

# NARRATIVE NETWORKS

# 1

## IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS THE SOCIAL EXPLORER

### OVERVIEW

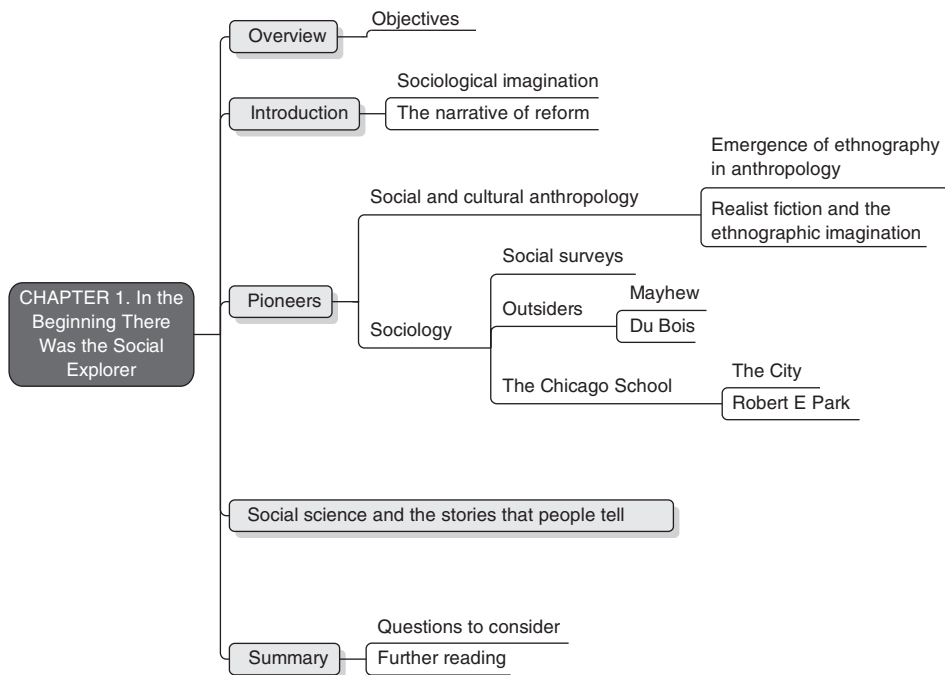


Figure 1.1 Chapter map

### Key learning objectives

- To survey the use of narrative in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sociology and anthropology.
- To introduce work that shows how social realism influenced journalism and policies of social reform in the nineteenth century.
- To introduce several pioneers in social research who used narrative in their work.

## Introduction

In this first chapter I discuss some of the pioneers of narrative use in the social sciences. Modern sociology and anthropology can be said to have begun as forms of writing. The discoveries, by Europeans it must be stressed, of exotic places and peoples abroad, and of exotic people ‘at home’, were discoveries on paper (Thornton, 1983), by which I mean that these were made as much as they were reported in the texts of the nineteenth-century social surveys and ethnographies that were at the heart of early sociology and social/cultural anthropology. Growing quantities of travel writing and missionary reports met together with the growth of the reading public among the newly expanding middle class in England. The scene was thus set for the emergence of a readership for ethnographic writing. Pioneering ethnographers drew upon existing conventions of realist writing in shaping their accounts of others – other places, other people and other cultures. As with their colleagues in what became social anthropology, the British pioneer social surveyors drew upon realist conventions in shaping their accounts of the lives of the urban underclass. That urban underclass was textually constructed as offering a kind of ‘close to home’ contemporary parallel to the exotic others in colonial spaces. The audiences were again the educated middle classes whose often liberal and reformist worldviews and expectations formed the normative basis on which social surveys were written. Liberal reformers saw a need to generate accounts of the lives of the working class in order to have some empirical basis for social reform.

