

ROUTLEDGE



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The Routledge International Handbook of Interactionism

Edited by Dirk vom Lehn, Natalia Ruiz-Junco and Will Gibson

The Routledge International Handbook of Interactionism demonstrates the promise and diversity of the interactionist perspective in social science today, providing students and practitioners with an overview of the impressive developments in interactionist theory, methods and research. Thematically organized, it explores the history of interactionism and the contemporary state of the field, considering the ways in which scholars approach topics that are central to interactionism. As such, it presents discussions of self, identity, gender and sexuality, race, emotions, social organization, media and the Internet and social problems. With attention to new developments in methods and methodologies, including digital ethnography, visual methods and research ethics, the authors also engage with new areas of investigation that have emerged in light of current societal developments, such as policing and police violence, interactionism beyond binaries and social media. Providing a comprehensive overview of the current state and possible future of interactionist research, it will appeal to interactionist scholars, as well as to established sociologists and students of sociology who have an interest in the latest developments in interactionism.

THE ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF INTERACTIONISM

*Edited by Dirk vom Lehn, Natalia Ruiz-Junco and
Will Gibson*



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INTRODUCTION

*Dirk vom Lehn, Natalia Ruiz-Junco and Will
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As scholarly perspectives and methods mature, the need is often felt to take stock and assess where they are and where they are going. Some of this reflective work is undertaken at conferences where academics meet to discuss their research and its relationship to existing and emerging scholarship. Handbooks are another place where such reflection takes place. They are less ephemeral than conference presentations, providing researchers with retrospective debate, discussions of the 'state-of-the-field' and, usually, an attempt to project possible futures. Thus, handbooks act as a resource to orient new and established practitioners to a novel and changing field, and once published, they become a historical marker of the discipline.

This handbook follows in the footsteps of eminent scholars who, in the 1960s, 1970s and in the early 2000s, produced important summative accounts of interactionism.¹ Of particular note is Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney's (2003) *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism*, which is the most recent work of this type. Produced nearly two decades ago, the book serves as a thorough and detailed background on theories, methods, concepts and several subfields of interactionist studies. It is a

landmark publication that brought together established and emerging scholars at the time of the book's production, and it remains a key text for interactionist students and scholars. Their expansive collection was comprised of important chapters that contextualized interactionist theory in relation to early philosophical sources, traced the more recent intellectual influences shaping classic interactionism and expanded upon the contributions of such foundational figures as Charles H. Cooley, W.I. Thomas and G.H. Mead. Further, the collection reflected the wide scope of interactionist approaches, including studies by scholars who align themselves with the Chicago School, the Iowa School, the dramaturgical approach, and ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. Contributors to the volume discussed methods of symbolic interactionism and a diverse range of concepts, from *mind*, *self*, and *society* to *role* and *social organization*. A core part of the handbook is made up of studies of institutions, such as economic, military, educational and religious institutions, as well as the mass media and explored conceptual issues such as deviance, collective behavior, race and ethnic relations, as well as occupations and professions, and community and urban life. Finally, Reynolds and Herman-Kinney's handbook ended with an exploration of several areas of focus for interactionists: social problems, cultural studies, semiotics, pragmatism and narratives, as well as an assessment of future developments in the field. All in all, the book remains one of the most important collected texts in interactionist scholarship.

Why a new handbook?

Given the expansive reach and the substantial successes of this earlier handbook, one may reasonably ask why another is necessary. There are two main answers to this question. The first has to do with the instrumental purpose of handbooks – as a *toolkit* to make sense of a specific area of knowledge at a particular point in time. The present text is the result of an interrogation of the rapidly changing contemporary field of interactionism. Kent Sandstrom, Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott and Gary Alan Fine in this volume point to three trends that define the current state of interactionism: a *diversity* of perspectives, increasing *fragmentation* regarding the theoretical nucleus of interactionism, and *internationalization*. In this introduction we address these trends with a slightly different focus: *theoretical diversity and expansion*, an *increasingly globalized field* and *broad dissemination of interactionist thought within the social sciences*.

First, there is a continuing tendency to embrace theoretical diversity, which has been a noticeable trend since before the publication of the last handbook. Since the last decade of the 20th century, scholars have merged or expanded interactionist insights with other frameworks, such as cultural studies (Becker and McCall, 1993; Denzin, 1992), feminism (Kleinman and Cabaniss, 2019) and performance studies (Denzin, 2003) and have created novel ways of doing research, including those inspired by theoretical critiques of positivist scientific writing, such as autoethnography (Adams et al. 2014; Ellis, 2003; Richardson, 2016). In the first two decades of this century this trend towards theoretical diversity has continued. However, rather than pouring their ideas and research efforts into separate “silos” of intel-

lectual activity, interactionists increasingly accept the diversity and interconnectedness of their perspectives, pushing further the theorization of new areas of research and new positions of critique.

An example of such developments is Leslie Irvine's chapter in this volume, which expands interactionist canon by exploring the connections between humans, nonhumans and the natural environment. Her chapter refutes what she characterizes as the anthropocentric framework of Meadian theory, which, she suggests, led interactionists to assume the centrality of human selfhood and to reject or ignore the self-experiences of non-human animals. A further illustration of theoretical innovation can be found in theorizations of the body: Lisa Jean Moore and Sumayra Khan's chapter shows the synergies between interactionism and several critique perspectives – such as Fatness Studies, Disability/Accessibility Studies, and Transgender Studies – in accounting for the embodied experiences of health and illness. As a final example, J.E. Sumerau's chapter on non-binary sex, gender and sexualities points out that interactionism has been one of the sociological perspectives that has supported the construction of a binary social world. She, however, notes that the interactionist tradition can correct this by exploring the social construction of sex, gender and sexuality at a much deeper level, questioning the binaries that appear in both social life and in social research practice.

The second trend in the field is towards the globalization of interactionism. In a special issue published the same year as the previous handbook, Philip Manning and David Maines (2003:

497) pointed out that “the future of symbolic interactionism is global, although its origins are thoroughly American.” This certainly has come to be true, as interactionism is no longer an American affair (see, e.g., Plummer, 2010; Plummer and Turner, 2000; Vannini, 2008), with conferences focusing on interaction being held around the world and with an increase in topics of investigation that are of global significance (see, e.g., Knorr Cetina, 2009) being studied in areas of the globe beyond the United States (see, e.g., Müller, 2015; To, 2013). In the recent past, interactionism has attracted enormous talent outside the territorial borders of North America. Scholars based in Europe now have an institutional anchor for their scholarship – the European Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction – and have transformed interactionism by incorporating approaches embedded in their unique social contexts (see Engdahl and Müller, 2015; Müller, 2015; Salvini et al., 2012a, 2012b). The current volume reflects this diversity with a third of the contributions coming from Europe and beyond.

The third trend is towards the increasing acceptance and influence of interactionist theories, concepts and methods within the social sciences. Again, this is not new, as Gary Alan Fine (1993), and, later, David Maines (2001) argued, interactionist theory and method has become a mainstay of much sociological work to the extent that, in Atkinson and Housley’s (2001) words, within sociology “we are all interactionists now”. Indeed, interactionist treatment of concepts such as *mind*, *self*, *society*, *time*, *deviance* and *stigma* have become central to debates not only in sociology, but across the social sciences. For example, as Baptiste Brossard

demonstrates in this volume, interactionism has been a key approach to the study of mental health, with landmark studies including Erving Goffman's *Asylums* (1961) and *Stigma* (1963), and Tom Scheff's (1999/1966) *Being Mentally Ill*. Interactionism has also greatly contributed to the study of emotion: while they were initially hindered by a focus on the cognitive aspects of the self in Meadian theory, contemporary interactionists have done much to break away from the limits of this framework (Collins, 2004; Ruiz-Junco, 2017; Turner and Stets, 2005). As Doyle McCarthy's chapter shows, the intersections of interactionism with cultural studies has given rise to diverse concepts for understanding emotions as normatively organized, interactionally situated, cultural (and semiotic) practices.

In summary, then, these three trends – theoretical diversity and expansion, an increasingly globalized field and broad dissemination of interactionist thought within the social sciences – warrant a text that can 'take stock', bringing together scholarly work that reflects the remarkable advances and diversity within our community. We think the fascinating collection of chapters that the authors have generously contributed to this volume do exactly that.

However, a further and critically important reason why we need a new handbook is because of the social and cultural changes that we have experienced over the past 17 years through rapid technological innovation. New technologies have thoroughly altered the nature of social interaction, and the types of resources available (both individually and institutionally) to

make meaning about ourselves, our contexts and society at large (Couch, 2017). People's experiences are frequently mediated or even *constituted* by technology, with new ways of speaking, new forms of activity, and with individuals and institutions using an ever-changing and expanding range of resources that alter how we do our work, socialize, access and process information and, ultimately, how we make sense of ourselves and the others around us. New communication technologies and their impact on human interaction, or the increasing use of the 'terminal' as a form of transforming self-understandings (see Simon Gottschalk's chapter in this volume on the terminal self) are now important foci of attention for interactionist researchers. These and other related changes also present new challenges for us as scholars altering the nature of the ethnographer's gaze, our understanding of our engagement with social worlds as sensory spaces, and the practices that researchers use to represent knowledge (see Emilie Morwenna Whitaker and Paul Atkinson's chapter).

Given this, one of the key aims of this handbook is to survey the major frameworks within contemporary interactionist scholarship; to show how they are being used to shed light on current experiences/practices of self, identity negotiation and interaction; to reflect on the conceptual and methodological innovations made by scholars and the challenges we face as an interdisciplinary field. We see this as a *continuation* of the work undertaken in the previous handbook and in the other collections referenced earlier.

A second aim of this collection is to provide an *interpretation* of the field of interactionism. This is an implicit function of all handbooks as their selection of content necessarily results in the construction of an interpretation and framing. Readers should not treat this (or any) handbook as representing the totality of a field, as collected works are always biased statements to some extent. Perhaps the most important feature of our own framing is the way we label the field and our definition of its boundaries. Readers will note that, in contrast to Reynolds and Herman-Kinney's (2003) text, we do not call this a handbook of 'symbolic interactionism', but of *interactionism*. This broader term is much more inclusive and enables us to include critically important areas of work, such as ethnomethodology and conversation analysis that sit uneasily in the more specific symbolic interactionism framing. This is not a new move within interactionism, as major statements on interactionism such as Reynolds (1993) and Atkinson and Housley's (2003) articulations (the latter published in the Reynolds and Herman-Kinney handbook) chose to discard the term 'symbolic', seeking an expansive lens from which to re-imagine the field. In our case, the choice is as an attempt to embrace a plurality of perspectives in an increasingly global and interdisciplinary landscape. As we discuss later, we see interactionism as a family of perspectives that, while diverse, have a key common concern with people's meaning making practices in social life (cf. Dingwall et al., 2012).

In spite of this, readers will encounter variation in the terminology used by the authors in these chapters, with some referring specially to 'symbolic interactionism' and others opting for the more generic term 'interactionism'. Similarly, there is varia-

tion in the ways that authors refer to people, using terminology such as 'actors' and 'members', which can carry quite specific conceptual implications. The label 'actor' is more strongly associated with symbolic interactionist theories that draw attention to notions of 'role taking' and the relation between social selves and society. In contrast, 'member' comes from Harold Garfinkel's work and its emphasis on people's own practices/methods of meaning-making of the contexts in which they find themselves. In this introduction, we use the more common term 'people' to avoid the implications that the specific terms carry. However, we have decided not to impose this restriction on the contributors, and we regard the variation in the conceptual language across the chapters as a reflection of exactly the diversity that we are concerned to represent.

Structure of the handbook

The handbook is organized around six themes: *varieties of interactionism* (which encompasses an analysis of key theoretical ideas in the field); *self, identity and emotions*; *social organization*; *media and the Internet*; *research methods* and *reimagining interactionism*. As we discuss in more detail later, we see these themes as major areas of work over the last two decades. In selecting the content for these sections, we have avoided reproducing content that was comprehensively covered in the 2003 volume. So, for example, we have not included a focused discussion on the Chicago School, which has been the subject of much scholarly attention (see Bulmer, 1984; Chapoulie, 2020; Fine, 1995; Musolf, 2003).

Similarly, we have not included a chapter on the antecedents of symbolic interactionism that were covered in detail by Prus' and Reynolds' chapters in 2003. We do not include statements solely focused on G.H. Mead's (2002/1932, 1967/1934, 1967/1938) theory or the Chicago School because we aim to avoid reducing the pragmatist strand of interactionism to G.H. Mead's thought: as Frithjof Nungesser's chapter in this volume argues, the study of social interaction must include a full array of interdisciplinary research and pragmatist ideas (beyond Mead's) in its understanding of how people adapt to their changing environments.

Given our interests in articulating an inclusive field, we have intentionally avoided prioritizing one particular strand of interactionism over others. Indeed, as we will explain, we are critical of narrow conceptions of interaction that privilege particular strands of thought over others. Instead, we have explicitly sought chapters that show how the field has advanced over the past 17 years and that reflect on new developments in the history of interactionism. Our intention has been to include representative perspectives that explore the contemporary significance and the potentials of interactionist arguments that resonate with current debates about sex and gender, the body, race and racialization, the natural environment and animals, time and space, the Internet and social media, as well as institutions such as the media and the police. Suffice it to say that, while we have tried to be as inclusive as possible in our selection of topics, the obvious limitations of space mean that neither the theoretical/conceptual approaches nor the empirical areas that we cover here exhaust what interactionism has to offer.

Varieties of interactionism

Interactionism can be thought of as a family of perspectives and methods within the social sciences and humanities that are applied to the study of a wide range of diverse topics (cf. Dingwall et al., 2012). As we have said, the common assumption that interactionism can be equated with symbolic interactionism is problematic, as the interactionist family is much larger than that.

There are several key features that these diverse areas have in common. First, the notion that human interaction is the context for the emergence of role-taking and is the basis of the social self has dominated the landscape of interactionist thinking since its early pragmatist roots (see Nungesser in this volume). Further, interactionists examine how people orient to the world around them according to the meaning it has for them; they consider that meaning arises from interaction, and they view interpretation as a process that is ongoing in interaction as people build and modify meaning in concrete situations (Blumer, 1969; Garfinkel, 2006/1948). From these general premises, interactionist research explores how relationships between people arise and how people maintain, experience, develop and change their sense of self in social relationships. It investigates society and the 'social self' by analyzing how social situations are organized through peoples' actions and interpretive acts and how this organization structures relationships between individuals in society. In the following paragraphs, we wish to show in more detail how these themes intersect, as well as the ways they have been developed as distinct approaches.

Probably the most widely known interactionist perspective outside of sociology is symbolic interactionism. The term was coined by Herbert Blumer (1900–1987), who provided a landmark statement on the conceptual character of the perspective,

which drew substantially on the work of G.H. Mead (1863–1931) (Blumer, 1969). Blumer's account of symbolic interactionism gave rise to an extremely successful research program and, as Thomas J. Morrione aptly discusses in his chapter, provided a clear agenda for sociologists, offering invaluable tools for the study of the human condition in terms of peoples' perspectives, identities, and actions as *emergent* developments rather than as inflexibly determined by outside forces. In Morrione's view, Blumer's approach is not just a 'micro' perspective but is, rather, a holistic endeavor that also encompasses macro-aspects of society. Symbolic interactionism grew in the United States at a moment of innovation for the discipline of sociology, and at a time when American society was subject to tremendous social changes, Blumer opened a theoretical space for the conceptual and empirical study of diverse and changing social settings and practices in a way that had been missed by the dominant framework of the time, structural functionalism (Low and Bowden, 2020).

The founder of structural functionalism, Talcott Parsons, was the doctoral advisor of another 'founder' of interactionism, Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011). Garfinkel began his PhD at Harvard at the time that Blumer was developing symbolic interactionism in Chicago and Berkeley. As Jason Turowetz and Anne Warfield Rawls note in this volume, Garfinkel took from Parsons an interest in the classic tradition of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. However, Garfinkel (2006/1948) rejected the social-scientific perspective underlying Parsons' approach and began to develop his own sociological attitude that would eventually be for-

mulated as the perspective of *ethnomethodology* (Garfinkel, 1996, 2002). Ethnomethodology has a strong affiliation to phenomenology and in particular to the social phenomenology developed by Alfred Schutz (1967) (see Rawls, 2002, 2006; vom Lehn, 2014). Like symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology is closely related to the pragmatist philosophy as developed by Peirce, James, Dewey, Addams and Mead (Emirbayer and Maynard, 2011). As Nungesser's chapter brilliantly illustrates, classic interactionists – specifically Dewey and Mead – understood interaction from the standpoint of an organism that relates and adapts to a specific environment. Relatedly, Garfinkel (2002) argued that sociology should prioritize the point of view of societal members and that it should aim to reveal the *organization of concrete everyday social practices*. In his 'tutorial exercises' (Garfinkel, 1967, 2002), which in textbooks are often called 'breaching experiments' (Giddens, 2009), Garfinkel explored and demonstrated that people approach social situations with expectations about how they should be conducted. Through its 'progeny' discipline of conversation analysis (CA), ethnomethodologists have discovered the detailed practices and methods through which people orientate to the problem of creating mutual understanding in concrete situations. By examining audio recordings through detailed transcriptions, conversation analysts reveal the organization of talk and demonstrate the social and collaborative accomplishment of people's problem-solving efforts. An underlying principle of ethnomethodology is that the coordination of social actions is possible because people mutually render their orientation toward shared practice *witnessable to others*. The theo-

retical focus on the possibility of coordinated action stems from ethnomethodology's concern with the study of society from the perspective of "the social fact tradition," to which the classic European theorists that influenced Garfinkel belonged (see Turowetz and Rawls in this volume).

With the development of CA, ethnomethodologists demonstrate their interest in practice by providing an understanding of 'language in use' that bears affinities to Mead's (1967/1934) theoretical discussion of 'communication' and of the production of 'meaning' through a 'conversation of gestures'. Further, Garfinkel's (1967, 2002) analysis of tutorial exercises show how people deploy 'situated creativity' to deal with problems they encounter in the everyday, an argument that is cognate to Joas's (1996) analysis of 'creative action'. More recent ethnomethodological research using video recordings as principal data for the analysis of everyday interaction in work and public places adds to those discussions by highlighting the interplay of vocal, visual and bodily action with the environment (Heath and Luff, 2000; Heath et al., 2010). This analysis relates to Mead's pursuits in the 'Philosophy of the Act' (1967/1938) as well as to research undertaken by Carl Couch (1925–1994) and colleagues at the New Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism (Couch and Hintz, 1975). While less widely influential than ethnomethodology, the New Iowa School was founded by Carl Couch as a response to the original Iowa School of Symbolic Interactionism, led by Manford Kuhn (1911–1963). Kuhn's approach shifted the methodological emphasis of symbolic interactionism away from the more interpretive, ethnographic current associated with Blumer's approach. As

Michael Katovich and Shing-Ling S. Chen point out in their chapter, Couch developed an alternative approach to Kuhn's, aimed at systematically pursuing symbolic interactionism's interest in the dynamic nature of social selves through video and audio recordings of behavior in laboratory settings. The New Iowa School of symbolic interactionism is further illustration of the diversity of ways in which the general commitment to studying meaning-making as a social process has been pursued.

Two further theorists that are important to mention are Anselm Strauss (1916–1996) and his student Erving Goffman (1922–1982): two giants of interactionism whose work is discussed here by Adele E. Clarke and Greg Smith, respectively. Although Strauss is perhaps best known for his introduction of grounded theory in contemporary qualitative research, Clarke's chapter in this volume showcases a richer Straussian toolkit for the students of interactionism, focused on the concept of negotiated order (Strauss et al., 1963) and its subsequent developments. Clarke distinguishes two periods of theoretical elaboration by Anselm Strauss and collaborators such as Susan Leigh Star (1956–2010): the first period spanned the 1960s to 1990, and the second from 1990 until 2020. The foundational idea of this perspective is the concept of *negotiated orders*, which Clarke defines as 'sets of *temporary* processual arrangements among various social actors that must be actively sustained or renegotiated' (p. 47). Working to dissolve dualistic thinking, Clarke contends, Strauss moved from the basic processual idea of negotiated orders to the theorizing of structural concepts, such as *social worlds* and *arenas*. Providing interactionist researchers with an under-

standing of structure, *social worlds* constitute groups with a common standpoint that grounds their shared identities and joint actions, while *arenas* bring together several social worlds with the implication of complex collective action. In the last part of her chapter, Clarke covers the extension of the Straussian perspective into three conceptual frameworks emerging in the second period: *boundary objects*; *infrastructures*, *classifications and standards* and *situational analysis*. This work represents not only a theoretical achievement but a methodological one, as Carrie Friese, Rachel Washburn and Adele E. Clarke's chapter in [Part 6](#) of this volume attests.

Like Strauss, Goffman also provided a powerful framework for interactionists. From his *dramaturgical principles* to his elaboration of *frame analysis*, Goffman gave interactionists not only ethnographically based concepts to nurture or expand through their research but, more importantly, an original and fascinating mode of doing research. In particular, Greg Smith's chapter discusses the three conceptual pillars of the dramaturgical approach: *dramaturgy*, *impression management* and *presentation of self*. As Smith convincingly argues, Goffman's dramaturgical principles, fully outlined in his classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959), would later remain important sources for Goffman's intellectual work in subsequent years. Smith views dramaturgy not as a phase in Goffman's work but, rather, as a perspective that Goffman used throughout his career and thus as an integral part of Goffman's overall theoretical strategy. Goffman's oeuvre remains a rich resource for contemporary researchers of interaction in the social sciences and the humani-

ties, and, as the chapters by Hannah Ditchfield and Xiaoli Tian and Yui Fung Yip show, is central to the analysis of technologically mediated interaction.

As the previous discussion shows, as well as strong similarities, there are also substantial differences that exist between the perspectives of interactionism, and we by no means intended to diminish these critically important variations. Rather, in giving emphasis to the interconnectedness between them and their substantial points of overlap, our intention is to create inter-perspectival dialogue that can, we hope, advance interactionism and strengthen its influence.

Self, identity and emotions

Interactionists have arguably paid much more attention to the topics of *self, identity and emotions* than to any other topic. The previous handbook provided excellent chapters focused on the elaboration of these ideas, acknowledging their centrality within the evolution of interactionism. This focus is understandable given the central role that Mead's social psychological ideas have played in interactionist theorizing, particularly his premise that the self develops in interaction with others. In Mead's theory, the self (and related experiences/enactments of emotion and identity) must be understood as being constructed through communication and through participation in society – an idea that is also found in another interactionist founder, Charles Cooley (see Ruiz-Junco and Brossard, 2020). This social construction occurs in a wide array of communicative patterns, which, through

Mead's influence, have been traditionally characterized in terms of the process of 'role taking' – that is, taking the role of others in interaction to build an understanding of the context and the implications of certain actions for oneself and for others. However, as Kent Sandstrom, Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott and Gary Alan Fine remark in this volume, interactionists have not reached consensus over the meanings of self and identity. Instead of trying to settle this by offering definitive definitions ourselves, our objective has been to include chapters that discuss crucial changes in interactionist conceptualization of these ideas from new frameworks – see, for example, Lisa Jean Moore and Sumayra Khan in this volume, who expand theoretical conceptions of self by drawing on *critical body studies* and *affect studies* – and through their application to new topic areas, such as Rachael Ironside's chapter on the supernatural.

