

James W. Carey's cultural approach of Communication

Filipa Subtil*

Abstract

James W. Carey is renowned as the founder of critical cultural studies in the US even though his theoretical approach to communication, journalism and the new media remains little known in the Portuguese academic world. Carey is part of a wide group of academics who, in the 1960s in both Europe and the US, sought out alternative approaches to mainstream mass Communication research and its excessive focus on the effects, functions and usages of mass media. We focus our attention here on his seminal article – *A cultural approach to communication* (1975) – but not exclusively. This article presents Carey's answers to three main questions: Communication, Communication and modernity as well as the cultural or ritual approach to Communication. Critical hermeneutics was chosen as the methodological framework. We seek to reach beyond Carey's responses to his context by highlighting his contribution to the understanding of Communication as a participatory ritual in and through which human beings construct, maintain and transform their culture.

Keywords: James W. Carey. Communication. Culture. Critical Cultural Studies. Ritual. Transmission.

Within the framework of the deep reaching crisis that took place in the wake of the post-World War II euphoria and expectations, James W. Carey stepped forward as an author who integrated the context of challenges

* Tenured professor lecturing on the undergraduate and post-graduate media programs at the Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa. Lisbon – Portugal. E-mail: fsubtil@escs.ipl.pt

to the hegemony of models of analysis studying society and Communication inspired by methodologies drawn from the natural sciences and proposed a stimulating critical cultural approach to Communication or rather the ritual of Communication in the mid-1960s. Contrasting with the still rising recognition of his thinking, the works of Carey still remain broadly overlooked within Portuguese speaking university environments.

Carey was born in Providence, in the United States in 1934 and passed away in May 2006. He embarked on his career as professor at the University of Iowa before then moving to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. From 1990 onwards, he lectured at the prestigious School of Journalism at the University of Columbia New York, where he founded the doctoral degree program¹. Since his death, there has been a flourishing number of books and academic journals paying homage and discussing his work and ideas. There are already a considerable number of academics who, whether in the United States or in Europe, adopt his essays as a means to continue expanding the conversation on Communication, journalism and the new media in contemporary society.

Carey falls within the diversified range of thinkers sharing the notion that societies do not constitute only those relationships built up around production, possession and power but also incorporate the sharing, exchanging and conflict over cultural symbols, meanings and forms. In the 1960s, beyond the example of authors such as Alfred Schutz and Northrop Frye in North America, other cultural projects were taking shape in British, French and German universities and proposed by theoreticians such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas. Whilst not exclusively, this article focuses primarily on his seminal essay *A Cultural Approach to Communication*, first published in 1975. As we discuss below, the thinking of Carey draws upon references to the social theory of tradition by Max Weber's symbolic systems and Émile Durkheim's perspective on ritual. Meanwhile, his sources directly related with

¹ For a more detailed biography of Carey in Portuguese, see Subtil (2006).

Communication are the American pragmatism of John Dewey and George H. Mead, the legacy of the Chicago School of Social Thinking and the historical and critical studies by Harold A. Innis and Lewis Mumford. The Carey project signs up to the idea that society represents a means of Communication based upon which experience gets described, shared, modified and preserved. From the methodological point of view, this article's option favours critical hermeneutics, shunning "erudite exegesis" in favour of searching for the semantic autonomy of Carey's work emerging not only out of theoretical configurations and their traditions but also out of the questions put both to the world he interpreted and the underlying timeless classical questions.

James W. Carey: founder of critical cultural studies in the US

Similar to other theoretical proposals emerging in the United States, the United Kingdom and mainland Europe within the same historical timeframe, Carey stood up for a cultural turnaround in Communication studies well before this became a dominant trend in the humanities and sociology. Carey suggested a Communication perspective that did not theoretically incorporate only phenomena interlinked with representation but rather acted as a means of interaction and exchanging collectively produced meanings through symbolisation. This option led him to abandon those means of explanation that had hitherto dominated the field of mass Communication research, as developed by Harold Lasswell, Carl Hovland, Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert K. Merton, Herta Herzog, Charles Wright and among others, and its utilitarian model of social order (ARAÚJO, 2001, p.119-130). This also implied deepening the relationship between media studies, historical knowledge and social theory, in particular in the debates surrounding mass culture and popular cultures (CAREY, 1979, p.288; [1986] 1992c, p.95).

Whilst still a student, he became an ardent advocate of the European *verstehen*² tradition following his reading of Weber's

² The German word *verstehen* finds its translation into English through the term understanding. The Weberian idea of understanding stems from both the movement against the assimilation of the social sciences by their natural coun-

“Critical studies in the logic of cultural sciences”³. This Weberian sociological understanding, as he was later to recall on more than one occasion (CAREY, [1986] 1992c, p.95, 1997b, p.4, CAREY;GROSSBERG, 2006a, p.21)⁴, nourished his interest in grouping a vast range of diversity of intellectual undertakings and political positioning under the overarching designation of cultural studies. This expression seemed that most appropriate to a commitment he deemed broadly historical, critical, interpretative and empirical. In his opinion, neither political economics, Marxism nor pragmatism would prove able to attain these objectives on their own. This new field of study should thus counterbalance theoretical and empirical research undertaken in the name of positivist science on the one hand and engage in a project of social reconstruction and, whether implemented implicitly or in another fashion, on behalf of this knowledge (CAREY, 1997b, p.3) on the other hand.