## Sociological imagination

For C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), the mark of good social science writing was that it sought to understand how the individual biography was related to social and historical forces (Mills, 1959). Of the three elements, two (biography and history) are defining forms of narrative. In order to understand

the social, the sociologist must find a way to blend research findings about people, institutions and social change with narratives about individual lives and historical processes. Mills's programme is in a sense humanist in its concern with the individual biography, but it avoids the voluntarism of some forms of humanism by taking into account the way that history and social structures enable *and* constrain people to different degrees. Mills was broadly on the Left, combining a wide ranging radical standpoint with a suspicion of orthodox Marxism. He was a public intellectual who believed that scholarly work must advance critical understanding of society in order to improve people's lives. The vision of sociology that Mills developed in the course of a relatively short but exceptionally productive career was one which was interdisciplinary long before that term became fashionable in the academy, and well before the cultural turn in the social sciences that emerged in the wake of the cultural revolutions of 1968 (Aronowitz, 2012).

Writing the kind of social study that Mills advocated required social scientists to be mindful of both the technical requirements of communicating their work – *The Sociological Imagination* is rich with advice on the craft of writing – and the importance of sociologists reflecting on their own biographies, goals, development and place in society. That for Mills sociology was in large measure a textual practice is further seen in his advice that the scholar should keep a journal (see the appendix to Mills, 1959), which is standard in social/cultural anthropology but not in sociology. That journal, as an ever-growing account of the sociologist's intellectual development, was for Mills an essential tool for the craft of research, whatever the methodological perspective of the researcher. Indeed, for Mills the choice of this or that methodological prescription was far less important than the cultivation of the skill of writing because it was the writing that mattered. Writing well, which for Mills was largely a matter of writing clearly, was one of the main means whereby the public service role of the intellectual could be fulfilled. That his work is still popular today is largely explained by his ability to craft work that was theoretically sophisticated, empirically rich, and above all accessible. I believe it was his emphasis on taking seriously the narrative texture of social life that gave his work its analytical and communicative power.

## The narrative of reform

Let us now consider literary realism in the nineteenth century. This development in letters was linked in complex ways to the coming to prominence of the bourgeoisie in western societies (Morris, 2003; Walder, 1996). I have in mind here principally Britain, the United States, and France: three places where literary realism is seen to have emerged and taken hold most significantly in the nineteenth century. This is not to say that I believe realism was not a characteristic of literature elsewhere in the western or for that

matter non-western world at this time, but my focus here is mainly on Britain, and to a lesser extent the USA. Economic growth and the expansion of the middle class led to an expanded reading public, which in turn provided a market that spurred the growth of print culture both in Britain and the United States (Claybaugh, 2007). A virtuous cycle was then set in train in which a steadily expanding class of persons with the desire and means to read brought forth an increasing supply of reading material which in turn fed the expansion of the market that it served. The gradual expansion of education in this period meant that an ever-increasing proportion of the wider population, and not just the middle classes, became literate.

Another important element of this period was the rise of reform movements in Britain and the USA. In Britain, in particular, movements for social reform were in part a reaction to revolutionary developments coming from the continent, most notably France. Fear of revolution motivated the English ruling classes to make some concessions to the working classes. Movements for reform were fed by two streams: the first broadly coming out of a greater acceptance of the possibility of realising the Enlightenment ideals of social progress through science and technology; and the second fed by a revival of evangelical Christianity with its doctrine that individual salvation was available in principle to all believers. Both of these currents made possible the questioning and rejection of the long-established notion of charity, going back to the Middle Ages and before, which constructed notions of the inevitability of poverty and enjoined those who were well-off to alleviate that poverty through charitable giving (Brown, 2014). This notion of charity saw the poor as a part of the social fabric whose very existence was itself part of a divine order and which it would be futile to attempt to eliminate or even alter in any fundamental way. The new reform movements, by contrast, took the view that scientifically and rationally shaped public policy could understand, alleviate and eventually eliminate a whole swathe of social problems that plagued nineteenth-century Britain, most notably the appalling conditions under which the newly urbanised working classes were forced to live in cities such as Manchester and London (Haggard, 2001).