The chapters in this volume help to highlight three areas of change or development in the theorization of self, identity and emotion. The first development addresses transformations in contemporary self-experiences due to the rise of communication technologies. Today, the interaction order is no longer simply defined by the face-to-face communication patterns that so interested Cooley, Mead and, more recently, Goffman. Simon Gottschalk explores how our use of digital technologies (cell phones, computers, tablets, etc.) has ushered in the "terminal self." This term refers to the self/body adjustments that people make as a result of interacting with other humans via terminals and with terminals. Terminal selfhood entails deep changes in self-experience, involving bodily and emotional attitudes based

on the constant use of digital technologies. More importantly, it alters the nature of our connection to the people with whom we interact and our capacities to understand others and to be understood. Gottschalk offers interactionists a critical angle from which to analyze these hypermodern online/face-to-face interactions, dominated by the presence of terminals, and where people increasingly find their need for what Axel Honneth theorized as *recognition*, problematically transformed.

The second development affects the contours and concept of selfhood. Traditionally in interactionism, conceptions of the self were dominated by anthropocentric, linguistic and cognitive understandings. As we have previously mentioned, Leslie Irvine's chapter extends interactionist theory of the self, breaking free from the highly engrained assumption that meaning-making only happens in humans. As Irvine shows, this logo-centric assumption has led researchers to ignore four fundamental characteristics of selfhood among nonhuman animals: *agency*, *coherence*, *affectivity* and *self-continuity*. Working against the Meadian belief that mastery of human language is necessary for the self to emerge, and drawing on research on human infants, Irvine shows that nonhuman animals demonstrate the four interrelated features of selfhood: for instance, when they signal they want to play; when they indicate their understanding of their embodied presence or absence in relation to others; when they emote, whether engaging in 'categorical' emotional behavior (e.g., feeling fear), or by expressing 'vitality affects', denoting the degree of feeling (e.g., high excitement at the prospect of play) and when they evince remembrances of experiences by acting ac-

cordingly (e.g., avoidance behavior when close to the animal clinic).

Rachael Ironside adds to these debates by exploring how subjective experiences – such as feelings, the sense of a presence, out-of-body experiences or paranormal dreams – feature in interaction between people. Because supernatural phenomena often are not visible or audible, it can be challenging for people to share the experience of the supernatural with others. In her chapter, Ironside introduces the qualities of supernatural and subjective experiences by examining a typical event from her data corpus of video recordings of Ouija Board sessions. During this event, the participants in the session discuss the presence or absence of a ghost. Ironside inspects the talk and bodily actions of the participants to reveal how they communicate and share their experiences with each other and thus uncovers the role of the self in supernatural encounters.

In their chapter, Lisa Jean Moore and Sumayra Khan turn to examine how people socially construct shared social facts about 'healthy' and 'sick' bodies. Their chapter begins with a review of key terminology in critical body studies, medical sociology and interactionism to then explore the proliferation of 'contested illnesses', like ADHD, obesity and body dysmorphia. The authors reveal that processes of medicalization of deviance and the stigmatization of illness sustain the cultural supremacy of a normative order, namely, the normativity of a 'healthy body', defined in limited and unattainable terms. In their analysis, Moore and Khan discuss how inequalities based on race, class, gender, sexual identity and ability are reproduced and sustained in our construc-

tions and management of health and illness.

In her chapter, Doyle McCarthy turns to 'emotional culture' to discuss selfhood in emotional terms. McCarthy defines emotions as '*cultural objects of human action*', implying that they are mechanisms of reflexive understanding and expression and of self-control. McCarthy's chapter sheds light on contemporary emotional culture and how it manifests itself in all spheres of society. In the United States, she argues, this culture involves treating one's emotions as the legitimate grounds for deeper self-understanding and identity verification. Markedly influenced by Romanticism, this culture valorizes intense, spontaneous and authentic *experiences*. As an illustration, McCarthy discusses how *emotional intensity* operates as an ideal, motivating people to enhance their sense of closeness and intimacy with others, and to reproduce this logic in a wide range of areas of social life, from personal relationships to politics and the economy.

The final development we wish to highlight involves the study of identity as a site of power and resistance. Interactionists increasingly scrutinize how systems of social categorization and labeling – particularly those of race, class, gender and sexuality – function as structures of oppression. This volume stresses several areas in which this critique has been developed. In their chapter on racial identity, Matthew W. Hughey and Michael L. Rosino reject a limited and de-politicized view of identity as a dimension of a person's sense of self. Combining interactionist ideas with other sociological literature, the authors view racial identity operating as part of *racialization*: a complex process of boundary-making involving multiple levels of sociological analy-

sis – from the micro to the macro. In their view, racialization processes are ideological, institutional, interest-based and interactional. The authors note the racialized interaction order represents a sphere where people at the same time act on their experience of others' racial identity and the related understanding of (un)belonging, (de)humanization, and prestige or stigma. Their chapter stresses how interactionism contributes analytic tools to explain and critique racial oppression. Relatedly, Sumerau's chapter shows that interactionism's critical take on identity construction can be fruitfully mobilized against sex/sexuality/gender oppression. As Sumerau argues, interactionism's commitment to revealing the constructed nature of identity provides a compelling resource to critique binary reifications of identity based on sex, gender and sexuality. Drawing on interactionist literature on 'identity work,' Sumerau suggests researchers may expand their current frameworks by questioning binaries, such as the construction of non-binary gender identities, including how others (e.g., transgender and cisgender people) view non-binary gender identities, and the marginalization of non-binary sexualities and sexual fluidity.

Social organization

Interactionists have arguably always had a deep interest in *organisations and institutions*, but, as Patrick McGinty's chapter highlights, they have approached their study in varying ways, with a divergence between approaches that study them as either the *context* for action or as *objects* of study – that is, as larger structures where action takes place, or as the result of processes of

action/interaction. McGinty (2014) finds that the majority of interactionist (inspired) research is focused on organizations and organizational culture while only a minority of studies looks at institutions as interactionally constituted. McGinty promotes this latter approach, pointing to the incredible value of research that focuses on how people organize the social world in interaction with each other. In this way, McGinty draws attention to work that treats organizational/institutional phenomena as a “going concern” (Hughes, 1984: 37) and encourages investigations that exploit the strength of the interactionist approach to uncover the processes that bring about organizations and institutions. McGinty, argues for studies of the *organizing practices and processes* through which organizations are created and continually renewed (cf. Dingwall and Strong, 1985).

Implicit in McGinty’s chapter is a rebuke of those who criticize interactionism for having an ‘astructural bias’, that is, for ignoring power relationships and other structural influences on social relationships (see also contributions in Musolf, 2016). Unfortunately, ‘these presumed interactionist biases actually served to promote an emergent interactionist perspective with little or no interest in institutional, structural, or organizational concerns’ (McGinty in this volume, p. 183). This argument has been taken up by Stacey Hannem, whose chapter tackles these issues head-on by showing how interactionist concepts can be used to reveal and analyze power and structure. Using the example of the #MeToo movement, Hannem’s analysis demonstrates that power and structure are embedded within symbolic interactionist concepts and research topics and that they are central to

One area where structure and power have been of particular concern to interactionists is in the study of health and medical contexts, which have been key topics of study at least since the publication of Goffman's (1961) *Asylums*. Baptiste Brossard adds to this important body of research by discussing interactionists' investigations of mental health, distinguishing four areas of contribution: (1) generating non-judgmental accounts of the experiences of mental health problems; (2) theorizing the role of diagnostic labels in the production of mental health issues; (3) studying how mental disorders make sense, exist and are embedded only within specific interaction settings and institutions and (4) understanding the mechanisms of social control weighing on our mental functioning. Through his detailed discussion of these four areas, Brossard shows possible avenues for the development of interactionist research on mental health.

In addition to health care, the police are another institution where power and structure are of key concern. For years, the Black Lives Matter movement has responded to the killing of Black people by the police, denouncing implicit and explicit racism within the police and calling for radical societal changes to end racial oppression. This reminds us that these issues are not just theoretical but of real practical consequence and of the most serious kind. Over the years, interactionist studies have made an important contribution to discussions about policing and police reform by investigating the day-to-day work of police officers (Bittner, 1967; Meehan, 1993) and the language and 'social organization of policing' (Manning and van Maanen, 1978). Recent work has shown how the police have increasingly used computer technology and other technologies for the profiling of suspects and the creation of crime statistics (Meehan and Ponder, 2002), and it has explored how such technologies have been em-

bedded within the existing organization of their work (Manning, 2008). Watson and Meehan (in this volume) consider the use of video recordings of police work, and how these are used to make judgments about cases of police violence against civilians. Through an ethnomethodological lens, they examine an arrest video-recorded by a security camera and a transcript of a subsequent civil legal action against the arresting officer. The analysis explores 'the viewing frameworks' and the endogenous reasoning within the settings under investigation, showing the situated practices of making sense of the recorded scenes as a course of adjudicative work, which, in Watson and Meehan's view, is 'the objective of a truly interactionist sociology'. With their chapter, Meehan and Watson exhibit the strengths of ethnomethodological research in unpacking the social organization of action through which participants interpret and assess the actions of others, and they show the important consequences that participants' meaning-making processes have for their and others' lives.

In addition to institutions, interactionists have also had a longstanding interest in the ways that social life is produced as an organizational structure, and several of the chapters in this section take on this topic. Robin James Smith's chapter addresses the concept of space from an interactionist perspective, emphasizing that space is never just a 'container' or context for action but is itself *configured* by dynamic social relationships. In the past, interactionists have often focused on the relationships between people in urban environments by describing them as an 'ecology' (Park and Burgess, 1967) and by examining how people structure and use urban spaces, particularly in the light of population

growth and changing political circumstances (Burgess, 1967; Rodner et al., 2019). Smith discusses the notion of space through the history of interactionist scholarship, from early Chicago School ethnographies to contemporary work that explores people's engagement with landscapes (Vannini, 2012). Through his detailed discussion of past and recent research, Smith powerfully shows that space and mobility are not just topics to which interactionists occasionally turn, but they are central to all interactionist endeavors.

Smith's chapter hints at the importance of the natural environment as a topic for interactionist research, a topic that is the main concern of Anthony Puddephatt's chapter. Puddephatt rebukes scholars who criticize interactionism for neglecting nature and the environment in their research and, through a detailed examination of interactionist writings from classic scholars onwards, Puddephatt brilliantly shows that nature and the environment have always featured in interactionist research. He uses his analysis to explain how a more materialist form of interactionism based on G.H. Mead's theory can open up a wide range of research trajectory for contemporary interactionist scholars.

Another major area of concern in considering organizational processes is the construction of temporality. For the past three decades or so, Michael G. Flaherty has been at the forefront of the development of interactionist study of time and has explored how human interaction and social relationships are underpinned in different ways by time as a means to socially organize actions (Flaherty, 2011). In his chapter, Flaherty carefully discusses these contributions in relation to interactionist theory and research,

highlighting the complex ways in which social interaction is interwoven with and organized by an orientation to time and is interlinked with larger forms of social organization.

The final chapter in this part of the handbook continues the discussion of time by looking at how studies of collective memory can contribute to our understandings of the operation of social worlds. Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott argues that memories are *negotiated*, *constructed* and *reshaped* in interaction. Memories are the result of interaction processes that van den Scott likens to 'generic processes' (Prus, 1987), that is, 'processes of generating, maintaining, and manipulating collective memory [that] can be studied across groups'. However, as van den Scott explains with reference to Milligan's (2007) study of the preservationist movement, the *content* and *form* of collective memories is constantly shaped and reshaped in interaction. For example, the buildings that people select for preservation change considering the circumstances in which the selection takes place. When collective memory has been created, people use it to interpret the present and imagine the future. In her chapter, van den Scott not only demonstrates that interaction processes are critical for the production of collective memory but also shows the importance of interactionist approaches to understanding the social processes through which collective memory is created, (re-)shaped and sustained.