The relationship between the Carey project with Weberian tradition was not contained to only claiming the word “culture” in order to designate the proposed movement. The broad theoretical framework of reference of sociology was also considered as determinant to providing the main methodological principles for a phenomenology of industrial societies and the corresponding minutely detailed descriptions of the subjective and cultural lives of these societies. This influence also proved decisive in another

terparts driven by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and the distinction made by Karl Jaspers between explanation and understanding. Explanation is bound up with intelligibility that implies general propositions with understanding bound up with intelligibility linked to singularity. According to Weber, the sciences focusing on human reality are the sciences of culture that he differentiated from the sciences of nature to the extent that social phenomena are unrepeatable, unique and a product of the thinking that human beings undertake to endow meaning on what they do.

³ This essay appeared in a collection of works by Max Weber translated and edited by Edward Shils and Henry A. Finch (1949, p.113-163).

⁴ Weber named this undertaking “cultural science” in his book *Naturwissenschaft und Kulturwissenschaft*. The semantic option taken by Carey results from his non-identification, as he affirms, with the “honorific meaning” of the word science present in the Weberian designation (CAREY, [1986] 1992c, p.95-96).

aspect: while Weber made certain modes of religious faith one of the fundamental nexus points for grasping the modern world and in particular the spirit of capitalism, Carey sought to establish relationships among religious doctrines and visions on Communication, technology and political forms.

Two visions on Communication

In *A Cultural Approach to Communication*, Carey attributed Dewey with the merit of having undertaken a reflection on highly complex Communication and thereby encountering a duality of contrasting meanings. In the history of Western thinking, Dewey would have been the author who best understood the existence of a tension between two forms of thinking about Communication and that he drew upon as a creative source in his work. Carey entitles these forms of thinking as the “transmissive vision” and the “ritual vision” and, in practice, they do border very closely on those deployed by Dewey in *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* ([1916]1944). Nevertheless, according to Carey, Dewey lacked a better perception on just what conflict generating implications stem from these two models for understanding Communication and at the origins of some of the most characteristic problems he encountered. Hence, rather than paying homage to his clarifications or replicating his shortcomings, Carey suggested the creative extension of Dewey’s thinking based upon the problematic framework of the same difficulties inherent to the idea of Communication (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.14).

From the Carey perspective, both the transmissive and the ritual visions have been present in American culture ever since the term Communication got introduced into the regular discourse of the 20th century and, as happens to a lot of secular culture, traces its origins to the religious imaginary even while actually relating to certain specific domains of the religious experience (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.14). Indeed, as is well known, the classical sociologists made hay with their explorations of the mediations and interconnections between religious beliefs and economic, social,

cultural and mental phenomena: Marx, in *Das Kapital*, with his fetishism of the market; Weber with his perspective of the religious formation of processes of rationalisation and his thesis on the influence of Calvinism on the founding of a work ethic and the economic mentality of capitalism; and Émile Durkheim, who conceived of religion as a society projected at the stars. Carey sets about following this classical intuition in order to discover the reasons behind these two visions of Communication existing in Western culture. For the transmissive vision, remission, only implicit, is the legacy of Weber: on the one hand, out of the influence of religious doctrines on secular culture, on the other hand, the study's emphasis on the ideological or normative meaning of human behaviour. Regarding the ritual vision, as we shall see, this refers to the socio-anthropological tradition of Durkheim on the elementary forms of religious life and his well-known argument on how the sacred bonds with collective and impersonal powers and which thus represents one representation of society itself.

From Carey's perspective, the transmissive vision of Communication is that most deeply embedded and conveyed by the culture industries, bound up with notions such as "sending", "broadcasting" or "giving information to others". Reaching back to the 19th century and extending right through to contemporary times, there is the underlying metaphor of transport, with the transport of persons and goods and the movement of information perceived as essentially identical processes and encapsulated by the shared term of Communication. According to Carey, the bitterness of the transmissive vision derives from the conventional models of broadcasting the signals and messages over distances for purposes of control. This idea, in turn, stems from one of the ancestral dreams of human beings: "The desire to increase the speed and effect of messages as they travel in space" (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.15). Back in Classical Egypt, notions of transport and Communication were intrinsically interconnected and united under the same meaning. The transmissive vision would have extended through to the discovery of the telegraph in the 19th century, a technical means that rocked the identity existing

between these two terms even while the metaphor has lived on. Despite the messages being produced and controlled centrally by means of the monopolisation of writing by certain social groups or the speed of printed production, there remained the need for distribution through increasingly fast means of transport as only thus were they able to attain the desired effect.

Deepening his inquiry into the origins of the transmissive vision of Communication in Western culture, Carey puts forward an argument based upon the idea that this is based on religious attitudes even while this influence appears obscured by political, economic and technological motives. Whenever present, these latter factors are in no way unique and certainly do not amount to the grounds for overlooking the religious motive, says Carey, paraphrasing the idea that the technical basis of Western science represents one method of ensuring the kingdom of God on earth⁵. Carey recalls the importance of that movement in space and clearly present in the ideations of reformist Dutch churches in South Africa as well as the Puritan movements of New England. In both one case and the other, what moved these populations was:

The desire to escape the boundaries of Europe, to create a new life, to found new communities, to carve a New Jerusalem out of the woods of Massachusetts, were primary motives behind the unprecedented movement of white European civilization over virtually the entire globe (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.16).