Social reform produced vast quantities of representation in the forms of official reports, statistics, journalistic accounts, sensationalist accounts, and more. Claybaugh (1997) writes that the 'Novel of purpose' – a work of fiction with a reforming theme – was a fundamental part of that outpouring of representation that was produced as reform expanded. The survey reports that were arguably the characteristic documentary representation that emerged in the wake of and in support of social reform drew upon narrative techniques developed in the novel of purpose in order to constitute the documentation of social ills. There was a feedback loop between the novel of purpose and the contemporaneous social survey report in that not only did typical social survey reports draw upon realist narrative techniques as

used in novels of purpose, but many novels of purpose, especially those with explicit campaigning intent, as in the work of Charles Dickens (1812–1870), were also informed by findings reported in social survey reports of that period.

At the same time as social problems were being invented, represented and politicised in the novel of purpose, another textual discovery was taking place in the far-flung corners of the British Empire. Africa was in a very real sense ‘discovered’ by European travellers’ accounts, missionary documentation, and ethnographies produced throughout the nineteenth century (Thornton, 1983). This exploration of exotic (for Europeans) others and colonial spaces was paralleled by the exploration of exotic others ‘at home’ in London, Manchester and Paris. In most cases the typical explorer was a middle-class educated man driven by an urge to discover and civilise.

## Pioneers

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a period when the pioneers of what would become modern sociology and anthropology developed textual forms (ethnographies and survey reports) that employed narrative techniques from realist fiction writing, biography, journalism, travellers’ accounts and missionaries tales. These new ways of representing social reality were employed by the pioneering anthropologists and sociologists in order to open space for their new disciplines in the university. As that space opened these textual pioneers addressed existing audiences and created new ones for their writing. Let us take two early urban explorers: Henry Mayhew (1812–1887) and Frederick Engels (1820–1895), both of whom were active around the middle of the nineteenth century. These two did not intend to carve out a disciplinary space in either sociology or anthropology; neither was an academic, though academics would later be influenced by their work. They used their accounts of urban social problems in London and Manchester to raise public awareness of the darker side of urbanisation, with a view to agitating for gradual social reform (Mayhew) or for revolutionary social change (Engels). Mayhew was a trained journalist and satirist and used these skills to produce a multivolume book, *London Labour and the London Poor* (2008), which displayed many of the features of social realism to be found in the fiction of for example Dickens: a detailed description of scenes, character sketches, and quotations of overheard speech, to name just a few. In a similar vein Engels, in his *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1993) employed literary techniques that had much in common with those of the nineteenth-century realist novel: again we have detailed descriptions of places and textual sketches of ordinary people. If narrative was the answer though, then what

was the question? What was the problem to which texts such as those produced by Mayhew or Engels were intended to be an answer?

In exploring these questions we have to begin with an overview of the context of industrialising Britain in the mid nineteenth century. In no particular order here are some of the points which are salient to the discussion:

- The latter half of the century saw the emergence of the social sciences and by the end of that period the beginnings of their institutionalisation within the academy.
- The latter decades of the century would witness the consolidation of the European colonial and imperial enterprise which would see much of the world come under the political and economic, if not always a social and cultural, domination of a handful of the most powerful Western European nation states.
- This was also the period which saw the consolidation of nationalism at the capitalist core of the world system.

A vivid account of how Western Europeans saw themselves experiencing modernity is rendered in Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, a text that derived much of its impact from narrative technique. Marx and Engels wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century; all around them the Industrial Revolution was changing the physical and human landscape. They vividly evoke the elements which were shaping the emergent modern Europe: greatly increased trade between European nations; the emergence of a world market created by European colonial expansion and supplied by European products; decisive technological advances such as the invention of the steam engine; the expansion of communication and transport; and institutional changes in politics and social organisation. But there was a dark aide to the upheavals of modernity, as Marx and Engels together and separately were to analyse and document in great detail.