Interaction, media and the Internet

One of the most dominant themes in the political landscape of recent years has concerned the consumption of information and the construction of 'truth' and 'facts'. We have seen the consequences of the ways that private companies, political interest groups, nation states and others manipulate information to construct and mobilize specific sentiments for their own interests (and often for nefarious purposes). The manipulation of elections; the incitement of hate crimes; the trivializing or rejection of scientific and other specialist opinion and knowledge – these are all real and increasingly common practices of contemporary social life.

The mass media have become a fault-line for these debates, with print and broadcast journalism regularly being challenged over their objectivity and partiality. David L. Altheide's fascinating chapter looks at how media content is used and made meaningful through the institutionalization and internalization of 'media logic'. This logic enables the creation of specific cultural meanings that are in turn used as mechanism of power to shape social agendas. Altheide's chapter helps to reflect on the relationship between corporate (and other) interests and processes of media consumption and use. Joel Best's chapter takes these ideas forward by reflecting on the ways that interactionists can conceptualize the relationship between audience experience and media content. Drawing on the notion of 'fear' in the context of moral panics and other media scares, Best warns against the simplified analysis commonly found in the broader discipline of sociology, which presumes specific emotional reactions on the parts of diversified audiences. Instead, Best points to the necessity of following interactionist ideals of studying meaning as a localized

construction. Together, these chapters show the importance of a continued engagement with the topic of media consumption and production.

Of course, traditional media's social role and practices have radically changed through the introduction of social media, and interactionist research has played and continues to play a hugely important role in this area. All kinds of institutions use media in the course of their work. One example of this is police work that is examined by Christopher J. Schneider's chapter in this volume. Schneider examines how the police use social media and how it has altered the practices of police work. Essentially, social media works as *a mechanism of social control*, enabling the police to understand things about people and crime that they may have previously found hard to explore. Further, as with individual users, the police use social media as a tool for self-promotion and for constructing an image and a relationship with the communities they 'serve'. These issues are of particular concern considering the previously discussed demonstrations against institutionalized racism in police forces. Schneider's chapter shows the immense contribution that interactionists can make to understanding the practices and systems of meaning that are embedded within these institutions, an area of study that must surely play a substantial part in any meaningful debate about the police.

Another area of practice that has been radically re-shaped through social media and internet technologies is computer game play. David Kirschner's chapter looks in detail at self-performance and meaning-making in these sociocultural domains and how the real and virtual worlds intersect in complex ways.

Kirschner shows the wide influence that interactionists have had in this field in terms of the study of the meaning-making processes within game play and in game communities and the importance of interactionist concepts for understanding the complexity of gaming.

Digital interaction through social media is a core area of interactionists' work. As we have seen, Simon Gottschalk in this volume uses the concept of the 'terminal self' to describe the process and consequences of using technology as a medium of interaction, drawing attention to the physical/perceptual skills of using such technologies. There is also uncertainty about the audience(s) of online interaction (what Tian and Fung Yip describe in their chapter as the 'n-adic' dilemma), where one's digital traces may be picked up, reacted to and used by all manner of unknown others. Certain institutions or cultural groups may pressure or even require people to have an active public presence on social media and websites, and a substantial body of research is concerned with the impact of this on practices of self-presentation (see Tian and Fung Yip's chapter for a comprehensive review).

As Tian and Fung Yip's chapter makes clear, Goffman's work continues to be a key resource for researchers of online interaction, particularly in terms of understanding practices of self-presentation. One of the many areas where this influence can be seen is in the study of 'celebrity', which is integral to the discourses of participation in YouTube, Twitter and the like (Blank, 2006; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Schneider, 2016). The uses of social media by celebrities as a feature of brand building have been

well documented, such as how they use it to construct a sense of intimacy with fans by revealing aspects of their 'backstage' behavior and by using forms of speech that display 'informality' and 'closeness' with their interlocutors (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Kerry O. Ferris's chapter shows that social media is used for interaction with celebrities even after their deaths. Taking the example of fans' interactions with Michael Jackson on Twitter, Ferris illustrates that cultural icons and the meaning around them are managed and negotiated by fans and the cultural industries more broadly. Ferris shows how the organizations that represent dead celebrities (often for substantial profit) continue to use and build the brand and that through such organizations, fans engage with the celebrity as an 'agentic' actor, and in doing so, they continue to construct their legitimacy as celebrities and icons.

Another use of Goffman's work is shown by Ditchfield's chapter, which demonstrates how Goffmanian concepts, such as facework and presentation of self, can be usefully combined with CA and with discursive approaches to look at the ways people manage the self in real-world conversations. Ditchfield's fascinating analysis explores how participants in Facebook message chats composed and edited their messages in real time and how their editing decisions help us understand their practices of 'facework' as a *lived* communicative practice.

New developments in methods

Since its earliest origins, interactionism has had a sustained impact on methodological debates and practices in the social sciences. From the 'urban ethnographies' of the Chicago School to CA attention to the 'micro' features of spoken talk, interactionists have shaped the landscape of qualitative research practice. Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve's chapter in the previous handbook gave a clear overview of the methods in symbolic interactionism, showing their emergence and variety and giving emphasis to the importance of careful empirical and conceptually grounded theory. Given that this history is well told, rather than provide an overview of methods within interactionist scholarship, our aim in this handbook is to include chapters that advance the discussion about the study of interaction in contemporary society.

It would be extremely remiss of us not to begin our discussion of methods without recognizing the groundbreaking work of Kathy Charmaz, one of interactionism's central figures in the last few decades who, sadly, passed away in 2020. Kathy had done more than anyone to advance the practices and uses of grounded theory (GT), helping to continue the sustained influence of the method across the social sciences (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007), including areas as diverse as marketing (Goulding, 2002), management and organization studies (Gioia et al., 2013), nursing (Schreiber and Noerager Stern, 2001) and information systems research (Wiesche et al., 2017). Originating in the collaborations of Glaser and Strauss's ethnographies of caring for the dying (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), grounded theory has since been developed substantially by these and other authors (Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Holton and Walsh, 2017; Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Konecki, 2011; Redman-MacLaren and Mills, 2015). But it

was Kathy who saw the importance of rescuing the approach from its realist implications – its implicit obsession with bias and objectified knowledge and method – and with developing an approach that takes account of contemporary social theory, such as feminism and postmodernism.

We are delighted that Kathy has been able to contribute to this handbook in one of the closing chapters, which we will discuss in more detail later. But her work is also shown in Carrie Friese, Rachel Washburn and Adele E. Clarke's chapter, which explores the development of GT in *situational analysis*. Continuing on from Kathy's work, situational analysis also intersects with critical perspectives, such as feminism and post-colonial theory, and continues to develop the pragmatist (critical) roots of symbolic interactionism. Friese, Washburn and Clarke's chapter gives a practical guide through the *mapping techniques* of this method, showing how they can be used to explore difference in perspective, examine power and create collaborative and *useful* research.

Aside from GT, interactionists have been a driving force in advancing the understanding, popularity and influence of ethnographic methods in the social sciences. The urban ethnographies of the Chicago School and the phenomenological studies of praxis in ethnomethodology continue to be central methods for learning about diverse worlds, shedding light on life and work that remains hidden from public view and from traditional sociological analysis (Goffman, 2015; Desmond, 2017; Duck, 2012; Stuart, 2018, 2020). René Tuma's chapter looks at the intersection of interpretive ethnographic inquiry with video methods developed from EMCA. Tuma outlines the emergence of video methods in

interactionist research before showing the particular components of *videography*, where ethnographic knowledge and careful methodical analysis of interaction inform each other. Video-based studies of interaction have been important since the 1960s and have become extremely influential in the analysis of work and organization through sub-disciplines such as workplace studies (Heath and Luff, 2000; Heath et al., 2010; Knoblauch et al., 2014; Szymanski and Whalen, 2010). Tuma's chapter continues debates in these areas by giving an example of how ethnography and video work come together in the analysis of a specific work setting. Through this, Tuma helps us to think about the connection between 'micro' data and broader ethnographic contexts of inquiry, which is a key topic at a time when video and audio data are increasingly easy to capture.

The subject of ethnography is also taken up by Michael Dellwing, whose chapter looks at practices of online ethnography, pointing to the huge diversity in methods and approaches that can be found in this area. Using the example of researching online games, Dellwing shows the importance of flexibility in online ethnography, being able to engage with online participants in the range of communication forms they themselves use. His discussion shows that naturalistic research online brings up distinctive issues, such as the question of whether 'lurking' online is equivalent to unobtrusive non-participant observation in face-to-face contexts.

This final point helps to foreground a set of issues that are of increasing importance for contemporary researchers, which is *how to negotiate the shifting political terrain of research ethics while*

maintaining flexible and meaningful research strategies that enable us to understand the world from peoples' own points of view. The final chapter in this section, from Deborah K. and Will C. van den Hoonaard, addresses this, proposing an approach to ethics that draw on interactionist principles by narrowing the gap between researcher and researched; recognizing the cultural complexity of participants' lives; having flexibility in the research process and the methods used (rather than rigidly sticking to pre-determined plans); and maintaining a key interest in protecting and fostering the dignity of research participants. The chapter offers an important contribution to the ongoing interdisciplinary conversation around ethics, on which interactionism must continue to have a substantial influence.

Reimagining interactionism

The chapters in this handbook illustrate that interactionism remains a vibrant research tradition comprising an abundance of creative scholarship that continues to advance theories, methods and substantive areas of study. The final section of the handbook examines the possible futures of the field, with the contributors providing powerful and thought-provoking commentaries on interactionism's relevance.

Emilie Morwenna Whitaker and Paul Atkinson's chapter explores advancements in the collection and analysis of data for interactionist work. Drawing on the claim that interactionism's most substantial contributions have been empirical, Whitaker and Atkinson look at how the ethnographic gaze – so central to

our discipline – can be extended by paying attention to the materiality of embodied sensory interaction to the ways that social media (and other technologies) extend interaction over time and across spaces. The chapter makes the strong case that methods are there to pursue disciplinary questions and topics – that *method* is only a means to an end, and that our overall aim should be to use advancements in methods to extend our sociological understanding.

Martyn Hammersley's chapter addresses what he characterizes as the *antinomies* within interactionist thinking: the tensions between focusing on process versus structure and between epistemic versus pragmatic conceptions of meaning. Hammersley's fascinating discussion reflects on how interactionism may come to grips with these tensions, but it also asks whether these tensions are simply areas we must learn to accept, whether they are productive for the advancement of our discipline or are actually impediments to advancement.

Kent Sandstrom, Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott, and Gary Alan Fine recognize interactionism's internal divisions. For these authors, interactionism finds itself in the midst of an "identity crisis," which cannot be overcome until interactionists drop what they characterize as the attitude of a 'resistance movement' and desist from fighting over dominance to define the 'central mission' of interactionism. Instead, they suggest that interactionism should embrace a commitment to 'a pragmatic and richly interpretive approach to social life – highlighting meanings, symbol creation, and interaction' (p. 444).

Finally, Linda Liska Belgrave, Kapriskie “Kikie” Seide and Kathy Charmaz argue a different point. Their chapter endorses a revised pragmatism – based on a critical gaze to address the limitations of its founders – particularly in terms of their [at best] ‘color blindness’ – and proposes the application of constructivist grounded theory and situational analysis to advance social justice goals. The authors propose two forms for this advancement: systematically questioning taken-for-granted meanings that reproduce systems of oppression (particularly in relation to neoliberalism) and making the perspectives of marginalized communities a central focus by combining interactionist methodologies with other methodologies.

In sum, the final section of this handbook points to three distinct paths to reimagine interactionism: working to resolve its antinomies or epistemological (and political) tensions; preserving its essence while letting go of the struggle for theoretical dominance and purity and reviewing and renewing its agenda and its methodological frameworks on the basis of the pursuit of social justice. The coming years will tell which of these paths are followed and how we develop and change as a discipline along the way.