The migratory dislocation of enormous population flows taking place during the formation of the modern world may be interpreted as an attempt to exchange the old world for a new world in which faith prevailed and was perceived as an act of redemption⁶. This underpins a structuring belief to North American culture. When

⁵ This is a recurrent issue in philosophy and sociology. On the issue, and from among the many other works available for consultation, see Leo Marx ([1967] 2000) and David E. Noble (1997).

⁶ We would duly note that this Carey's perspective underpins a "social concept" of the population that echoes the theoretical developments of Maurice Halbwachs (1930). Carey establishes a bond between populations, movement in space, time, memory and aspirations.

the means of transport put the European Christian community in contact with the pagan communities of the Americas, this process was understood as a means of Communication with profoundly religious resonances. The change in place was both an attempt to establish and to extend the kingdom of God, nurturing the foundations upon which religious understandings might be attained and thereby resulting in paradise upon earth. Hence, the moral meaning of transport became establishing and expanding the kingdom of God on earth with that of Communication proving identical. Following the midpoint in the 19th century, the telegraph helped in differentiating between Communication and transport even while this event was equally endowed with religious overtones. This technology also got interpreted as being inspired on God with the objective of territorially disseminating the Christian message to still more distant spaces and in a faster way able to eclipse time and transcend space.

While at the beginning of the 19th century the religious metaphor remained still heavily preponderant, as the century advanced, due to the growing cultural importance of science and technology, a new means came in for consideration as the ideal for the conquest of territory and controlling their populations:

Communication was viewed as a process and a technology that would, sometimes for religious purposes, spread, transmit, and disseminate knowledge, ideas, and information farther and faster with the goal of controlling space and people (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.17).

The growth and expansion of modern means of transmission very much became a political project - Carey reinforces this observation in his final essays – in which the objective was to wield political control over the new commercial opportunities arising (CAREY; GROSSBERG, 2006b, p.200). With resistance against this project emerging, which may be testified to by reference to the works of American intellectuals such as Henry David Thoreau⁷

⁷ In the literary work of Thoreau, we encounter various references that the author deems self-delusions caused in us by the many “modern progresses”, which do not always bring positive advances. In *Walden; or Life in the Woods*, Thoreau makes sceptical allusions to the magnetic telegraph, to postal systems and to newspapers themselves ([1854] 2009, p.68-69; p.111-112).

and John C. Calhoun, this did not prove sufficient to change the course of North American thinking and culture (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.17). In any case, according to Carey, the historical-religious perspective was never completely obliterated in North American thinking as the mechanistic ballast to the history of the means of Communication duly demonstrates. At least since the advent of the telegraph and into contemporary times, this history has been characterised by the notion that the machines for Communication close off the scope for conveying moral improvements.

And we need not be reminded of the regularity with which improved communication is invoked by an army of teachers, preachers, and columnists as the talisman of all our troubles. More controversially, the same root attitudes, as I can only assert here rather than demonstrate, are at work in most of our scientifically sophisticated views of communication (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.18).

According to Carey, the other vision on the Communication ongoing in US culture stems from ritual, the oldest of all visions even while playing a lesser narrative in North American academia. Within this conception, Communication interlinks with words such as “sharing”, “participation”, “association”, “company” and “holding a shared faith”. In turn, this incorporates notions such as “communion”, “community” and “Communication” that Carey maintains underpin the ritual approach. As a counterbalance to the transmissive vision, this focuses on the maintenance of society through time and not through the dissemination of messages in space in order to represent shared spaces and not the act of transmitting information. While the transmissive model consists of disseminating messages over distance, the ritual vision centres upon the effects of the reality of Communication in daily lives and in the ceremonial facets attracting people to share and socially engage.

To Carey, the ritual vision of Communication derives from a religious conception that dismantles the role of the sermon, instruction and advertence and instead highlights the minor activities ongoing in daily routines, festivities, song and prayer. This construction and its maintenance over time of a meaningful and ordered cultural world, serving as the framework for human

actions and not for merely conveying of information, when Communication attained its highest and most original manifestation. As already alluded to, in his reflections, Carey evokes the Durkheim-work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. The Totemic System in Australia* ([1912]2002), which he explicitly quotes, within the scope of which the interpretation of rituals takes place through their relationships with the social structures sustaining them. As is well known, Durkheim defends how the very ideas, beliefs and basic categories of human understanding and the logical operations by which we think stem from the ritualism that consolidates the group memory. Ideas and beliefs, including the religious and moral emerge out of social practices and especially those of the ritual type. In Carey, the ritual vision was shorn of its explicitly religious origins but never disconnected from its metaphoric background. Within this line of reasoning, he perceives the projection of collective ideas and their incorporation into forms such as dance, games, architecture new stories, etcetera, as the process creating a ritual and symbolic order that serves to represent the basic order of things and display behaviours alongside continuous and fragile social processes.