Detailed documentation of the problems of modernity that preceded the writing of these two, however, began in the work of 'political arithmetic' (Hacking, 1990) of the early political economists, most notable of whom was Adam Smith (1723–1790). The new science of statistics was developed as a way of supplying 'hard' data on the development of modernising societies (Hacking, 1990). The first modern census of population took place in England in 1801. By the middle of the nineteenth century we have a number of persons going out to survey the social scene in the industrial heartland of England, often, but not always, with a patronising view of those they observed, as many of these pioneering social explorers had a deep commitment to understanding the transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution in order to develop appropriate social policy with a view to bettering the living conditions for ordinary men and women. Both Mayhew and Engels were very much of this age of reform, and their works

were ‘narratives of reform’ among many such works in fiction and non-fiction that were written in the nineteenth century.

## Social and cultural anthropology

### *Emergence of ethnography in anthropology*

An ethnography is a written account of some aspect of human social/cultural life, based on participation and observation, over an extended period of a year or more, usually by a single researcher. It is the characteristic means of generating and reporting knowledge in social and cultural anthropology, and is important for sociology and for some other disciplines, most notably education and cultural studies (Atkinson et al., 2007). Curiosity about others is a general human trait. Responding to such curiosity through producing oral and especially written texts about other people and places can be traced back at least to Classical times (Woolf, 2011).

By the early nineteenth century in Britain, there was an established reading public for two bodies of texts that would feed into what became academic ethnography: missionary accounts of exotic societies and the long-established genre of travellers’ tales. Pioneering anthropologists like Tylor, Frazer and Morgan were drawing on these to produce a more ‘scientific’ ethnography, which was addressed to an audience that considered themselves to be rational empiricists (Thornton, 1983). Another (and larger) audience comprised the church leaders and congregations of the evangelical movement. This audience was from a different intellectual formation, being more attuned to transcendental styles of argument and to the exercise of the individual imagination. Thornton notes that the styles of the two types of text differed in narrative technique: the authors of the diverse body of missionary letters and reports addressed the reader directly, while the early ethnographies were couched in the norms of the scientific report, employing an impersonal third person style of narrative. Similar kinds of accounts emerged out of the early colonial encounter between European-descent settlers and Native Americans. These were initially written by the European settlers in the mode of observations of and about the noble savage. Another source of knowledge about the Native Americans was a re-telling of Native American narratives by European settlers (Hegeman, 1989). Just as the British explorers and missionaries did in Africa, the early North American settlers sought to render knowledge about the Native Americans through texts that constructed the natives as objects of inquiry. Thus, as Thornton argued for Africans, Native Americans were also ‘discovered’ on paper.

It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that modern social anthropology emerged, enabled in part by the redesign of the travellers’ tales and missionary accounts into a new ‘scientific’ form of writing – the ethnographic monograph:



In effect, the writer On Africa in the period 1850 to 1900 changed from hero to handyman. The image of Africa itself changed from the immense and mysterious to the standardised though enigmatic. Writing about Africa was romantic and imaginative in the early 19th century, since writers of travelogue and the missionary bulletins were interested in attracting an audience for narrative about a new place, new peoples, new problems. Travelogue writers sought to capitalise on their experiences. Missionaries wrote to attract capital for their enterprises. By the end of the century, however, writing reflected an ironic vision of people that had to be explained, both to themselves and to the rest of the world. (Thornton, 1983: 516)

This early anthropological ethnography had its twin in sociology, as I will show later. The parallel emergence of a sociological tradition of ethnography also drew on pre-existing bodies of literature, as the missionaries' accounts of native Africans had their sociological parallel in the 'novel of purpose' (Claybaugh, 2007): the sociological ethnography drew on reports by urban 'explorers' and reformers for whom the mid nineteenth-century underclass of London was as exotic as any tribe in Africa. But before turning to sociology, there is some more to consider regarding social realism and ethnography.

