The Interactionist Imagination

Michael Hviid Jacobsen
Editor

The Interactionist Imagination

Studying Meaning, Situation
and Micro-Social Order

palgrave
macmillan

Editor

Michael Hviid Jacobsen
Department of Sociology
University of Aalborg at Esbjerg
Aalborg Oest, Denmark

ISBN 978-1-137-58183-9

ISBN 978-1-137-58184-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-58184-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017943871

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2017

The author(s) has/have asserted their right(s) to be identified as the author(s) of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover image © Stephen Harrison / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

Preface

Ever since early childhood, I have always been a curious soul deeply attracted to all the many different places ‘where the action is’, as Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman once so memorably put it. Seeking out the wonderful but also unpredictable world of interaction, conversation and sociality became the source of excitement and embarrassment, friendships and animosities, nail-biting and euphoric experiences as well as a solid career in my life but it also served as a bulwark against boredom and loneliness. Despite its apparent unpredictability, ‘all the world’, as Goffman also suggested, is ‘truly a wedding’, a thoroughly ritualised micro-universe in which people – at times total strangers to each other, at other times long-time friends and lovers – come together, navigate with their bodies, touch each other, talk to each other, make transactions, hurt each other, make love, fight, make up again, and so on. Even though such a world might be seen as a rather unruly affair with the risk of transgression, violation, and breakdown always lurking beneath the undisturbed surface, in fact, most times and most places the endless stream of interaction between people, even among strangers, runs in a smooth and relatively uncomplicated manner. The reason for this is the fact that most of us, most of the time and in most places, know how to behave. The invisible rules of sociality seem to keep us constantly in check even when we think we are free to do whatever we want. It is this wonderful world of interaction and sociality that long before I became a professional sociologist attracted my attention.

Interactionism – as an approach to the investigation of social life as well as a theoretical perspective – has thus been an integral part of my sociological backpack ever since my early training in the discipline. In fact, it was probably there long before I even knew about or was taught about interactionism. Some of my own first empirical studies were deeply inspired by the curiosity of many of the interactionists I read during my student days: I did observation studies of mortuary behaviour, funeral ceremonies, childbirth sessions and interaction patterns in a small homosexual community in the United States. What I once in some early books called ‘inappropriate sociology’ captured this youthful fascination with microsociological studies of the obscure corners, deviant margins and subterranean subcultures of society that I continue to believe is such an important part of the sociological craft. Moreover, some of the most memorable texts from my student days were exactly the works of the great interactionists – Erving Goffman, Anselm L. Strauss, Stanford M. Lyman and Marcello Truzzi. Having long since quitted doing in-depth empirical work myself, being now chained to my desk and working primarily with social theory, I tremendously miss the strange and intoxicating odour from the field. However, the great satisfaction derived from reading and rereading the many studies, classic and contemporary, conducted by excellent interactionist ethnographers and cartographers of everyday life situations is still as great as when they were discovered for the first time.

The idea behind this book began fermenting when one day I was thinking about my own indebtedness to interactionism. Without the life-giving and inspirational ideas of interactionism, I am unsure that I would ever have decided to become a sociologist. This book is an attempt to cover some grounds when it comes to introducing to the rich and potent tradition of interactionism in sociology. It is, however, not an exhaustive account – many important contributions to interactionism are not included or covered in separate chapters, but are merely mentioned or touched upon cursorily in other chapters. The reasons for these omissions are primarily of a practical nature. First, the interactionist tradition is now so widely branched that it would be utterly and practically impossible to hope to introduce to all the thinkers, theorists, and researchers counting themselves as belonging to or who are conventionally included under an

interactionist heading. At least, no publishing house would sign on a book project of several thousands of pages required for such an exhaustive exposition. Second, some planned chapters simply did not pan out as is often the case in such collaborative projects as edited volumes and especially when inviting very busy people on board. Hence, intended introductions to the likes of Charles Horton Cooley, Ann Swidler, and Norman K. Denzin regrettably never made it into the final product. Despite such absences, I still think the book goes a long way to introduce to a number of die-hard interactionist sociologists, thereby providing accessible and useful inroads into the rich interactionist legacy. It is my hope that these introductions to key interactionists will inspire students and scholars alike to keep the spirit of interactionism alive and kicking in sociology.

Aalborg University,
autumn 2016

Michael Hviid Jacobsen

Contents

1	Introduction: Instigators of Interactionism – A Short Introduction to Interactionism in Sociology	1
	<i>Michael Hviid Jacobsen</i>	
2	Georg Simmel: Interactionist Before Symbolic Interactionism?	41
	<i>Greg Smith</i>	
3	Robert E. Park: – A Precursor to Interactionism	71
	<i>Suzie Guth</i>	
4	George Herbert Mead: – The Evolution of Mind, Self and Society Through Interaction	95
	<i>Antony J. Puddephatt</i>	
5	Everett C. Hughes: – Human Ecology, Peripheries and the World of Work	121
	<i>Edward B. Davis</i>	
6	Herbert Blumer: – From Critique to Perspective	145
	<i>Alex Dennis</i>	

7	Manford H. Kuhn: – A Legacy in the Age of Inquiry	169
	<i>Michael A. Katovich</i>	
8	Erving Goffman: – Exploring the Interaction Order Through Everyday Observations and Imaginative Metaphors	195
	<i>Michael Hviid Jacobsen</i>	
9	Harold Garfinkel: – Experimenting with Social Order	233
	<i>Dirk vom Lehn</i>	
10	Anselm L. Strauss: – Action/Work as Process and Perspective	263
	<i>Jörg Strübing</i>	
11	Jack D. Douglas: – The Existential Sociology Project	291
	<i>Andrey Melnikov and Joseph A. Kotarba</i>	
12	Howard S. Becker: – Aspects of an Open Sociology	315
	<i>Marc Perrenoud</i>	
13	Stanford M. Lyman: – A Sociology of the Absurd and Beyond	341
	<i>Cecil E. Greek and Michael Hviid Jacobsen</i>	
14	Arlie R. Hochschild: – Interactions, Emotions and Commercialized Intimacy	375
	<i>Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Anders Petersen</i>	
15	Gary Alan Fine: – From Small Groups to Peopled Ethnography	409
	<i>Chiara Bassetti and Roberta Sassatelli</i>	
	Index	435

List of Contributors

Chiara Bassetti Department of Information Engineering and Computer Science of the University of Trento, Trento, Italy

Edward B. Davis Sociology at Yuba College, Marysville, California, United States

Alex Dennis Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom

Cecil E. Greek Department of Sociology at University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, United States

Suzie Guth Department of Sociology, University of Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France

Michael Hviid Jacobsen Department of Sociology, University of Aalborg at Esbjerg, Aalborg Oest, Denmark

Michael A. Katovich Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, United States

Joseph A. Kotarba Department of Sociology at Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas, United States

Dirk vom Lehn Department of Interaction & Technology Research Centre, King's College, London, United Kingdom

Andrey Melnikov Department of Sociology, Taras Shevchenko National University, Kiev, Ukraine

Marc Perrenoud Department of Sciences Sociales, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Anders Petersen Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

Antony J. Puddephatt Department of Sociology at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Canada

Roberta Sassatelli Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy

Greg Smith Department of Sociology, University of Salford, Greater Manchester, United Kingdom

Jörg Strübing Department of Sociology, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany