roots in aristocracy, but which had become democratized in two senses: increasing numbers and categories of people gain the capacity to become celebrities, and the power-balance in the relationship between celebrities and their audience shifts increasingly towards the latter, so that celebrity is to a large extent controlled by the audience, effectively supplying the audience's demand. Celebrities are in many respects *democratized aristocrats*, both the subjects and the objects of power relations.

The fact that celebrities are the focus of the attention of large numbers of people and are inherently the product of mass *recognition* raises the question of how recognition in contemporary social life has been understood in social theory more broadly. For example, the German social philosopher Axel Honneth (1995) has emphasised how what he calls 'struggles for recognition' – the pursuit, not of wealth, status or power, but simply of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem through being acknowledged as unique, particular individuals – is in fact a central element of all social movements and political activity. The word 'recognition' can mean 'acknowledging as true, valid, or entitled to consideration', which is the sense that Honneth works with. Honneth's normative aim of social solidarity is that of a form of social life characterized by a horizontal and symmetrical relationship between members of society, with as few individuals as possible falling below a particular threshold of respect, acknowledgement and recognition.

However, it can also mean 'The action or fact of perceiving that some thing, person, etc., is the same as one previously known; the mental process of identifying what has been known before' (OED), which is the 'recognition' central to celebrity. This meaning concerns the projection of social acknowledgement into the public sphere, for the larger-scale, mass-media based recognition ('haven't I seen you somewhere

before?') characterizing celebrity, constituting a vertical and asymmetrical relationship between celebrities and their audiences. The focus here is not on identifying the social conditions that make it possible for people to avoid disrespect, to achieve a socially-valued minimum of recognition, but on the mechanics of particular individuals rising far above the basic threshold of recognition, in a sense becoming super-rich in their possession of recognition-capital. As John Adams observed, the 'mighty secret' of aristocracy of all sorts was that 'although it excites the indignation of many, and the envy of more, it still attracts the attention of the world' (1805:31-2).

The intriguing question, theoretically as well as empirically, then becomes that of the structure and dynamics of the relationship between these two dimensions of struggles for recognition, the horizontal and symmetrical, and the vertical and asymmetrical, and their implications for the inherently unequal distribution of recognition. Once one looks at celebrity as another kind of capital, 'attention', understanding the economics of attention – the accumulation, distribution and circulation of the abstract form of capital that is attention – becomes central to understanding how celebrity and celebrity society works.

The question of the power dimensions of our relationships with differing forms of celebrity, together with the idea that celebrity is primarily about the management of attention capital (Franck 1998) in a world awash with information and knowledge, are probably the most useful places to start in establishing how we might approach celebrity society more reflexively, in a way that comprehends its inner logic. Once the various aspects of celebrity society are clearer, it might then be possible to experience celebrity as less of a mysterious neurosis of the media age, and more as a manageable feature of contemporary social life, with which we can engage in an active, creative, and thoughtful way.

References

- Adams, John. 1805. *Discourses on Davila; a series of papers on political history*. Boston: Russell & Cutler.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. 1962. *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Elias, Norbert. 2006. *The Court Society. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 2. Edited by Stephen Mennell*. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Franck, Georg. 1998. *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit. Ein Entwurf*. Munich: Carl Hanser.
- Honneth, Axel. 1995. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Merton, Robert K. 1968. "The Matthew Effect in Science." *Science* 159:56-63.
- _____. 1988. "The Matthew Effect in Science II." *Isis* 79:606-23.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1957. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sennett, Richard. 2002 [1977]. *The Fall of Public Man*. London: Penguin.
- van Krieken, Robert. 2012. *Celebrity Society* London: Routledge.

Robert van Krieken

Introducing Paolo Mancini and 'Media System'

The prospect of including Paolo Mancini as keynote speaker in our meeting in Italy struck me as highly propitious. His project ideally meets a common goal pursued within our research committee: the need to make our social theoretical innovations speak to contemporary empirical research.

There could hardly be a better testing ground for such a goal than political communication research, still bearing the scars of the Adorno/Lazarsfeld dispute of the 1940s. However, Mancini's area of particular influence has been *comparative* political communication, and this, if anything, has been more disputed still. So I

have focussed this introduction / commentary on this wider context of Mancini's work, as it may be unfamiliar to RC16's membership.

For more than a generation the somewhat nakedly Cold War text, *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al, 1956), remained in dominance in comparative political communication, not least for scholars in emerging democracies and journalism educators. It established and popularized the place of political communication in 'modernization' models of evolutionary progress towards a Western norm. It also laid the ground for proto-neoliberal works such as Pool's *Technologies of Freedom* (1983). Comparative research thus inevitably came up against the dead weight of the 'four theories' which were built primarily upon the freedom/totalitarianism binary. *Four Theories* so made it doubly difficult to deploy even Lazarsfeld's critical/administrative research distinction outside domestic political communication in the western democracies.

Beyond this remains the familiar difficulty of the conceptual framing of orthodox political communication research that still uses empirical instruments similar to those Lazarsfeld developed and which is still inclined to privilege data analysis in both framing and 'writing up' of such research. Mancini alludes to this problem as the 'pre-theoretical strategy'. For much of the period of broadcast media dominance, the critical project in political communication research retreated into a relatively narrow political economy which, with the possible exception of its Francophone strand, bore little relation to critical social theory, methodologically or normatively.

Yet it was the Anglophone political economy formation that recognized and promoted the significance of the Habermasian public sphere thesis for the field of media and communications research. The late English translation of *The Structural Transformation* and Habermas's contemporaneous admission of the influence upon it of the Adorno/Lazarsfeld moment, enabled a revisitation of the old

conceptual terrain at a time of dramatic transformation in means of communication.

Indeed, as Mancini notes in his paper, one of the key texts in redeveloping the field of comparative political communication was Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) aptly titled *The Crisis in Public Communication*. For Europeans especially the rise of satellite broadcasting and subsequent digital technologies had called into question the viability of public service broadcasters (PSBs), which had often enjoyed monopoly dominance. Moreover, digital remediation problematised core public interest rationales for commercial broadcast regulation in all democracies, including most conspicuously the USA.

One response was to extend the determinism of *Four Theories* and *Technologies of Freedom* and insist that digital remediation was inherently emancipatory and deregulatory, based in a marketised and globalized 'first amendment fundamentalism' whose most notorious proponents have been Rupert and James Murdoch. This hegemonic position is only just now being seriously challenged in public debate in the wake of the UK's Leveson Inquiry (Jones 2012).

Another response can be seen in the critical scholarly effort to advance the project of comparative political communication. Here Hallin and Mancini's magnum opus, *Comparing Media Systems: three models of the media and politics* (2004), has been the pivotal text. It has provoked intense critical debate, as well as welcome reception, in the disciplines of Politics and Media/Communications. However, sociological responses have been almost negligible and, more worryingly, the sociological dimensions of the work have been misunderstood or overlooked by many commentators outside sociology.

This is especially ironic as the formative influence on this project of Jeffrey Alexander's pathbreaking 1981 essay (Alexander 1981) is openly acknowledged by Hallin and Mancini and is a frequent reference point in Mancini's Trento paper. However, the differences in approach between the two are as significant as that

between this 'early Alexander' and subsequent developments in his own work (see also Hallin 2005).

For Alexander (1981), differentiation is the key to understanding the systemic and comparative historical role of news media. Increasing professionalization and institutional autonomy are the hallmarks of the differentiation of the news media subsystem from other subsystems (political, religious, solidarity, economic). Such substantive freedom thus requires not only formal constitutional recognition but also the disembedding of newsmaking practices from their former solidaristic attachments with the other social subsystems. Partisan journalism cannot as successfully play the necessary roles of legitimation and the enabling of reportage of the universalistic value claims of subordinate social groups. As in *The Civil Sphere* (2006), *The New York Times* emerges as the paradigmatic example of a 'factual arbiter' accepted across 'a wide spectrum of social opinion'. Without such 'cognitive agreement about the facts themselves', social strain is increasingly manifest as polarization and the prospects for social reform diminished.

Comparing Media Systems – self-limited in scope to North America and Western Europe - can be read as a long critical-synthetic meditation on Alexander's paper, weighed up against the de-differentiation theses of Habermas and Bourdieu. Its 'three models' are designed to decentre any 'developmentalist' narrative. Yet Hallin and Mancini nonetheless conclude that their North Atlantic Liberal model is achieving increasing dominance, with its 'objective' journalism winning out over other forms, notably the partisan traditions dominant in their Southern European model. Precisely because of this, however, they question key aspects of Alexander's differentiated media subsystem, as they identify more and more evidence of homogenizing economic de-differentiation. They read Alexander as having implied that it is the independent commercial base of newspapers, notably advertising, that enables their institutional and professional autonomy (Hallin 2005).

To put this in language used by media policymakers, while internal plurality might be increasing within many media corporations, external plurality is decreasing. Moreover, not all successful media corporations, or all comparable nation-states, have produced a newspaper like *The New York Times*. Australia has none for example. We might add that the 'business model' of the 'quality press' is now widely claimed to be in crisis, partly because some megacorporations are unwilling to cross-subsidize quality journalism.

Yet *Comparing Media Systems* has been criticized for its relative inattention to digital media (Norris 2009). This misunderstands the authors' sociological argument that key features of most contemporary media systems are path dependent (2012b). The historical weight of early democratization and rational-legal authority are pivotal, for example. At the level of technical infrastructure, broadcasting came to play a role comparable to that Alexander attributes to the historical role of newspapers. Yet the establishment of publicly funded PSBs meant that the forms of institutional autonomy within broadcasting were more diverse than those that had developed for newspapers. The BBC and its close imitators stand out from other PSBs because of their institutionalization of professional autonomy in their modes of governance, so reducing the political parallelism common amongst many European PSBs.

This typologization also underpins one of the most criticized of Hallin and Mancini's models, the North Atlantic Liberal. Much recent critical comparative analysis had used the USA as an outrider against which European developments were contrasted, as comparative media law scholarship would still do. To blend the two, even with two 'continental' models in tandem, has seemed heretical at least, especially to some scholars in media and communications (most notably, Curran 2011). Yet Hallin and Mancini's reasoning here seems to me sociologically impeccable (see also their

2012b). Journalistic commonalities within this model cross media infrastructures. The UK public service ethos in broadcasting achieved an autonomy and wide societal trust comparable to that Alexander attributes to *The New York Times*. Indeed it took the non-partisanship principle further than any newspaper by prohibiting editorialization by its PSB and commercial licensees (Jones 2012).

Aside from his fascinating recent reflections on Berlusconi (2011), Mancini has most recently overseen with Hallin an edited collection (2012a), *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*. This features a mixture of contributions sympathetic to, and critical challenges of, *Comparing Media Systems*.

It is in this context that I'd place Paolo Mancini's Trento paper. With 'media system' now firmly established at the heart of his own subfield, Mancini, himself a trained sociologist, reflected on the lineage of 'system' within media studies and across the 'sister' disciplines that inform that field. In this edited version we have focussed on Mancini's reflections on the relation between sociology and comparative media studies.

Paul Jones

Social Theory and Media System Analysis

Three ideas of media system

My aim here is to establish a bridge between the social sciences, on one side, and media studies on the other. In many parts of the world the roots of media studies come from sociology (the other possible roots are psychology and semiology) but very rarely do these two fields meet. Sociologists (and political scientists) have tended to think that media scholars lack theoretical insight and that the media are a minor subject of investigation lacking any particular specificity while media scholars think that they are dealing with topics too important to be seen in connection with other social phenomena or the interpretive support of other disciplines.

One example of this lack of communication is represented by the notion of system. I suggest there are three different uses 'system' of relevance here:

(i) 'Purely Indicative': the everyday use of the word system. It just indicates a subject, the media, distinguishing them from other subjects without adding any other attribute or specific meaning in terms of approaches and possible interpretations.

(ii) 'Confrontational' (for want of a better term). This is the most frequent meaning and undoubtedly this is also the most criticized. Here system is used to define an 'other' the media confronts. It is not just a matter of distinction (as with the indicative sense) but rather is used to list and order some features of the 'media' that are different from features that characterize some other system. I put under this label also the 'comparative' use of the word system through both space and time.

(iii) 'Functional' is more precisely definable as it refers specifically to the usage of scholars of differentiation theory. Here the term 'system' assumes all the theoretical and empirical connotations that derive from the application of functional system theory to the universe of the mass media. Jeffrey Alexander wrote a very interesting paper on this describing the birth of a system in charge of spreading 'universalistic information' (Alexander, 1981, 25). Niklas Luhmann also used the concept of media system in a purely 'functional' meaning. For him 'differentiation means the emergence of a particular subsystem of society by which the characteristics of system formation, especially autopoietic self-reproduction, self-organization, structural determination and, along with all these, operational closure itself are realized' (Luhmann, 2000, 23).

In spite of being widely used (mostly in its 'indicative' meaning), the term 'media system' has never been clearly defined by media scholars. There are different reasons for this missing definition. For many years the attention of media scholars has been addressed to the individual rather than aggregate level of analysis. Media studies

developed mainly (not exclusively) out of the interests placed on the 'effects' of the message. Especially in the USA, early media studies research focused on the specific requests coming from big industries, governments and similar sponsors. Consequently, comparative research was underdeveloped as such research funding was based in single countries and very rarely considered other social realities as well.

A certain self-referentiality based in an asocial conception of media and domestic nation-bounded studies so became dominant. Indeed, in the first years of infancy of media studies, the word 'system' was used exclusively in the 'indicative' way: it didn't imply any interpretive framework nor any precise meaning. It was used just to indicate a subject distinguishing it from other subjects. In *Four Theories of the Press* the word system was used several times but only in its 'indicative' meaning.

It is with the work of Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch that the word system starts to assume a more precise conceptual identity in media studies. In a 1977 essay republished in their *The Crisis in Public Communication* (1995), they suggested a 'confrontational' usage that indicated a set of qualifications that differentiates the media from other activities and structures.

It may be useful here to stress the similarities that exist between such 'confrontational' and 'functionalist' meanings of the concept of 'system' on one side and Bourdieu's idea of 'field' on the other. Introducing their influential *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Benson and Neveu write 'Bourdieu's field theory follows from Weber and Durkheim in portraying modernity as a process of differentiation into semiautonomous and increasingly specialized spheres of action (e.g. fields of politics, economics, religion, cultural production) (Benson & Neveu, 2005, 2). This definition is very close to that of Alexander and Luhmann's conception of journalism as a (sub)system. For Benson and Neveu there exists a journalistic field that is part of the wider field of cultural production. In its

interaction with other fields, for them, journalism shows itself to be essentially heteronomous i.e. it is highly dependent on other fields, and not autonomous such as other fields are.

In Alexander's and Luhmann's interpretive frameworks the news media are inserted within a broader 'theory of the social system and a theory of social differentiation' (Alexander, 1981, 17). System doesn't include just a whole set of characteristics that is different from other wholes but, rather, implies a theory that places systems within a larger interpretation of how social structures evolve and work.