Note

- ¹ Examples for such accounts of interactionism are *Human Behavior and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach*, edited by Arnold Rose in 1971/1962 and the collection *Symbolic Interactionism: Genesis, Varieties Critics*, edited by Bernard N. Meltzer et al. in 1975.

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PART 2

Varieties of interactionism

2

PRAGMATISM AND INTERACTION

Frithjof Nungesser

Introduction

Pragmatism is a constitutively interactionist theoretical perspective. If we investigate the writings of the founders of pragmatism – Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), John Dewey (1859–1952), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) – it becomes obvious that the key characteristics of this intellectual movement are rooted in reflections on the interaction between organisms and their environments. This holds true for the pragmatist reconceptualisation of perception, knowledge, and truth, just as for the pragmatist concepts of habit, per-

spective-taking, and the social self, and for the pragmatist belief in scientific fallibilism, progressive education, and democratic reconstruction. As these examples already suggest, interaction is not only one of pragmatism's key concepts but also has a rather extensive meaning. From a pragmatist perspective, 'interaction' is not limited to social interaction, nor is it limited to the interaction of humans. Instead, all organisms act within – and, hence, interact with – their specific non-social and social environments.

Against this background, several key questions, which can be divided into four segments, arise with respect to the pragmatist perspective on interaction: 1) How do the interactions between different organisms and their environments differ, and what is specific about the interactions humans have with their environment? 2) What are the differences between human social interaction and that of other organisms? How are these differences connected to the emergence of perspective-taking and the self? 3) How does the development of perspective-taking and the self occur during socialisation? How is the refinement of perspective-taking connected to the understanding of normativity? 4) What are the broader implications of the pragmatist account of interaction for our conceptualisation of society? How were the insights of pragmatist social theory taken up by the interactionist tradition in sociology?

The chapter is structured according to these questions. Each of the following sections will first outline the answers the classical pragmatists gave to the respective question; then, I will illustrate how the pragmatist arguments influenced later theoretical developments and in which respects their answers need to be revised

in light of current research. Because of the scope of the pragmatist conceptualisation of interaction, the discussion will touch on developments in various fields of study, ranging from primatology and the cognitive sciences to developmental psychology and sociology.

Modes of organism–environment interaction

Pragmatism conceptualises the activities of organisms in a relational way, that is, as interaction between the organism and its environment. The most elaborate account of this interactive process can be found in the work of John Dewey (esp. 1925/29/1958, ch. VII, 1938/1986, ch. II). This is why, in this section, I will summarize Dewey's view on interaction before I outline how his insights relate to current developments in biology, psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and the theory of action.

In contrast to inanimate things, Dewey argues, all living beings show an organised pattern of activities to satisfy their needs and maintain their integrity. Living beings thus strive to maintain a stable relationship with their environment or – in the case of tension – seek to restore it. This is the basic idea of the *pragmatist concept of organism–environment interaction*. It applies to all organisms from protozoa and plants to animals and humans.¹ However, one can identify vastly different 'modes of environing–organical interactions' (Dewey, 1938/1986: 36). Dewey differentiates between these modes by looking at some of their elemental physical and perceptual features. Of fundamental importance are the *organism's mobility* and its *modalities of perception*. The sim-

plest forms of life are thus sedentary organisms without distal senses. In their case, an activation of the contact sense is followed directly by the 'consummatory act' (Dewey, 1938/1986: 36). In contrast, with the emergence of distal senses – especially seeing and hearing – 'activities of search' (Dewey, 1938/1986: 36) intervene between these poles of activity. The subordination of the contact senses to the distal senses leads to a strong increase in the organisms' behavioural inhibition and control because a stimulus perceived from a distance must be kept stable and tracked over longer periods of time and greater distances. As a result, these organisms act in a spatially and temporally 'spread-out environment' and are 'liberated' from the immediate impact of the environing objects (Dewey, 1925/1929/1958: 270, 279). This change, according to Dewey, is the starting point for an increased flexibility and reflexivity of behaviour, which has reached an unprecedented level in the natural history of the human species.

To differentiate between modes of organism–environment interaction, Dewey also considers the varying *degrees of changeability*. While the life of simple organisms resembles a repetition of almost identical activities, the interactions of more complex organisms undergo greater change. Towards the outside, the degree of changeability can be perceived by the *extent to which the environment is manipulated* by the organism to solve problems or avoid their emergence. Such 'adaptations' (Dewey, 1911/2008: 360) would include the construction of burrows, dams, or nests; the spinning of webs; or the construction of roads. The use of tools, according to Dewey, is a method of adaptation that is spe-

cific to humans. Using tools becomes possible, he argues, because human activity is regularly and strongly inhibited. Instead of being urged to behave in a certain way, humans can take a step back from the situation and identify the connections between various objects and effects they have on each other (Dewey, 1925/1929/1958: 128–129). Thereby, the environment fills with objects that refer to others, and objects turn into signs. At this point, there is a correspondence to language, which Dewey also regards as a human monopoly. He not only emphasises that the transmission of tool use is often accompanied by language, he also characterises language as the ‘tool of tools’ (Dewey, 1925/1929/1958: 168, 186).

Different modes of organism–environment interaction also correlate with different *degrees of experiential change*. While the experiences of simple organisms remain relatively stable over time, the experiences of more complex organisms are modified through interaction with the environment. This is what Dewey (1911/2008: 360) calls ‘accommodation’. The inhibition of activity in problematic situations often leads to the perception of previously unknown behavioural possibilities. Hence, the increased flexibility of activity goes hand in hand with the possibility and necessity of learning and habitualisation. In this context, language, again, has a ‘peculiarly significant function’ (Dewey, 1938/1986: 51). On the one hand, language itself is the result of a historical development of learning and, thus, can be regarded as one cultural artefact among many; on the other hand, however, it is an essential driving force for the cultural restructuring of cognitive processes as well as for the transmission and development

of cultural knowledge. In other words, Dewey understands language as a product of cultural history that, after its emergence, becomes a constitutional medium of thought. Language continues the 'liberation' of experience because it allows us to intellectually recombine potential actions and meanings and thus to carry out 'rehearsals', that is, imaginations of future interactions with the environment (Dewey, 1938/1986: 63).

Dewey's conceptualisation of organism–environment interaction is of crucial importance for pragmatism in general because it synthesises some of its key insights of earlier pragmatism, such as the functionality and situatedness of reflection (e.g. James, 1890/1950: 138–144; Peirce, 1868/1992) and the importance of learning and habitualisation for human action (esp. Dewey, 1922/2002; James, 1890/1950, [ch. 4](#); Peirce, 1878/1992, 1877/1992). Also, Dewey's arguments were later refined by other pragmatists. In the work of George Herbert Mead (esp. 1907, 1938/1964) we find important arguments on the embodied and practical character of the perception and meaning of objects that take up Dewey's arguments.

Just as pragmatism in general, its conceptualisation of organism–environment interaction has become the *subject of renewed interest*. This rediscovery started in the 1990s (e.g. Joas, 1992/1996: 126ff.; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 97) and '[t]oday, organism-environment talk is more common than ever before' (Pearce, 2014: 28). As current research shows, some of the original arguments must be revised. Nevertheless, recent discussions demonstrate that pragmatism still possesses substantial potential for theoretical innovation in different disciplines. I will

shortly touch on three aspects:

- 1 One aspect that is clearly problematic in the classical pragmatist account of organism–environment interaction is the *characterisation of animal activity*. As will also become clear in the next section, there is a recurring tension in the pragmatist interpretation of animal behaviour (Nungesser, 2017: 357–361). On the one hand, the pragmatists not only follow Charles Darwin’s gradualism, they also advance conceptual means that would allow for a fine-grained analysis of animal behaviour. Yet, when referring to concrete behavioural patterns of animals, they usually fall back on traditional dichotomies, such as the one between animal instinct and human learning. Recent ethological studies demonstrate that such dichotomies fail to do justice to animals – also with regard to their object manipulation (e.g. Tomasello and Call, 1997, ch. 3.1.) and use of tools (e.g. Sanz et al., 2013). The challenge, therefore, arises to analyse these complex forms of animal activity by means of pragmatist concepts, such as adaptation and accommodation, manipulation and environmental spreading, and situated reflection and habitualisation.
- 2 Convergences between pragmatism and various innovative developments in psychology, the cognitive sciences, and neurophysiology prove its lasting theoretical relevance. These innovations confirm that *cognitive processes* need to be interpreted as *functional and embodied phases within environmental interaction*. Experimental research on ‘inattentional blindness’ and ‘change blindness’, for instance, proves that we perceive

only a very limited part of our environment (e.g. Mack, 2003; Simons, 2000). This selectivity of perception can only be understood if we follow the pragmatists in dismissing the copy theory (Mead, 1936, 344,) of perception and knowledge, which held sway over philosophy and psychology for centuries (Noë, 2006, ch. 2). Instead of copying our environment, we perceive what is relevant for our current activity. Furthermore, several scientific developments corroborate the pragmatist claim that our access to the environment is structured according to our bodily actions. Here the pragmatists anticipated insights which are often discussed in the cognitive sciences with reference to J.J. Gibson's theory of affordances (Shapiro, 2011, ch. 2). These arguments can also be combined with important findings in cognitive neuroscience (Nungesser, 2017: 354–357).

- 3 In different disciplines, pragmatism became an essential reference point for the development of a *non-cognitivist*, *non-rationalistic*, and *non-deterministic* theory of action. In philosophy and the cognitive sciences, pragmatist arguments are invoked to criticise what Susan Hurley (1998, ch. 10) calls the sandwich model of cognition. According to this model, cognition starts with the passive reception of sense data and ends with the bodily action (the two slices of bread), while the cognitive centre (the filling) processes the sense data and commands the body. Contrary to such a linear conception, embodied and situated accounts of action understand perceptual, cognitive, and motor processes as circularly connected and mutually constitutive (e.g. Gallagher, 2009; Johnson, 2010;

Shalin, 2017). Similarly, in social theory, authors such as Hans Joas (1992/1996) and Anselm Strauss (1993/2014) draw on pragmatism to oppose both rationalist and deterministic theories of action. From their perspective, rationalist theories falsely assume that individuals permanently experience their situation consciously and conceptualise it in means-ends relationships, while deterministic theories assume that consciousness is ineffective, and action is instead regulated by drives or habits alone. From a pragmatist perspective, belief and doubt – or, as Joas would put it, habits and creative reconstruction – mutually constitute each other. Which of these phases of activity is dominant cannot be decided a priori but rather depends on the challenges the concrete situation holds in store.

Social interaction and the emergence of the self through perspective-taking

The differences between modes of organism–environment interaction just described are also relevant for the pragmatist perspective on the *emergence of the self*. Classical pragmatist arguments regarding this issue vary in complexity. The writings of James and Dewey suggest that the emergence of the self can be understood as a result of the inhibited and flexible character of human activity, which gives rise to self-reflexivity and self-awareness as an effective way to cope with a contingent environment. Mead refines this argument by claiming that the genesis of the self can only be understood if this pragmatist account of human activity is connected with an analysis of the specifics of *social* interaction.

Self-awareness, according to Mead, is rooted in the ability to look at oneself through the eyes of others, that is, in the ability of *perspective-taking*. Mead studies this connection of social interaction, perspective-taking, and the emergence of the self on an evolutionary, ontogenetic, and macrosocial level.² In this section, I will first summarise Mead's evolutionary arguments; then I will refer to the implications of some recent findings for Mead's theory. His ontogenetic and macrosocial arguments will be discussed in the following sections.

In his *evolutionary account* of the emergence of perspective-taking and the self, Mead draws on the comparative analysis of animal and human interaction. The social interactions of animals, he claims, exhibit a fixed structure and are regulated by instincts. In several studies, Mead illustrates this mode of social interaction with reference to a dog fight (Nungesser, 2016: 258–265). The fight, Mead argues, consists of a series of reciprocal instinctive reactions that 'does not call for more than inherited physiological adjustment' (1925: 263). The reciprocal reactions take the form of a 'conversation of gestures' (Mead, 1910: 398). A gesture, then, is an abbreviation of a social action. For example, the dogs' snarling and baring of teeth can be interpreted as the evolutionary remnants of the original action of biting. Such gestures trigger an instinctive response by other group members, resulting in a coordinated interactional pattern.

Within such instinctive and gesture-based interaction, there is, according to Mead, neither the possibility nor the functional necessity to develop a self. This is different in humans. Because they

lack instincts, they 'do not know what to do'. However, as was shown in the previous section, it is the very indeterminacy of behaviour that allows humans to detect new objects to cope with the challenges of their environment. According to Mead, this ability led to a dramatic change in social interaction in the course of human evolution. The mutually reactive character of social interaction allowed human individuals to detect *a new social object* that drastically influenced the behaviour of their conspecifics, namely, *themselves*. Of particular importance within this process was a specific class of communicative signs, which Mead (e.g. 1912) calls – following Wilhelm Wundt – 'vocal gestures'. Because the 'sender' is affected by his or her own vocal gesture in the same way as the 'receivers', the individual can associate others' reactions to the vocal gesture with his or her self-affection (Mead, 1922: 161). This is why, for Mead, the use of vocal gestures facilitates the constitution of the self as a social object in human social interaction.³

The emergence of perspective-taking and the self results in a *new form of social coordination*, which is, according to Mead, human-specific. Aside from perspective-taking, this new form of social coordination is also based on reciprocal anticipation, learning, and habits. Perspective-taking also gives rise to symbolic communication. In contrast to gestures, significant symbols are perceived not only by the receiver but also by the sender, thus facilitating the establishment of a common meaning (e.g. Mead, 1922). Symbols are necessary for the development of language, which, again, is constitutive for both reflective forms of group coordination and complex forms of thinking.⁴

If one confronts Mead's analysis of animal and human social interaction with current research, the previously mentioned pattern reappears. Similar to Dewey, Mead develops highly innovative arguments that suffer from their dichotomous structure and the contemporary lack of reliable empirical research. Hence, it is appropriate to revisit Mead's approach in light of recent ethological findings. These findings strongly suggest it is necessary to distinguish a continuous spectrum of modes of social interaction that considers nonhuman social activity that is not exclusively based on instinctive patterns. Such non-instinctive patterns can be observed, for example, in primates. Primatological experiments suggest that the ability to engage in perspective-taking and to communicate in a flexible, situation-specific way can no longer be regarded as a human monopoly. However, experiments also show that these capacities are limited in important ways (Nungesser, 2016). Despite these differences, important ethological studies agree with pragmatism in that complex communication and cognition depend on social cognitive capacities, such as perspective-taking, and that language in the strictest sense only took shape in the course of human cultural evolution and then became a seminal medium of human thought (Nungesser, 2012: 187–196; Tomasello, 1999).

The refinement of perspective-taking in the course of socialisation

While Mead's comparative analysis focusses on the phylogenetic conditions for the emergence of perspective-taking and the self, his discussion of *human socialisation* reconstructs how perspective-taking and the self become more complex over time through social interaction. Again, I will outline Mead's arguments before discussing their relevance for current debates.

In his well-known reconstruction of ontogeny, Mead (1925, 1934/2015, ch. 20) distinguishes between *two stages of perspective-taking* by looking into the development of children's play behaviour: The first stage, which Mead calls 'play', consists of simple role plays. In such a play, children adopt the perspective of specific and typical social roles. Thus, in this stage 'the child is continually acting as a parent, a teacher, a preacher, a grocery man, a policeman, a pirate, or an Indian' (Mead, 1925: 269). In the second stage, which Mead calls 'game', children begin to take part in competitive and rule-based games, such as team sports. To participate in such games, children need to engage in a more complex, qualitatively new form of perspective-taking that provides a situational overview. For example, when playing football, children need to consider the perspective of their teammates and opponents, but they also must follow the rules of the game as well as tactical guidelines. To do this, children need to adopt a kind of social bird's-eye view that Mead (1925: 268, 1934/2015: 154) calls the 'generalized other'. Through the adoption of generalised perspectives, the relations between different roles and general expectations of these roles – that is, norms, rules, and plans –

become understandable. What is more, according to Mead (e.g. 1925: 272–273), all general concepts that imply an evaluation that is perceived of as independent of individual persons – such as objectivity, justice, validity, or truth – presuppose the adoption of such generalised perspectives.

Mead's interpretation of children's play behaviour and perspective-taking is connected to his distinction between the 'I' and the 'me' as two aspects of the self (Mead, 1934/2015, [ch. 22](#), [25](#), [27](#)). In the beginning, Mead argues, children are purely impulsive beings. So, they have an 'I' but not yet a 'me'. Through the development of perspective-taking, children learn to judge their own impulses and creative flashes based on the perspectives of others. This is how they acquire a 'me'. Only after the constitution of the 'me' can they understand that others perceive and judge them and that they expect certain actions from them. Importantly, through the internalisation of the interplay of 'I' and 'me', children can anticipate the reactions of others to a certain action before it is actually performed – a crucial step in the development of reflexive and normative agency. Also, during socialisation, the 'me' multiplies because the individual encounters various groups and institutions which often possess diverging standards and norms. Although it comes under stronger social control in the course of socialisation, the 'I', however, remains a source of spontaneity and creativity.

Although there was hardly any systematic psychological research on human ontogeny in Mead's time, if we look into recent studies in developmental psychology, we can notice important similarities to his account. Michael Tomasello and Hannes

Rakoczy (2003: 139), for example, agree with Mead in that ‘the child is going from guiding its actions via an internalized “significant other” to guiding its actions via an internalized “generalized other”’. The first step can be observed in two-year-olds who show an understanding of the intentions of others but do not yet grasp how cultural institutions work. This changes in four- and five-year-olds, who gain access to ‘collective realities’ and general normative expectations. This also explains why in ‘virtually all cultures in which there is formal education, where children learn about such things as cultural institutions and their workings, 5 to 6 years of age is the canonical starting point’. While they confirm Mead’s description of the generalisation of perspective-taking in the course of socialisation, studies in developmental psychology can give us a more comprehensive and experimentally based chronology of ontogenetic development. Also, the connections between the development of social cognition and other, especially linguistic, competences are studied in much more detail (e.g. Tomasello, 1999, [ch. 3–6](#), 2019).

Pragmatist social theory and the interactionist tradition in sociology

The relevance of the pragmatist account of interaction is not limited to the analysis of different modes of organism–environment interaction or the development of human agency in the course of anthropogenesis and socialisation. Rather, it has also wide-ranging implications for the understanding of society. I will now illustrate some of the key implications by pointing to *four social mechanisms* that are not only core components of pragmatist so-

cial thought but also paved the way to crucial contributions to the interactionist tradition in sociology.

Experience, social objects, and meaning as products of interaction

From a pragmatist perspective, experience is socially constituted through a myriad of interactions. As Dewey (1916/2008: 71) states, experience is 'reconstructed' or 'reorganized' by living in a social group. This is the very process he calls 'education'. Crucially, for Dewey, education is not a process in which certain contents are transferred directly from one individual to another. Instead, only when the individual participates in conjoint activities with more experienced individuals will he or she learn which aspects of the environment are of importance, what they mean, and how they are used (Dewey, 1916/2008: 25).

The idea that the behaviour of individuals is based neither on objective meanings inherent in the surrounding objects nor on subjective meanings emerging from the individual mind but on socially and interactively produced meanings became the starting point of important sociological contributions. It was especially Herbert Blumer (1969/1998) who took up this pragmatist insight and transformed it into a sociological research programme he named 'symbolic interactionism'.⁵ According to Blumer, this insight has far-reaching methodological consequences (for more details, see the chapter on Blumer in this volume).⁶ Social phenomena cannot be explained just by looking at social structures or individual dispositions. Things do not

speak for themselves but gain meaning and relevance only through interaction and interpretation. For example, as especially Howard S. Becker (1973) argues, social problems or deviant behaviour are not simply 'there'. Instead, they are 'social objects' that result from the interactive formulation and enforcement of social rules that define a certain situation, behaviour, or person as problematic or deviant. Similarly, as Becker (1973, ch. 3) showed using the example of marijuana consumption, the physiological change caused by a drug does only lead to a pleasant experience when it is framed in interaction with more experienced users as a positive result of the practice of drug use.

The social constitution and transformations of the self

One of the crucial contributions of Mead's pragmatist social theory is the insight that the emergence of the self can be understood as a result of the capacity for perspective-taking. By looking at themselves through the eyes of others, individuals internalise the cultural narratives and normative standards of their group(s), evaluate their actions accordingly, and, thereby, build up complex identities which remain dependent on their social environment and the recognition of others.

This conceptualisation of a constitutively social self found its way into some of the seminal contributions to social theory. Jürgen Habermas draws heavily on Mead to argue for a 'paradigm shift' 'from purposive action to communicative action' (1981/2005, pt. V) and praises him for being the 'first to have thought through this intersubjective model of the socially pro-

duced ego' (1992: 170). In an extension of his earlier study on Mead, Hans Joas (1992/1996, ch. 3.3) develops the claim that many theories of action fail to do justice to the 'primary sociality' of human agency. Instead of simply assuming the existence of individual agency, Joas argues, every theory of action needs to consider the question of how agency develops in the course of socialisation and how it remains dependent on social interaction afterwards. The idea of a constitutively social and continuously changeable self also became the starting point of interactionist studies of biographical transformations. The interactionist concept of 'the career' connects the theorem of the social self to the study of institutional and organisational contexts (esp. Goffman, 1961b; Strauss, 1959/1997). Over the course of one's life, one will pass through various positions in social structure; each of these positions brings with it specific perspectives from which one can view, evaluate, and regulate one's behaviour. Importantly, the term 'career' is neither exclusively associated with professional careers nor with personal success but also involves nonprofessional as well as downward and horizontal dynamics. Hence, there are not only careers of bankers and university professors but also the careers of mental patients (Goffman, 1961a), violent repeat offenders (Sutterlüty, 2007), and radical protestors (Pettenkofer, 2017). Also, as especially Anselm Strauss (1993/2014: 53) stresses, careers are 'not entirely manageable' but follow 'trajectories'. We are, thus, not always in the driver's seat of our own lives (for more details, see the chapter on Strauss in this volume). By integrating elements of planning with elements of contingency, failure, and suffering, interactionist soci-

ology, again, follows pragmatists like Dewey (1925/1929/1958: 23), who emphasises that interaction always has to be conceptualised as a process of 'action-undergoing'.

Perspective-taking, emotions, and social order

Mead's arguments on perspective-taking can be complemented by Charles Horton Cooley's concept of the 'looking-glass self'. According to Cooley (1902/1922/2009: 183–184), the looking-glass self emerges through a three-step process. In contact with others, an individual first imagines how he or she appears to the other person; then, the other's 'judgement of that appearance' finally results in 'some sort of self-feeling'. If the imagined judgement is positive, the individual usually experiences a pleasant self-feeling, such as pride; if it is negative, an unpleasant feeling, such as shame, follows. Like Mead, Cooley indicates the imagined other can be a specific person or a group. Also, the other does not have to be present. Even if individuals are alone, others 'look over their shoulder'.

Cooley's concept of the looking-glass helps us understand how genuinely social emotions, such as shame, embarrassment, and pride, are connected to normative expectations and social order. Important interactionist studies can be interpreted as a continuation of this insight. This holds especially true for the work of Goffman (Scheff, 2005). Not only does Goffman (1959) analyse the strategies individuals use to produce a positive image of themselves, he also describes in great detail the measures they take to protect the interaction order and the persons involved in it from embarrassing situations (Goffman, 1967; for more de-

tails, see the chapter on Goffman in this volume). By analysing how companies enforce the manipulation of feelings in interaction, Arlie Hochschild (1983/2007) elucidates the connection of emotions, perspective-taking, and social organization from still another angle.

The universalisation, hierarchies, and conflicts of perspectives

By taking the perspectives of generalised others, individuals are able to understand and evaluate the viewpoints, attitudes, and actions not only of themselves but also of others. As Mead shows in his more macrosociological studies, generalised perspectives can lead to very different social dynamics (Mead, 1918, 1929). On the one hand, contrasting different generalised perspectives can lead to insights into the limits and peculiarities of one's own perspective, which may foster dialogue and understanding between different individuals and groups. Such a dialogue can be given an institutionalised form that is of special importance in science, in the media, and in public political debate. On the other hand, the understanding of generalised perspectives also brings new incentives for aggression and violence: The development of generalised perspectives may lead to sanctions that aim at individuals who (supposedly) violate the norms of the group. Also, conflicts between generalised others may occur when different groups or political actors disagree, for example, on their political, moral, or religious truths.

The conflicting consequences of the institutionalisation of generalised perspectives are echoed in later scholarship that draws on pragmatist social theory. On the one hand, Habermas (1968/1987, 1981/2005) refers to both Peirce and Mead to develop his concepts of the rationality of communicative action and the ideal communication community, thereby emphasising the integrative and universalising dynamics of communication and perspective-taking. On the other hand, by connecting the concept of perspectives with concrete organisational settings, Goffman demonstrates that generalised perspectives are not neutral but are the result of power relations. According to Goffman (1961a), in 'total institutions', such as psychiatric clinics or prisons, the inmates are forced to view and evaluate themselves by means of the perspectives that are valid in the organisation, which often leads to radical changes of their selves. Although Goffman develops this argument with reference to the extreme case of 'total institutions', it is clear that it contains a more general lesson, namely, that the inventory of perspectives used to build up an identity in a certain society is not only limited but also connected to social hierarchies and power relations (Athens, 2002; Pettenkofer, 2014; Thomas et al., 1972).

Concluding remarks

As has become clear, pragmatism is a fundamentally interactionist theory. Its conceptualisation of interaction touches on a great variety of issues: the basic bodily and perceptual dimensions of interaction; the genesis of perspective-taking, the self, and normativity in human evolution and ontogeny; the social constitution and transformation of experience and the self in institutional and organisational contexts; and the various macrosocial dynamics of generalised perspectives. Accordingly, a re-evaluation of this conceptualisation of interaction must consider a wide variety of findings ranging from evolutionary biology and ethology to cognitive science and developmental psychology to social philosophy and sociology.

From a sociological perspective, the breadth of the pragmatist approach to interaction may come as a surprise. Yet, I think it has several advantages: First, this approach highlights the originality of pragmatism in areas that are usually not perceived in the social sciences. Second, highlighting crucial, yet often ignored, aspects may also be of systematic relevance for social theory. For example, only if we take into account Mead's thoughts on evolution, animal behaviour, and the psychology of perception can we gain a comprehensive view of his radically embodied and constitutively social account of human agency, and only then may we see the important differences between Mead's understanding of human action and, for example, Blumer's or Habermas's (Joas, 1993; Kilpinen, 2013). Third, highlighting the scope of pragmatism's account of interaction can also help us see its limits. Despite all their innovative insights, the classical pragmatists did not develop an elaborate sociological theory (Nungesser and Pettenkofer, 2018). Instead, as revealed in the last section (and as

will be shown in more detail in the following chapters), the pragmatists devised a series of highly innovative concepts that only later were transformed into full-fledged sociological research programmes.

Notes

- 1 For the origins of the pragmatist concept of organism–environment interaction, see Pearce (2014).
- 2 However, the distinction between these analytical levels is often fuzzy in Mead's writings (e.g. Cook, 1993: 205).
- 3 I can only give a rough summary of Mead's arguments here. However, it needs to be pointed out that Mead's exact argumentation on self-constitution varies in different publications and suffers from argumentative problems – particularly with respect to the 'vocal gesture' argument. For a detailed discussion, see especially Joas (1980/1985, ch. 6) and Cook (1993, ch. 6).
- 4 Like Peirce and Cooley, Mead (1934/2015: 47–51, 141–142) understands thinking as the internalisation of symbolic dialogue.
- 5 Although Blumer (1969/1998: 1, 21) mentions Dewey, his systematic argument draws almost exclusively on Mead (see Huebner, 2014, for a detailed study on how Mead became canonised as the founding figure of symbolic interactionism). Blumer's interpretation has been criticised repeatedly because it ignores key dimensions of Mead's pragmatism, such as the importance of the physical environment or the embodied character of agency (see, e.g., Joas, 1993, ch. 1 and Strübing, 2005, ch. 2.4).

6 This is one of the reasons why there is a strong link between pragmatist-inspired interactionist social theory and qualitative social research. For more on this, see Strübing (2007) and the chapter on Strauss in this volume.

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HERBERT BLUMER, SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, AND 21ST- CENTURY SOCIOLOGY

Thomas J. Morrione

Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) is a pivotal figure in the development of sociology and social psychology. The central theoretical and methodological propositions of symbolic interactionism that he articulated in 1937 are relevant throughout the social sciences today and are apt to remain so as long as there is interest in learning about human knowing, acting, and interacting. His insistence on a scientific empirically grounded examination of human interaction in everyday life challenged then-prevailing sociological and psychological theories.

His perspective evolved throughout his exceptionally productive academic career and is informed by knowledge that he gained through personal experiences. These included serving as the public panel chair of the War Labor Board (1943–1945) and as the first chair of the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration for U.S. Steel and the Steelworkers of America (1945–1947). Within the academic world from 1940 to 1952, he edited the *American Journal of Sociology* and served as the president of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 1956, the Society for the Study of Social Problems in 1954, and the Pacific Sociological

Association in 1971–1972. A larger-than-life figure, over six feet tall, with a rich baritone speaking voice and the physique of a professional football player (which he was for a time), Blumer strode through life with courage, humor, and an ever-present curiosity about the nature of human conduct.

Exceptionally curious about the dynamic character and complexities of social life, Blumer entered academia and earned his MA from the University of Missouri in 1922 and his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1928, where he worked with Ellsworth Faris as his thesis advisor and the philosopher G.H. Mead. Blumer's dissertation drew on C.H. Cooley's conception of "sympathetic introspection" to support what are now generally accepted assumptions of ethnographic research (Prus, 1997, 1999). Critiquing social psychologists for relying upon physical science research methods to understand human action and group life, his dissertation contained the core ideas of symbolic interactionism. It also informed his *Methodological Critique of Thomas and Znaniecki's Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1939) and a great deal of his theoretical, methodological, and analytic-conceptual work.

Dissertation in hand, Blumer taught at the University of Chicago from 1928 to 1952, when he was recruited to chair the sociology department at the University of California, Berkeley. He retired from teaching there in 1967. Four years before he died, the ASA honored him with its Career of Distinguished Scholarship award, praising him for formulating the theory of symbolic interactionism and for making "substantive contributions" to a "wide variety" (Blumer, 2003) of areas of study

(Footnotes, 1983). These include, for example, his analyses of movies and adolescent development, drug addiction, social problems (Blumer, 1971), the effects of mass media, morale, race relations and race prejudice (Blumer, 1958), social development, public opinion polling, labor relations (Blumer, 1947), fashion (Blumer, 1969), social structure and power conflict (Blumer, 1954), collective behavior (Blumer, 1946, 1959), industrialization (Blumer, 1990), research methodology (Blumer, 1939, [1969] 1986), and Mead's understanding of the nature of human conduct (Blumer, 1966, [1969] 1986, 2003).

Opening Pandora's box: paradigmatic clashes in the social sciences

Influenced greatly by Chicago sociologists Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Ellsworth Faris, as well as by philosophers Mead and John Dewey, Blumer took over teaching the social psychology course at Chicago at Mead's request in 1931. Six years later, he put symbolic interactionism on the theory map when he distilled and articulated the core ideas of a group of theorists, whom he named "symbolic interactionists" who "view social interaction as primarily a communicative process in which ... a person responds not to what another individual says or does, but to the meaning of what he says or does" (Blumer, 1937: 171). His perspective stood in direct opposition to dominant stimulus-response behaviorist theory by making "interpretation" the intervening variable between stimulus and response. It invited epistemological and ontological questions about the nature of social reality, action,

social structure, change, and collective life.

Blumer's scientific, empirically oriented, anti-behaviorist, anti-positivist, and anti-functionalist stance quickly drew him into controversies about sociological and social psychological theory and methods. In America, particularly from the 1920s through the 1950s, structural, functional, positivist, and neo-positivist sociological theory, as well as quantitatively oriented research methodology, enjoyed widespread acceptance among sociologists and social psychologists. Blumer's perspective contrasted sharply with these views and with psychological reductionism and behaviorist models of human action in general. Predictably, his debates became more frequent as his fundamental ideas gained notoriety and informed his critiques of dominant views (Maines, 1977, 1988; Morrione, 1988; Prus, 1996, 1997, 1999). He relished these exchanges and met them in a direct and conceptually articulate fashion (Morrione, 2003: 1–11).

David Maines (1988: 236–237) chronicles persistent misinterpretations and recurring “myths” about Blumer's perspective as being a-theoretical (Huber, 1973) or anti-theoretical (Coser, 1976), as deficient for not melding Mead and Marx into a humanistic sociology attuned to the impact of structural variables (Lichtman, 1970), and as hamstrung by an a-structural view (Smelser, 1988) – a charge that has been repeatedly debunked (Lyman, 1988; Maines, 1977/1989; Maines and Morrione, 1990, 2001; Prus, 1996, 1997, 1999). Maines (1989: 384–387) also cites distortions offered by Hans Joas (1985: 6), J.D. Lewis and R.L. Smith (1980), L. Warshay (1975: 31, 119), and others who paint a warped picture of Blumer not as the pragmatist he was but as a

phenomenologist, "subjectivist," or nominalist/idealist.

Rooted in pragmatism

Clarifying his position in an April 17, 1979 letter to Irwin Deutscher, Blumer (2003: ii) said, "Mead was a pragmatist in philosophical stance and so am I... [F]or pragmatism reality does not exist in consciousness, nor is the reality eternally real, independent of human experience with it." Blumer's symbolic interactionism rests squarely on pragmatism's assumption that

reality lies at the point of contact between the empirical world and knower of that world. Reality emerges in a process in which the knower (1) is establishing the composition and character of the empirical world by indicating or asserting what it is and (2) is using that empirical world to test the validity of the indications and assertions. (Blumer, Letter to Peter Mills, 1982 in 2003, p. 167)

He locates social reality and individual and collective acts of any size or complexity in a situated, continually emerging present. He rejects philosophical idealism and realism in favor of empirically grounded understandings of everyday life composed of individual and collective acts, interactions, and social structures that are continuously defined reflectively and predicated upon the generation and use of shared meanings. As processes, human actions and interactions, joint activities, and social organizations or structures are always situated.

Dimitri Shalin's (1986: 13) description of what interactionists adopted from pragmatism reflects Blumer's stance, particularly in that reality is understood to possess an emergent or "indeter-

minate” quality and to exist as a “pluralistic universe continually produced by the collective effort of individuals.” More directly, Blumer’s symbolic interactionism builds upon the cardinal pragmatist tenet (Mead, 1932, 1938: 215) that all aspects of reality and our thoughts about it exist as continual processes of becoming. Whatever it is, including social life, it exists as a situation ongoingly reconstituted and always marked by our relation to it. Social reality in all contexts and forms, from the mundane to the extraordinary, from a person putting on his or her shoes to a community dealing with a mass shooting or a nation facing a balance of trade crisis or a pandemic, is experienced as situations are indicated and defined – wittingly or not – given meaning, and “handled” in some way or another – effectively or not. It is continuously formed and reformed as situations that are themselves emergent processes with outcomes not written in stone. This is the *empirical reality-in-process* that Blumer exhorts symbolic interactionists and ethnographers engaging his view to describe and to understand.