While the ritual vision of Communication does not represent a core topic in US academia, according to Carey, this only results from an intellectual assumption as regards the idea of culture in the country. In turn, this attitude partially owes its origins due to obsessive individualism, the overvaluation of psychological life, the undervaluation of the meaning of any human activities that are not practically based and designed for productively working. In his perspective, another important factor in the undervaluing of the cultural facet within the social thinking taking place in the United States involves the absence of any notion that science plays part of that culture, or alternatively expressed, the separation of science from the universe of culture. There is a certain irony to the way in which Carey summarises this feature of the American mentality: “science provides culture-free truth whereas culture provides ethnocentric error” (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.20). We may better grasp this cultural framework when interrelating it

with the effects of the prestige acquired by the natural sciences in the reorganisation of the sphere of knowledge. The scientific achievements in physics, chemistry and biology led not only to the belief that certain forms of knowledge (literature, history, other cultural forms...) were secondary when compared with the experimental sciences but also to the prescription that social knowledge should adopt scientific procedures in its studies of society. What the Carey quotation unravels is how the aura acquired by science came at the cost of breaking its bond with culture in the sense of it taking a stance in opposition to ideology. Furthermore, in the conviction that science represents the solution to every problem having become the strongest ideological representation of the modern world.

However, as regards the generalisation about the adhesion of Communication studies in the United States to this transmissive perspective, Carey, in another essay, maintains that there are many exceptions (CAREY, 1977, p.412). In the same text, he insists that American studies are based on a vision of Communication that might be designated either transmissive or transport because, on the one hand,

its central, defining terms have much in common with the usage of communication in the nineteenth century as another term for transportation. It is also related strongly to the nineteenth-century desire to use communication and transportation to extend influence, control, and power over wider distances and over greater populations (CAREY, 1977, p.412).

And on the other, in contrast,

a ritual view of communication is not directed toward the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information or influence, but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared beliefs (CAREY, 1977, p.412).

Reflecting on newspapers enables Carey to set out the differences between the transmissive and cultural visions. The transmissive vision tends to approach the newspaper as a means of informing the public, spreading news and entertainment over ever

longer distances; raising questions as to its effects on audiences, their functions and the role of news relative to processes of social integration, stability and adaptation. As regards the ritual vision, the newspaper, more than describing the world, renders feasible the collective participation in a social rite that ensures a collective dialogue may take place and a reality becomes shared. The reading of the newspaper thereby represents an act in which the reader joins a world of openly struggling powers as if an observer at some game or other. The ritual vision sees in the news not mere information but an invitation to participate based upon our taking on, and frequently in a vicarious fashion, social roles within this process. To the extent that readers make their journeys through the newspaper, they commit themselves to continuously changing roles and dramatic *focus*⁸ (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.21).

We would note the way in which Carey puts forward the example of the ritual of newspaper reading to discuss the differences between the ritual and transmissive visions and indicating how this distinction should in no way be seen in any rigid fashion. The ritual also spans diverse means of mass Communication. Actually, Carey's perspective encapsulates how these two ways of conceiving Communication – the transmissive and the ritual – necessarily negate what the other affirms. The ritual vision does not exclude the process of transmitting information or the change in attitude and defending only how it does not prove possible to understand the correct form of these processes without placing them within a vision of Communication and social order that is primarily ritualistic. One commentator on the work Carey, Kenneth Cmiel (1992, p.287), observes that the differentiation between the two visions is less radical than it would otherwise appear. If, on multiple occasions, the distinction between the theory of ritual and transmissive Communication takes on an incisive form, on other occasions the separation is not completely clear. This tension reveals a broader ambiguity that Cmiel detects in Carey whenever

⁸ On Carey's reflection on newspapers and the transmissive and ritual visions, see Jay Rosen (1997, p.197-199).

approaching modernity. Despite his critical distance regarding the trends in power and trade in the modern world, Carey “by no means wants to turn the clock back” (CMIEL, 1992, p.287). While maintaining the primordially ritual character of Communication, Carey considers that mass Communication may also undertake ritual functions or trigger “moments of rituality” to return to the Marc Augé notion.

Whatever the case, one aspect proves clear to Carey: that which is fundamental to Communication cannot be displaced into the spheres of transporting signs or transmitting messages. This arises out of the risk of the transmissive vision becoming that which impoverishes the essential to Communication: “Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.23). Communication represents the foundations for human solidarity, producing the social limits, fictitious or otherwise, that bond men and render their associative life probable. Society only proves feasible out of the strength of the bonds enabling mutual intelligibility and a reality shared by its co-participants. In accordance with the ritual vision, Communication is a “ceremonial” participation in which we manage, preserve and transform culture. What is at play in ritual Communication extends beyond the mere conveyance of information or messages but rather includes co-creation and the sharing of those cultural activities that define reality. We live in realities broadly created by Communication and we very commonly neglect how this proves intrinsically ritualistic. Carey was certainly postulating rituals highly varied in their forms of presentation and interrelationship with the daily life, the reading of the newspaper and discussing the news, attending and participating in classes, academic tests, parliamentary debates, court trials, conversing with friends, visiting family, going to mass, celebrating birthdays, funeral ceremonies, community parties and so forth. In participatory rituals such as the latter, the condition of sharing an understood reality is, Carey maintains, closer to the true purposes of Communication.