### *Realist fiction and the ethnographic imagination*

One aspect of the establishment of anthropology as a distinct empirical discipline involved setting its work apart from earlier speculative writing that drew more on literary conventions than those of the physical sciences. The establishment of Malinowski's scientific ethnography meant that anthropology moved away from nineteenth-century literary practices and began to shape itself as a positivist discipline. Anthropologists have since tended to develop separate identities as social scientists and as creators of imaginative texts. Time spent on ethnography was (and is) sharply divided from time spent on imaginative writing.

Anthropologists can sometimes struggle to inscribe the more subjective/imaginative aspects of the field experience, but the classic ethnography was perhaps not the best place for such attempts, with its requirement for verifiable evidence. Treating the subjective and imaginative, by contrast, is the special preserve of novelists. The writing of fiction as a 'side line' by anthropologists was one way of meeting a felt need to write imaginatively about the inner worlds of others (Rose, 1993), but few anthropologists have tried to combine classic ethnography with a fictional mode in the same text. In *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) several contributors argued that what the ethnographer does when writing ethnography is similar to what the novelist does when writing a novel. On this view ethnographers need to be aware of how literary devices like metaphor, plot, characterisation and symbolism work to construct texts, including and especially, their own ethnographic texts.

Realism, as an artistic and critical sensibility, and as a cultural movement, sought to come to terms with the transformation of social life brought into being by modernity. Realism was the characteristic nineteenth-century mode of novel writing. The realist novel represented people in society, especially the emergent bourgeois societies of Western Europe and North America. Further, it sought to portray people and society in the state of disenchantment that resulted from modernity. The character in a realist novel was one intended to be identified as someone who could be just like the reader, who was the new bourgeois individual. The 'ordinary man' going about his ordinary business came into his own – 'ordinary' here meaning bourgeois – and this figure was usually male. To represent is literally to 'present again': to bring an image of a thing before our consciousness in the absence of the thing itself where the representation of the thing is not the thing itself. This notion of representation underlies realism. When, as with the nineteenth-century novel in English, what is represented is the person in society, the term 'social realism' is often used. The social realist novel seeks to render aspects of society and culture in a given space and time, in a manner that exhibits the quality of verisimilitude. Social/critical realism in literature is parallel to the realist mode of ethnographic writing. Minute observation and recording of persons and events was at the core of Malinowski's scientific ethnography. Grimshaw and Hart write:

The method of scientific ethnography required the invention of a new literary form. Here, too, Malinowski's lead was decisive. Like the novel in its heyday, the fieldwork-based monograph adopted the style of realism, of being close to life; but, unlike the novel, it abjured any fictional devices, claiming to be an absolutely factual report and explicitly engaging in analytical argument. The distinctive innovation of scientific ethnography was to make ideas seem to emerge from descriptions of real life. (Grimshaw & Hart, 1993)

Realist writing assumes that social reality is amenable to textual representation. The neutral or sympathetic observer, relying on careful observation and inscription, could produce a text which would be both a valid and reliable representation of the social reality studied. The concern of both the realist novel and the realist ethnography was with representation, and indeed faithful representation (Atkinson, 1990).

## Sociology

### *Social surveys*

As discussed by Kent in his history of empirical sociology in Britain (Kent, 1981), the early nineteenth century would see the growth of social

arithmetic and the social statisticians; the latter are probably better understood if we locate them in the emerging field of political economy rather than sociology. It is at this time that we begin to see social explorers, that is to say, middle and upper class, sometimes but not always well-meaning, persons who set out to explore the mysterious (to them) world of the urban underclasses in England. This social exploration emerged in parallel and has to be understood as the twin of the explorations into the dark and mysterious spaces of Africa and other newly colonised spaces by those persons whose work would come to form the corpus on which modern social and cultural anthropology would be constructed. The Victorian social explorers comprised people who set out to understand the lives of the vastly expanded urban poor. They were responding to a new curiosity on the part of the middle and upper classes towards an aspect of their own societies about which they suspected they knew very little. Modernisation and urbanisation having led to larger cities and rising inequality that expressed itself in greater spatial segregation, the everyday lives of the working and non-working poor were very much hidden from the view of observers higher up in the class structure. The middle-class social explorers studied lives of the urban poor by temporarily becoming one of them. Of their accounts Kent wrote:

The results were typically presented as a narrative of journey or exploration by a middle-class observer into the unknown culture of the British working class. The urban poor of London and Manchester were seen as ‘tribes’ of a ‘dark continent’ that needed to be ‘penetrated’ like the darkest forests of Africa. (1981: 6)

### *Outsiders*

**Mayhew** Henry Mayhew (1812–1887) began his career as a satirist. He tried his hand at many different occupations, including that of inventor, but with no success (Introduction, Mayhew, 2008). He is best known for his multi-volume account of the life of the London underclasses, *London Labour and the London Poor* (first published in 1851). At the same time as Dickens was writing his fictional texts about the urban poor in London, Henry Mayhew set out to study the London poor. He was critical of capitalism, but not as a radical socialist or Marxist: he was a reformer rather than a revolutionary. Of particular interest to the discussion here is the fact of Mayhew moving into self-publishing, and then to writing novels, in order to stave off bankruptcy. His work was of quite considerable scope, but was dismissed by later commentators as mere fact-finding.

Even though his notebooks and questionnaires have not survived, Green (2002) has been able to construct a plausible reconstruction of Mayhew’s working methods and motivation from the overall corpus of his work. In

*London Labour* he employs the realist perspective characterised by a third-party point of view; this is then supplemented by a number of other literary devices that are characteristic of realist fiction: detailed descriptions of settings and detailed character sketches, some of which were supported by line-drawn illustrations. Mayhew presented some of the accounts of the people he interviewed by constructing stories in which he sought to render the actual language used by his informants. Many of these sketches, portraits and stories are supported by statistics and several attempts to develop typologies of the human variety of the London lower classes.

Mayhew's work has much to contribute to contemporary ethnography, concerned as it is to avoid the many well-documented problems with realist representations of social life. Mayhew wrote for a general audience, with a view to enlightening them as to the real-life conditions of the poor in London. That general reading audience was the same one we saw in the earlier discussion of the transatlantic readership for the 'novel of reform' (of which the work of Charles Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell is a prime example). The writing of the text is as much part of ethnography as is the fieldwork itself, Green (2002) notes. He goes on to point out that the ethnographic text has two moments of truth: the first is the point of contact in the field between the ethnographer and the ways of life that she sets out to understand; and the second for Green is at the point of communicative contact with those 'who are to be vicariously drawn into those experiences and ways of life, the readers of the ethnography' (p. 103). Mayhew employed many of the techniques of contemporaneous realist fiction, in particular his vivid character sketches and the many stories told by his informants which he reported as quoted speech. Van Maanen (2011), in discussing the different kinds of authorial stances adopted in ethnographic writing, asserts that one of the main features of realist ethnography is a narrative stance of studied neutrality on the part of the author. Though his work was squarely in a realist tradition, Mayhew did not adopt this neutral stance because he was committed to reform and intended his work to be a resource for those engaged in reform. Green (2002) notes that Mayhew did not hesitate to deliver policy opinions and moral judgements. For Green, Mayhew's work is of most value to us in finding a way through the opposition of realist versus post-modernist writing perspectives. There is much in so-called traditional realist ethnography that is worth salvaging.

**Du Bois** W.E.B Du Bois (1868–1963) was a pioneer sociologist who did groundbreaking work in mixed methods, as evidenced by *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois, 1996), his autobiography, and the mixed-genre *Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1968, 1994). Du Bois used narrative as a way to represent and understand the racialised city. He was a friend of Max Weber and had greater acceptance as a scholar in Germany than he did in the USA, due to the US racial glass ceiling, which meant that he was unable to secure a