Even if one does not want to 'buy' functionalism 'in toto', i.e. even if we don't feel convinced by the more general implications that derive from social differentiation theory (unilinear evolution towards more complex social structures, modernity linked to social complexity, etc.), there is no doubt that the idea that society may be divided into different systems interacting and affecting each other may be a useful interpretive tool for communications research.

Conclusion

So I believe that the notion of system can be a valid instrument in media scholarship for a number of reasons.

Following Blumler and Gurevitch, the comparative use. Indeed, the idea of system may give a *comprehensive* view of how the media work in a country compared with some other country: it may give a very general view of how the entire field of the media is organized and works within a country in comparison with another.

Within the framework of system theory it will be possible to stress how different systems work in society; how they interact each other, which of these systems is more capable of affecting the others; what is their level of autonomy/heteronomy in Bourdieu's terms. In other words the notion of system may place the news media within a broader interpretive framework avoiding

the risk of abstracting the media from the surrounding context, so overcoming one of the main problems of media studies.

What about the relation between the different components of a media system? Undoubtedly a risk of overgeneralization exists when using the concept of system and specificities may get lost, but here a question of level of analysis arises. Indeed there is a more general level of analysis within which it is appropriate to ask a general question such as 'what about the news media in Italy?', 'which are the main characteristics of news media in Italy?', etc. These are perfectly legitimate questions and deserve scientific answers. These general questions imply the observation of both television and print press. Are these outlets different? Of course they are. Do they respond to different (and often competing) logics? Of course they do. And nevertheless they share some commonalities that mostly emerge when, for instance, the Italian media system is compared with the English one. Both Italian television and print press are much more partisan than their English counterparts in spite of the existing differences between print press and television. Journalists moving from print press to television, and vice versa, bring with them their attitudes and their rooted habit to be simultaneously professional journalists and political actors. In this way the news outlet they enter is permeated by frameworks of procedures, attitudes and beliefs that derive also from the news outlet the reporter comes from. In other words there is a general cultural habit, there is a more general social expectation (also on the part of political actors) that is common to television and print press.

Indeed the most important answer to criticism about what to exclude and what to include may come if we take from sociology some of the already mentioned suggestions: the notion of system doesn't refer just to actors and subjects (the usual indicational or confrontational use of the idea of system) but essentially to the framework of roles and rules that direct the actions of the actors. In this sense there exists a common framework of roles,

procedures and rules that link together those who are working in television and in print press and that may distinguish them in different measure in relation to different national contexts from actors following a different set of procedures.

Beyond the idea of media system, a more restricted analysis of the professional figures working in news outlets in Italy and Great Britain is of course valuable but it may be not sufficient to explain the reasons for the emerging differences between Italian and English journalism. Indeed, these differences are rooted in the specific dimension of the wider media system: they are rooted in the elitarian nature of the Italian media system, in the difficulty in being economically autonomous and therefore in its dependency on external forces, both political and economic. These differences are rooted in the history of the press and in its relation with economics. These differences pertain to the dimension of the system.

As I indicated, there is also a 'lower' level of analysis: for instance, the notion of system can be applied to a small section within the broader mass media system. It can be applied to the television system compared with the print press system and so on. The risk of overgeneralization will be lower and the possibility to furnish adequate answers will not be at risk either. In terms of Bourdieuan field theory, functionalism and other sociological approaches as well, 'political communication' may be defined as a sub-system of the wider media system. Scholars working at the level of the 'political communication system' will address more specific topics such as patterns of interactions between reporters and politicians, specific working routines, organizations of physical contexts where politicians and reporters meet, etc.

From 'sister' sciences that have used this notion far longer, media scholars can learn lessons and so move beyond what I defined as the 'indicative use'. Without a more critically reflective conception informing comparative research, there is a risk of a 'pre theoretical strategy' (Swanson, 1992) a

frequent choice of media scholars who 'go comparative' without any clear understanding nor clear definition of the instruments they are applying.