Carey conjectures that each of the two visions on Communication might interconnect with particular historical periods and

with an immense scope in terms of the effects associated with the social order, technologies, forms of domination and the emergence of economic models. Carey considers that the transmissive vision had dominated American thought since the 1920s, the inter-war period. However Carey adds that each vision is interrelating with the different perspectives in terms of the nature of language, thinking and symbolism: “The transmission view of Communication leads to an emphasis on language as an instrument of practical action and discursive reasoning, of thought as essentially conceptual and individual or reflective, and of symbolism as being preeminently analytic. A ritual view of Communication, on the other hand, sees language as an instrument of dramatic action, of thought as essentially situational and social, and symbolism as fundamentally fiduciary” (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.22, n.4). What seems crucial to Carey is how each of these visions shapes how “all these forms of interaction are necessarily the anticipation and creation of forms of social relations and, therefore, of forms of institutionalized modes of conduct and ways of dealing with one another” (CAREY; GROSSBERG, 2006b, p.200). According to this point of view, the transmissive vision holds a dominant role and, since the second decade of the 20th century, both in the thinking and the research on Communication in the United States. In attributing technologies a broad spatial range, Communication became profoundly vulnerable in terms of its communicative purpose. Dewey would also have been aware of the existence of two facets to Communication and the tensions running between them, Carey insists; even while not having grasped their full extent and having also overvalued scientific information and the information and Communication technologies as a solution to social problems. According to Carey, the shortcomings of Dewey – and this evaluation extends to all of the pragmatist peers of his generation – were those of a political optimist who had difficulty in appropriately understanding how transmissive forms were being deployed both by the new means of political control wielded by states at a distance and for the purposes of national and international business interests.

What is Communication or Communication as a map “of” and “for “ reality

Therefore, Carey's digression over the two visions of Communication enables him to reach deeper in clarifying their meanings: Communication proves the process of building, learning and applying symbolic forms that bring reality to human existence. Human Communication thus represents an activity that constructs a new dimension to reality, the codified and meaning packed world constitutes the symbolic reality in which individuals live. This new dimension to reality gets established by the agency designated as Communication.

Nevertheless, this apparently obvious understanding of what Communication contains does not make its learning any easy process. The activities spanned by Communication, such describing, greeting, self-identification, conversing, giving instructions, sharing knowledge, exchanging significant ideas, searching for information, entertaining and being entertained are as common and mundane as the challenges posed in seeking to transform them into objects of intellectual study, stripping them of their triviality, rendering them strange and, in sum, establishing the problematic framework. Just as fish ignore their aquatic environment, said Carey, recalling an expression by Marshall McLuhanas to how human beings tend not to pay attention to Communication, this activity shared through language and other symbolic forms constitutes the ambience to the human world (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.24). Confronting those who perceive Communication as something “lighter” and deriving in a “more real” existing nature, Carey argues that, whatever the respective level of sophistication attained, from the occasional chat to mathematical expression, Communication encapsulates the primordial phenomenon of human and social life. More than content, Communication consists of a set of maps – or symbolic systems – surveying our social relations. These maps are representations, abstractions and simplifications guiding our behaviours while simultaneously transforming undifferentiated spaces into learned and intelligible environments. These maps

are so multiform that they depict that which is not present and produce acts when the real stimulus is not even physically present. Different maps present the same living environment in diverse different fashions to produce different realities. “To live within the purview of different maps is to live within different realities” (CAREY, [1975] 1992a, p.28).

All these maps are representations “of” reality and representations “for” reality, “symbols of” and “symbols for”. In the exercise Carey undertakes with the prepositions “of” and “for”, what is at stake is a definition of Communication that does not boil down to the creation of meanings and versions of reality but rather implies asking just which meanings, which values and moral senses are guiding us through life. Symbolical activities, as Carey highlights do not only involve the production of reality, they also imply the maintaining of that which is produced as there shall always be new generations for whom the forms of preceding cultural expression prove insufficiently problematic and for whom reality requires renewing.

Hence, studying Communication involves examining the social process by which significant symbolic forms – the maps serving to structure and guide our lives – are created, learned and applied. Expressed in this fashion reveals the vast empirical field spanning all of the attempts to build, maintain, repair and transform reality, all of the publically observable activities taking place over the course of historical time. The creation, expression and transmission of our knowledge about something and our orientations towards such realities stem from the construction of a variety of symbolic systems, such as art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, mythology, etcetera. Hence, to Carey, the so apparently very simple questions that Communication studies should formulate are: just how is this done? In what way do these forms differ? What is the range of their historical and comparative diversity? How do Communication technological transformations wield influence over what might be created and specifically learned? How do the social groups struggle over the definition of just what is real?

In turn, the map metaphor also applies to the very study of Communication. Studying Communication implies building maps, in other words, theories or models for representing communicating processes. Similar to other maps, the theories of Communication are simple and imperfect representations of a complex and contingent process that cannot be understood apart from through their incompleteness. As with all maps, the study models “of” Communication also prove to be models “for” Communication and hold a dual nature in being not only descriptive but also bearing moral implications. As models “of” Communication, they describe to us the process of Communication as models “for” Communication, they induce the behaviour that they describe. Thus, the Communication process may be studied empirically in accordance with the diverse models but that these always hold distinctive value based implications in fostering different forms of social relationships. Put otherwise, Communication represents a moral activity exactly like our theoretical ponderings on the subject.