teaching post in sociology at an established university, despite the fact that his work was comprehensive in scope and groundbreaking in technique. His *Souls of Black Folk* is a multi-genre text, using different discourse modes of narrative, description, and reporting. *Souls* also employed different genres in its sociological representation of life and poetics to argue that black people in the USA occupied a unique position in the modern western world, and that they had developed sophisticated modes of action and understanding in order to cope with the harsh realities of life in a racially-segregated USA. The focus on the creative arts in *Souls* was in contrast to his earlier hope that science would reveal the irrationality of racism. Du Bois wrote in his autobiography (1968) that he had come to realise that white racism could not be countered by social science alone, and that he therefore needed to work in a literary and poetic as well as a social research mode. The painstaking work of social research exemplified in *Philadelphia Negro* was not a fully adequate response to the harsh brutalities of lynching: it was political necessity that led Du Bois to explore different narrative techniques in his work.

### *The Chicago School*

**The City** The city of Chicago looms large in the history of sociology, and urban sociology in particular. Early twentieth-century Chicago was a vast social laboratory in which many of the techniques of ethnographic investigation in sociology were pioneered and refined (Bulmer, 1986). Chicago was the first university in the world to offer graduate training in sociology. The researchers who gathered there around the newly formed Department of Sociology were pioneers in a number of areas: in urban ethnography, in the use of personal narratives in sociology, and in developing ecological approaches to understanding how different social groups occupied different spaces in the city. The Chicago Department of Sociology was established to aid understanding of the processes that shaped the city in the wake of mass migration, intensive industrialisation, and the integration of immigrant groups, many of whom were of different ethnicities (ethnicity here is largely a matter of different ethnicities understood as different groups of people from different Western European nations of emigration).

In late nineteenth-century Chicago there was a significant wave of social surveys that paralleled developments in Britain in the same period. The settlement house movement, which was transatlantic in scope, was a major source of data that fed into the sociological knowledge base of the sociology department, but this movement was also a major site of policy, some of which was based upon work in the Chicago Department of Sociology. Of significance here is that many middle-class women – often university graduates – were involved in social work and social surveys in settlement houses. This was at the time one of the few careers in social science research

open to women. Some of the earliest social surveys in the USA were carried out by members of the settlement house movement, most notably Jane Addams (Deegan, 2010). These surveys were characterised by a strong moralistic overtone.

As one example of the department's pioneering work in sociology, *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, 1922) was one of the first social surveys to combine theory and method in a way that would become characteristic of early to mid twentieth-century sociology in the USA. This work was a sociological survey that differed from the work of the social survey movement in that it was scientific in the sense of drawing upon the latest social theories and sampling techniques and also narrower in scope (Bulmer, 1986: 78–80). This is a work that has interesting resonances with Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro*, but Du Bois was not at the time seen as part of mainstream US sociology, due in part to racism in the academy, and in part to the fact that Robert E. Park, one of the founders of Chicago sociology, had considerable political antagonism towards Du Bois. It is to the work of Park that we turn next.

**Robert E. Park** Robert E. Park (1864–1944) was one of the founding figures of Chicago sociology. Park studied philosophy and social theory in the USA and in Germany and was influenced by the work of the German social theorist Georg Simmel (1858–1980). He also worked as a reporter and publicist for the anti-racist campaigner and educator, Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). Park was a contemporary of Du Bois, who like Park was influenced by German philosophy and social theory. Both men studied for a time in Germany. Despite both Du Bois and Park carrying out research on the status of blacks in US cities, and despite both being committed to the ending of US racism, there was no collaboration between the two, and indeed there was considerable antagonism between them, with Park taking a gradualist approach as against Du Bois's more militant politics.

Park, through his work as a journalist, became a major proponent of the human interest story. This was significant in light of the fact that in the nineteenth century in the USA the journalist was often seen as a disreputable figure (Lindner, 1996). In order to combat this, Joseph Pulitzer founded a College of Journalism in 1908, to raise journalism to the rank of a profession. Park was a pragmatist and had read and taken on board the work of John Dewey. He 'held do-gooders at arm's length', and was opposed to the moralising tone of the settlement house and early social survey movements (Lindner, 1996: 137). He was keen to establish social research on a sound scientific footing, which for him meant that the value of social research was to be found in the evidence of the research findings themselves and not in a moral framework (Lannoy, 2004). Park engaged in fieldwork through participant observation, drawing on his journalist's skills, and was

one of the pioneers of the use of biographical research methods (Park, 1915, 1970). For him, biographical and related narrative materials supported putting oneself in the position of other people, leading to mutual understanding, or as Max Weber put it, *verstehen*.