We can learn from differentiation theory and from field theory which components define a system. First of all there are the actors: their specific professionalism, their forms of recruitment and career improvement, their specific identity in front of other professions, their role in news production and in the interaction with other actors. The aims of those who operate within the media system are the best indicators of the specificity of the field and the distance that separate this field from others. Very often these aims are dependent on particular kinds of structures that influence the way in which professionals work and interact with people outside of the system (low print circulation in face of high television consumption, structure of the ownership, local vs national markets, etc.). Rules and procedures determine formally and informally types of activities and their boundaries. Formal rules (mainly laws) determine the role of news media in society and their interactions with other systems. They define also the level of autonomy of the media system that is made clear by the capacity to fix procedures that are specific of media professionalism (self regulation vs external regulation). Observing this set of dimensions it will be possible to isolate and therefore to interpret the media system in relation to other, different systems in the same society and to compare different systems in different countries. It will be possible to study the just described dimensions and their interactions within the media system itself and with the external systems. Is the system heterogeneous including different sub-system? Does it include an articulation in tabloid and elite presses? As we wrote in *Comparing Media Systems Beyond The Western World*, one of the major opportunities offered by the notion of system is the possibility to look at 'the relationships among their parts and the logics and tensions that structure them' (Hallin & Mancini, 2012a, 301). This kind of observation can strongly support comparative analysis.

My last point regards the overlapping between media system and country. Is it still possible to assume this identification in today's globalized world? My answer would be yes: in spite of the global cultural market, the undeniable tendency towards homogenization and hybridization and the rise of the world wide web, still each media system is affected by the local culture, by the specific national language and by all those cultural symbols that still characterize cultural production. There is no doubt indeed that the media system, as Bourdieu states, is part of the more general field of cultural production that is still strongly dependent on national traditions and symbolic dimensions.

References

- Alexander, J. (1981) 'The Mass News Media in Systemic, Historical and Comparative Perspective'. In E. Katz and T. Szecsko, eds., *Mass Media and Social Change*. London: Sage: 17-51.
- Alexander, J. (2006) *The Civil Sphere*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Blumler, J. & Gurevitch, M. (1995) *The Crisis in Public Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Curran, J. (2011) 'Questioning a New Orthodoxy'. In his *Media & Democracy*. London: Routledge: 28-46.
- Hallin, D. (2005) 'Field Theory, Differentiation Theory & Comparative Media Research'. In R. Benson & E. Neveu (eds) *Bourdieu & the Journalistic Field*. Cambridge: Polity:224-247.
- Hallin, D. and Mancini, P. (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of the Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hallin, D. and Mancini, P. (eds) (2012a) *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hallin, D. and Mancini, P. (2012b) 'Comparing Media Systems: a response to critics'. In F. Esser & T. Hanitzsch (eds)

Handbook of Comparative Communication Research. N.Y.: Routledge:

Jones, P. (2012) 'The Moment of Leveson: Beyond 'First Amendment fundamentalism' in news regulatory policies. *Pacific Journalism Review* 18(2): 51-67.

Luhmann, N. (2000) *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Mancini, P. (2011) *Between Commodification and Lifestyle Politics: does Silvio Berlusconi provide a new model of politics for the Twenty-first century?* Oxford: Reuters Inst for Study of Journalism.

Norris, P. (2009) 'Comparative Political Communications: Common Frameworks or Babelian Confusion?'. *Government and Opposition* 44 (3): 321 – 340

Siebert, F. et al (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana:University of Illinois Press.

Pool, I. de Sola (1983) *Technologies of Freedom: on free speech in an electronic age*. Cambridge,Mass.: Belknap Press.

Swanson, D. (1992) 'Managing Theoretical Diversity in Cross-National Studies of Political Communication'. , In J. Blumler, J. McLeod & K. Rosengren (eds.) *Comparatively Speaking: Communication and Culture Across Space and Time*. London: Sage.

Paolo Mancini