The identification of Communication with ritual and conversation

For Carey, as we have seen, all Communication holds a ritualistic substrate and frequently proves primordially ritualistic. In turn, the ritual is understood as a symbolic action. The symbolic activities generating culture and ritual create the forms of social relations in which individuals begin as containers of processes occurring in these forms. Through this symbolic activity, the cultural and social world is built and afterwards we live in the world we have built. We represent the world to ourselves (building maps) to live in the world that these representations (or maps) induce the construction of. This double ability of symbolic forms is also inherent to ritual order: we do not only produce reality while also maintaining that which we produce. The ritual represents the main means, even while there may be more than one means, through which order takes hold of the disparate and contingent impulses of human action. The ritual creates and recreates symbolic forms – feelings, moral ideas and beliefs – in which the bonds of society

are rooted. Communication generates culture; and through ritual, community undergoes celebration.

Examples of Carey's understanding of the intrinsic relationships between Communication and ritual in modern societies may certainly include sporting events, games of cards, dominoes and chess, religious, profane and civic festivals, wedding ceremonies or other commemorations of life and death, among many other events, celebrations and activities from daily life that incorporate symbolic interactions, interpretation, participation and association in significant contexts to daily and social life. We have already referenced Carey's evocation of the Durkheimian perspective according to which ideas and beliefs emerge out of social practices, in particular ritual practices. We would recall that it is out of the sacred and not the divine that Durkheim made his approach to religious phenomena and through ritual that we understand the process of symbol creation as well as the intertwining of symbols and the sacred. Carey admirably grasped the religious perspective that the French sociologist re-sent to all relationships in which the symbolic, the sacred and ritual interrelated. Such rituals honour that socially valued, hence, the "sacred objects" in the Durkheimian terminology. To Carey, the existence of a society presupposes the process of Communication, interactions mediated symbolically, generating beliefs and representations because individuals, living in close mutual proximity to each other, through the ritual and the ceremonial, attain the capacity to create the sacred. Alternatively expressed: the drive of the sacred stems from society and society is itself consecrated by ritual. This involves a complex and broad ranging understanding of Communication as in conflict with reductionist perspectives anchored in scientific and mechanistic conceptions so present today in the new domains of information technologies generally conveyed by the engineering and management professional cultures.

Carey's emphasis on Communication through co-presence, interactional focalisation, the importance of small social systems and the on primacy given to the concrete places actually forging the construction of meaning stems from the relevance granted to

ritual as a primary and intense communicative social experience generating emotions, knowledge, morals and community (and even “mystic union”). In order to explain the construction of meaning, Carey centres on ritual and not – and thereby differentiating from other leading figures in culture studies – in seeking out codes or very general and wide reaching mental structures⁹. He highlights the symbolic facet to the rites and those rites as a symbolic action constituting the culture of a community or society. Participative rituals and symbolic activities are interlinking phenomena. Hence, ritual engenders symbolic (inter)action, in other words Communication; in turn, Communication engenders culture, which thus results in the co-creation of shared meanings. Communication therefore builds, preserves and transforms culture. Therefore, Carey places culture at the very centre and identified from the out set as ritual and conversation (CAREY, 1997a, p.321). This is the sense in which Communication is culture.

The focalization on ritual is accompanied by a consideration of Communication made not based on Communication technologies (that is, not on the transmissive vision embedded in technologies) but rather emphasising the oral-corporal formation of culture. The relationship among Communication, body and embodiment thus emerges as a central question: ritual constitutes the most embodied form of culture maintains Carey (1997a, p.314). The conversation requires the acting presence of bodies, the co-presence. Speaking involves entering into a social relationship “activating and exhibiting all the capacities of the body” (CAREY, 1997a, p.314). Along with Carolyn Marvin, we may furthermore add the clothing, ornamentation, perfumes, dances, songs, gestures and oratories that all take the physical power of body seriously and amplify their own aura in the meaning of their communicative presence (2006, p.69).

⁹ Randall Collins, one of the most renowned contemporary North American sociologists, highlights three key programs for the study of ritual: subcognitive ritualism, functionalist ritualism (including the interactive ritual variant by Erving Goffman) and the search for codes (and their critics). Collins integrates the last two programs under culturalist trends ([2004] 2005, p.9-30).

In ritual and in conversation, the signs display an intrinsic “agency”, they are reliable symbols, meanings acquired through the embodiment and the externalisation of that which the symbols awaken. The body contains memory and not only discourse, orality and conversation externalise the body throughout all of its capacity to learn and deploying to this end not only hearing, but also the visual, olfactory, gestural and touch dimensions¹⁰. Conversation and oral Communication imply the simultaneousness of the presence, the embodiment of language and memory and thus the “synaesthesia of the senses” as Carey notes. Conversation is “a mode of the immediately present available in all the sensory channels” (CAREY, 1997a, p.315). This therefore covers one of the most controversial considerations from Carey: all rituals trace their beginnings to the surrounding ambience of conversation even while the rituals also play their own role through the mediated forms such as the press, television and the Internet; but these forms, more than the creators of community, resemble to us communities once embodied in ritual and conversation¹¹. It is on this point of argument that the Carey perspective distances itself from the proposals of various culture study authors about conceiving Communication as a ritual (LULL, 1988; MORLEY, 1992; COULDRY, 2003) and as well as Dayan and Katz (1992).