## Social Science and the Stories that People Tell

Sociological interest in and use of narrative goes back to the very beginning of the discipline, with pioneering work by some founding members of the sociology department in Chicago (Plummer, 2001; chapter 5), and especially figures like Du Bois and Park making the case for the collection and analysis of narrative material. Sociologists use narrative texts to gain insight into the lived social world. As Franzosi (1998: 519) notes, narrative texts are rich in sociological information. Sociologists working with narrative draw on the work done by linguists and sociolinguists in theorising narrative and narration, and move on to focus on the social relations that are actual and implied in narrative texts as discourses and in narrative acts as social performances. And more sociologists are becoming aware that the communication of sociological knowledge entails narration to a greater or lesser degree. Contemporary sociology has seen an expansion of work based on various forms of discourse analysis, within which we find narrative analysis (Berger and Quinney, 2005).

Anthropologists bring very similar concerns and perspectives to narrative as those of their sociological colleagues. What is arguably distinctive about anthropological approaches to narrative is the close attention that is paid to the symbolic work of narration. Linguistically oriented anthropologists bring the plethora of linguistic theory to bear on narrative, and move on to pay special attention to the collective work of meaning making and interpretation in narrative text and performance. Compared to sociologists, anthropologists have more highly developed tools for studying narrative in non-western settings, as well as for comparing narrative texts and narration across cultures (Langness and Frank, 1981).

### Summary

In this chapter we looked at the use of narrative in the early work of sociology and of social and cultural anthropology. The narrative turn in social science may be fairly recent, but narrative has been present, if not always acknowledged, from the very beginning of academic social science. Social realism was a defining

feature of much nineteenth-century fiction. For the first time in the history of literature, ordinary people (at least ordinary middle-class and to a lesser extent working-class people) were the subjects of fiction. This development was the literary parallel to the consolidation of capitalism in the economic sphere and of liberal democracy in the political sphere. Social reform was fed by liberal projects to redress the negative consequences of capitalism, and the work produced by many of its leading figures drew on techniques and forms that were developed in social realist fiction; the development of academic social science in the USA and the UK proceeded hand in hand with projects of social reform.

### Questions to consider

1. Read any of the introductory texts on social realism that are listed in the 'Further reading' section below.
  - a. What are some defining features of social realism?
  - b. Identify social realist features in any classic work of anthropology or sociology with which you are familiar.
2. Read Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, and Dickens's *Hard Times*.
  - a. Compare the representation of people and social relations in the two texts.
  - b. How important is description of places in these two texts?

## Further reading



- Atkinson, P. (1990) *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual constructions of reality*. London: Routledge.
- Bulmer, M. (1986) *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity and the Rise of Sociological Research* (new edn). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Claybaugh, A. (2007) *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Mayhew, H. (2008) *London Labour and the London Poor* (Wordsworth Classics of World Literature). Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions.
- Morris, P. (2003) *Realism: New Critical Idiom*. London: Routledge.
- Park, R.E. (1915) 'The city: suggestions for the investigation of human behavior in the city environment', *American Journal of Sociology*, 20(5) (March 1): 577–612.



- Phoenix, A. (2008) 'Analysing narrative contexts'. In: Andrews, M., Squire, C., and Tamboukou, M. (eds), *Doing narrative research*, London: Sage, pp. 64–77.
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- Thornton, R. (1983) 'Narrative ethnography in Africa, 1850–1920: the creation and capture of an appropriate domain for anthropology', *Man*, 18(3): 502–20.