With this emphasis on the presence of ritual in technologically mediated Communication, Carey privileges both the oral and a co-presence out of descriptive and moral reasons. Let us consider his argumentation. Communication understood as a metaphor for ritual requests and drives an original situation of equality because the co-presence and the proximity imply the granting of

¹⁰ This topic has come in for study by authors including Erving Goffman ([1959] 1993) and Roy Rappaport (1979; [1999] 2000), among others.

¹¹ As regards this, we would note that despite Carey himself referring to Durkheim in terms of the relationship between ritual and society, his defence that those rituals mediated by the *media* above all make us recall those communities already embodied in the ritual may also encounter support in an author beyond suspicion of being confused with the Durkheimian tradition, Gabriel Tarde, especially in his arguments developed in *Opinion and Crowd* ([1901] 1981).

space for a response as a condition for continuity. Presence based interactions also tend to strengthen and deepen the recognition of others in their totality. For example, in conversations, we have to deal with the weighting of all the words because this calls into question and puts at risk not only our minds but also our bodies. Talking through a conversational process also involves inviting and simultaneously requesting a response, modified through the implicit and explicit expressions of respect, to our objections and differences.

The central core of Carey's theoretical position rests upon two aspects: on the one hand, on an affinity in seeking to establish Communication, ritual, conversation and embodiment as the factors fostering culture and the sense of community; on the other hand, the scope for social, economic and political change that may interrelate with the technologically mediated Communication and in particular technologies inherent to the conquest of space and the transmission of messages, orders and goods over distance. However, we might inquire: given the centripetal strength of modern capitalism and the evidence of a cultural universe in which the community of meaning may not be taken for granted, does the Carey vision not run the risk of overlooking conflict and power within the actual framework of ritual Communication? Carey does not ignore this type of questioning and in turn responding that the emphasis on the ritual, on the oral tradition and culture does not exclude topics such as power and conflict. He declares his awareness as to how all societies are crisscrossed with antinomies and contradictions (ecological, structural and cultural) as well as differences based on class, status and power that prove as difficult to "[eradicate] as the biological programming and cultural resources on which they are based" (CAREY, 1997a, p.315). Carey believes that it is necessary to situate or locate the mechanisms through which the differences in power and conflict may be "buried, deflected, resolved, exercised, and aggregated into interests" (CAREY, 1997a, p.315). This *locus* is ritual: because this is a form of dispute exactly in the way conflict is a form of ritual. Furthermore, it is through ritual that power based relationships play out

as the conflicts involve more than simple economic interests; they indeed incorporate motivations stemming from aesthetic, moral and political reasoning (in a word, meanings). Ritual still remains the foundations for raising another order that is not that of communion or the search for shared meaning but rather of banishment and exclusion, affirms Carey before proposing the example of the death penalty as a ritual of excommunication perpetrated by the state union (CAREY, 1997a, p.316)¹².

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have conveyed how Carey approached Communication as a complex process that builds, alters and maintains the world of culture and thus the plural and diverse world of symbolic forms and the meaning they endow on human existence. This is a conception of Communication that Carey shares with the broader current in culture studies. In this sense, Carey explored the notion as to how symbolic forms represent maps that we draft and apply to guide us through social life and the world. However, the crucial contribution of Carey, the contribution attributing critical meaning to the dominant Communication standard, derives from another level: on the one hand, disentangling the transmissive (or mechanistic) maps and, on the other hand, from the rituals or cultures of Communication.

¹² As regards the idea of the excommunication ritual, we would here refer to his long essay, "Political Ritual on Television. Episodes in the History of Shame, Degradation and Excommunication", written in 1998, in which Carey draws attention to the importance of considering these types of ceremonies of humiliation and excommunication as important media event categories. Carey considers that the study of exclusion rituals represents a task that has not been undertaken and was worth undertaking within the framework of studies on media events and happenings: "Curiously, the rituals of degradation have not deserved the special attention of Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan in their powerful and instructive analysis contained in *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992). The objective of this essay is to begin correcting this imbalance, isolating a class of ceremonies whose meaning escapes the categories through which these authors classify media events" (CAREY, 1998, p.43).

While the former perceive Communication as the conveying and exchanging of messages, which means opening up the scope for transforming a means to any purpose, including rendering such an instrument for persuasion and influence in the general service of the economy, the dominant and distant power, the latter understands Communication as an inter-subjective process of creation, maintenance and alteration of the meanings and culture constituting any shared reality. According to Carey, Communication should be understood as a fundamentally participative ritual in which and through which we manage, maintain and transform culture. We do not restrict ourselves to the transmission of messages and instead co-create and share the cultural rituals that define our realities. Still furthermore, through this understanding of Communication as a map “of” and “for” reality, Carey posits that there may be not one but various cultural perspectives on Communication. While cultural perspectives are commonly more receptive to concepts such as meaning, interpretation and the plurality of cultures, Carey does not limit himself to the relativism of cultural preferences and instead insists on a cultural perspective that seeks the conjugation of Communication, participation, sharing, association, civic life and democracy. In sum: Communication and community.

Elucidating on how models of study “of” Communication also prove to be models “for” Communication, the Carey approach requires consideration as a proposed cultural map of Communication that strives to study through the discovery of the capacity for inventing new daily models of interaction, for understanding its ritual dimension and making recourse to qualitative approaches to interpret the dynamics and the diversity of the many forms of expression.

References

ARAÚJO, C. A. A Pesquisa Norte-Americana. In: HOHLFELDT, A., MARTINO, L. C.; FRANÇA, V. (Orgs.) *Teorias da comunicação. Conceitos, escolas e tendências*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001. p.119-130.

FILIPA SUBTIL

CAREY, J. W. Politicalritual ontelevision. Episodes in the history of shame, degradation and excommunication. In: LIEBES, T. and CURRAN, J. (Eds.). **Media, ritual and identity**. New York: Routledge, 1998. p.42-70.

_____. Afterword/The culture in question. In: MUNSON, Eve S.; WARREN, C. A. (Eds.). **James Carey. A critical reader**. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997a. p.308-339.

_____. Reflections on the project of (American) cultural studies. In: FERGUNSON, M.; GOLDING, P. (Orgs.). **Cultural studies in question**. London: Sage, 1997b. p.1-24.

_____. A cultural approach of communication. In: **Communication as culture. Essays on media and society**. [1975]. London: Routledge, 1992a. p.13-36.

_____. Mass communication and cultural studies. In: **Communication as culture. Essays on Media and Society**. [1977]. London: Routledge, 1992b. p.37-68.

_____. Overcoming resistance to cultural studies. In: **Communication as culture. Essays on media and society**. [1986]. London: Routledge, 1992c. p.89-110.

_____. Graduate education in mass communication. **Communication education**, v. 28, September 1979. p.282-293.

_____. Mass communication research and cultural studies: An American view. In: CURRAN, J.; GUREVICH, M.; WOOLACOTT, J. (Eds.). **Mass communication and society**. London: Edward Arnold, 1977. p.409-425.

CAREY, J. W.; GROSSBERG, L. From New England to Illinois: The invention of (American) cultural studies: James Carey in conversation with Lawrence Grossberg, Part I. In: PACKER, J.; ROBERTSON, C. (Ed.). **Thinking with James Carey. Essays on communications, transportation, history**. New York, Berlin, Brussels and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006a. p.11-28.

_____. Configurations of culture, history, and politics: James Carey in conversation with Lawrence Grossberg, Part II. In: PACKER, J.; ROBERTSON, C. (Eds.). **Thinking with James Carey. Essays on communications, transportation, history**. New York, Berlin, Brussels and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006b. p.199-225.

CMIEL, K. (Recensão de) James W. Carey. Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society. **Theory and society**, v. 21, n. 2, 1992. p.285-290.

JAMES W. CAREY'S CULTURAL APPROACH OF COMMUNICATION

- COLLINS, R. **Interaction ritual chains**. [2004]. New York and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- DEWEY, J. **Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education**. [1916]. New York: Free Press, 1944 .
- DURKHEIM, E. **As formas elementares da vida religiosa. O sistema totémico na Austrália**. [1912]. Oeiras: Celta Editora, 2002.
- GOFFMAN, E. **A apresentação do eu na vida de todos os dias**. [1959]. Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1993.
- HALBWACHS, M. **Morphologie sociale**. Paris: Colin, 1930.
- LULL, J. **World families watch television**. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1988.
- MARX, L. **Machine in the garden. Technology and the pastoral ideal in America**. [1967]. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2000.
- NOBLE, D. F. **The religion of technology. The divinity of man and the spirit of invention**. New York: Knopf, 1997.
- RAPPAPORT, R. The Obvious Aspects of Ritual. In: _____. **Ecology, meaning, and religion**. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979. p.173-221.
- RAPPAPORT, R. **Ritual and religion in the making of humanity**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- ROSEN, J. "Introduction/'We'll have that conversation': Journalism and democracy in the thought of James W. Carey. In: MUNSON, E. S.; WARREN, C. (orgs.). **James Carey. A critical reader**. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. p.191-205.
- SHILS, E.; FINCH, H. A. (Eds.). **The methodology of social sciences**. Illinois: The Free Press, 1949.
- SUBTIL, F. James W. Carey. Uma voz que clamou por mais e melhor democracia, **Media & Jornalismo**, a. 5, n. 9, 2006. p.133-136.
- TARDE, G. **A Opinião e a multidão**. [1901]. Lisbon: Publicações Europa-América, 1981.
- THOREAU, H. D. **Walden ou a vida nos bosques**. [1854]. Lisbon: Antígona, 2009.

FILIPA SUBTIL

Filipa Subtil

She received her Doctoral Degree in the Social Sciences from Lisbon University's Institute of Social Sciences; was a visiting scholar at the Department of Communication Studies, the University of Iowa, Iowa City (2010) and at Mulhenberg College, Allentown (2008), in the USA. Her research interests have focused on communication sociology, the social theory of the media in the United States and Canada and the problematic frameworks of the media on gender issues, all fields on which she has published articles and book chapters. In 2006, she published the book *Compreenderos Media. As Extensões de McLuhan- Understanding the Media. The McLuhan Extensions* (Minerva, Coimbra).

Received: 03.04.2013

Accepted: 02.11.2014