Premises, “root images,” and central conceptions

Although symbolic interactionists’ scholarly interests vary considerably, there has emerged among them an acceptance of Blumer’s ([1969] 1986: 2) three perspective-defining key tenets: (1) people’s actions are based upon the meanings they ascribe to things they point out to themselves (objects); (2) meanings of objects (any physical, social, or abstract thing indicated) are not inherent to them but are developed through interactions with one-

self and others; and (3) meanings are not unchangeable – people define and may reinterpret meanings of objects as they use them to construct acts when dealing with situations they face. Accordingly, individual and collective acts are accomplishments enabled by the human ability to create and share meanings of objects, define situations, and act upon those definitions.

Blumer's portrayal of acts of any scale, duration, or complexity as constructed moment to moment (with the contents and processes always subject to unpredictable effects) in ongoing situations respects the emergent creative nature of human behavior. Indication, interpretation, and situational definition, thus, take on causal significance in establishing the nature and careers of individual or collective acts, including those of macro proportions. As developing processes, acts are not determined by abstract forces, such as strains toward equilibrium, or by "variables," such as roles, norms, statuses, or reference groups (Blumer [1969] 1986: 53). What people do and the forms that social life takes depend upon the human ability to point out and define one's own indications as well as others' acts and utterances and to engage in symbolic interaction with oneself.

Blumer ([1969] 1986: 6) develops this point further in his basic understandings, or "root images," of the nature of groups and societies, interaction, objects, actors, and action, as well as the "fitting together" of ongoing acts to form collective or "joint" acts. He employs the latter term to build an empirically grounded conceptual bridge to large-scale structured social phenomena (Blumer [1969] 1986: 58). Describing phenomena that are generated, maintained, and changed through symbolic interaction, his

basic conceptualizations further one's understanding of people's immediate life-worlds, inform his macro-sociological approach (Lyman, 1988; Prus, 1997; Maines, 1988; Morrione, 1988, 2003), and undergird his often path-breaking contributions to substantive areas such as fashion, collective behavior, social change, race prejudice, and power relations.

As importantly, Blumer's "four central conceptions" of symbolic interactionism reveal his pragmatist-born commitment to viewing all forms and aspects of individual and collective acts and community life in terms of *processes* that create, sustain, and change them. Essentially, he (Blumer ([1969] 1986: 50) observes that (1) action relies on constructing objects' meanings through the process of self-indication, (2) interactions among people are enabled through interpretations of what each indicates to the other(s), (3) acts are built up in situations as people point things out and interpret the relevance of whatever it is they confront, and, on a macro level, (4) "the complex inter-linkages of acts that comprise organization, institutions, division of labor, and networks of interdependency are moving and not static affairs." These conceptualizations reflect his understanding of the ubiquity, complexity, and multi-layered operation and interaction of processes in social life; they frame his view of reality and direct his scholarly research agenda. Indeed, his contributions in areas such as collective behavior, labor and race relations, and industrialization often involve drawing attention to the operation of processes within processes.

Processes within processes

Blumer's focus on process is especially evident, for example, in his formulation of the origin and career of social problems, wherein he observes that symbolic interaction-enabled *collective definition*, not so-called objective structural conditions, promotes the emergence and charts the careers of social problems. Accordingly, he offers a guide for the close empirical examination of five stages through which social problems are constructed; these cover its "emergence, ... legitimation, ... mobilization, ... formation of an official plan of action, and ... implementation" of that plan (Blumer, 1971: 301).

Broadly speaking, a social problem is a form of macro-social organization or structure, the career of which reflects the development of each of these five empirically observable arenas of action, interaction, or joint action. Each process contributes to socially constructed realities supporting individual and/or collective acts. And Blumer's discussions of such substantive areas routinely offer road maps to discovering emergent processes deserving empirical scrutiny. Thus, by uncovering the details of the process of *collective definition*, creating collective protest and change becomes a focus of investigation. As people consider things, social unrest may entail the production of delegitimizing collective definitions of social arrangements, which challenge the status quo (Blumer, 1978: 9); here, for example, Blumer would have us seek answers to questions such as, "Whose definitions?" "How are they communicated?"

Robert Prus's work on generic social processes (GSPs), defined as empirically identifiable "transsituational elements of interac-

tion" (1987: 251), brings the abstract notion of process into sharp empirical focus, creating the basis for his formulation of a pragmatist's rationale for ethnographic research methodology and choice of sociological subject matter (Prus, 1997). He draws on Blumer's perspective to formulate his concept because of its *inherent* emphasis on the ubiquity of indication, interpretation, and definition occurring in human association and group life. This ubiquity lends symbolic interactionism a "generic" character, one that underscores its relevance, if not its indispensability, for analysis of "transsituational" forms of social life (Prus, 1999: 123). Additionally, in a Blumer process-oriented fashion, each GSP points to constitutive empirical processes within it. Thus, for example, while the generic process of socialization is germane to analysis of what occurs during military boot camp or a first-grade class, in each case, activities pertaining to "acquiring perspectives," "achieving identity," involvement, "doing things," and "experiencing" relationships (Prus, 1987: 274–281) invite examination as generic processes developing *within* processes, none of which have certain ends given in advance.

Emergence

Blumer, as might anyone, observed that individual and collective acts and interactions take unpredictable twists and turns. For example, international trade negotiations, advocate groups' confrontations, impeachment proceedings, community power group conflicts, marriages, industrial relations, and social problems have unpredictable careers and may be studied empirically as

emergent processes. Constituted through processes intrinsic to symbolic interaction (indication, definition, interpretation, and situation-related self-reflexivity) and open to the play of obdurate factors outside developing lines of action, individual and collective acts and interactions are not entirely predictable in advance. As G.H. Mead student and philosopher David Miller (1973: 42) observes, "The emergent, being unpredictable in principle, does not follow logically from the world that is there, from the conditions necessary for its emergence, from what is traditionally called its cause." In fact, "emergence, uniqueness, and the unpredictable are all parts of reality that cannot be adequately subsumed in a scientific cause and effect logic" (Puddephatt and Prus, 2007: 276).

Stressing this point with an eye toward "broadening" limited views of the relevance of Blumer's symbolic interactionism beyond meaning creation and micro interaction, Snow (2001) suggests using emergence as an "orienting principle" to frame inquiry into processes that produce novelty or changes in existing forms of social organization, what people normally do, how they define particular situations, or how they see things in general. While Blumer would probably be sympathetic to Snow's project, he would emphasize that emergence goes on *continuously* and is not restricted to what appears to actors as "novel." He found problematic the assumption that emergence is associated exclusively with change because it implies logically, but misleadingly, that something is there in a *fixed* fashion that is changed. Blumer (Blumer-Morrione conversation, December 9, 1985) said of Mead's (1934, 1938) treatment of emergence:

If there's anything that's true in Mead's thought, it's the realization that it's a process going on all the time, which contains within it as a process, the ingredients of a shifting scene... . He's conceiving of this process as a continuous ongoing affair, as it actually is because what happens this moment is not the same thing as what happened a moment ago or what will happen a moment ahead. You've got inherently, not accidentally, but inherently, a flux taking place and I think that thought is something that has escaped scholars by and large, even though they may talk about emergence.

Thus, as Blumer sees it, (1) specific instances of social reality, and social reality in general, are ongoing emergent processes residing in streams and networks of situations met by acting units (individuals, groups, large-scale organizations, societies, etc.). (2) The existence of emergence as a ubiquitous adjusting process is a necessary feature of reality. As Miller (1973: 41) notes, "A world without adjustments would be a world without emergents and without process, passage, time, and history." (3) Emergence operates at all levels of scale of social phenomena and characterizes the physical as well as psychological realms of reality (Mead, 1934). (4) In so far as interpretation and situational definition involve the ongoing *selection* of past and future elements when shaping individual and collective acts, and social structures comprised of them, such selection is an emergent process at the root of human creativity, a source of novelty that is "incurably unpredictable" (Miller, 1973: 29). (5) While definitions of situations are emergents that guide acts, Blumer (1972, [1969] 1986) cautions that social reality has an "obdurate" character that also impacts them and that situations have qualities independent of however

they may be defined by an “acting unit” – individual, group, organization, community, society, etc. For example, however much I may believe that I can convert another’s political opinion to my own, that other may remain opposed to my position. And, (6) the ubiquity of emergence does *not* mean that there are no patterns of individual and collective human activity (Blumer [1969] 1986: 86) or that within repetitious acts emergent symbolic interactional processes are not occurring.

In terms of emergence manifested on a larger scale, consider unpredictable paths of organizational mergers and acquisitions, marriages, union/management bargaining, congressional debates, political primaries, or military conflicts, all of which are never entirely predictable. As acting units meet and handle situations, their acts, identities, and situational definitions are built up through *selectively* carving out, *in ways that are not fully determinable*, recollected and immediate experiences as well as imagined aspects of projected situations (Morrione, 1985). How, which, or when such indications enter the construction of thought and situated action is not entirely determinable. As emergents, an acting unit’s selections from a recollected past and from future projections are folded into ongoing situational definitions, acts, interactions, and developing joint acts. Emergence is an elemental aspect of Blumer’s view of social causality pertaining to the construction and career of acts, interactions, and forms of small and large-scale social organization.

Social causation, macro social phenomena: industrialization and race prejudice

Blumer (1956) rejects the determinism implicit in variable analysis and the associated common assumption that factors external to individuals act upon them as passive agents to determine particular outcomes. Such an assumption is, for example, evident in faulty causal logic revealed in prevalent interpretations of industrialization's role in producing social change (Blumer, 1990: 103–126, 145–150).

In that Blumer ([1969] 1986: 70–75, 2003: 25–26, 95–102) considers macro (a term he found conceptually problematic and never used) social structures, large-scale complex social organizations, systems of stratification, and institutions to be forms of joint action, he finds symbolic interactionism quite capable of analyzing them at least as effectively as mainstream sociology does (Maines, 1977, 1988: 47, 1989).

Contrary to a view of macro social entities that reifies them, conceptualizing them as somehow self-directing, Blumer ([1969] 1986: 58) believed they should be viewed empirically, as continually constituted, shaped, and directed by people in interaction with one another, weaving their acts together. Always situated, macro social phenomena are formed in an emerging present in which existing ongoing structures (as forms of joint action), meanings of acts, and definitions of situations play into them as they are constructed. In his process-oriented view of social organization, the meanings of individual and joint acts are elements of histories constructed and recalled by groups, organizations, institutions, and societies (Blumer [1969] 1986: 20); but these histories do not fully determine their paths of development.

Blumer's (1990) *Industrialization as an Agent of Social Change* illustrates his empirically oriented position concerning macro social phenomena and social causation. Defining industrialization as an economic system possessing "a *nucleus* of mechanical production, an *attached network* of procurement and of distribution, and an attendant *service structure*" (Blumer, 1990: 32), he argues that "To be realistic and workable in scholarly use, the conceptualization of industrialization as an agent of social change must be cast in terms of items or features that can be identified and traced at work in the collective life of the group" (Blumer, 1990: 42). Individual and collective situational definitions figure among the most significant of such features, especially since his counter-intuitive thesis is that industrialization plays a neutral role in determining social change. His view elevates the causal significance of such definitions and supports an emergent process model of social structure and societal organization. In so far as social life *is* human action and interaction, change necessarily involves actors' self-enabled ability to create objects and to act based upon their meanings when dealing with situations involved. This ability enables people and groups to address and handle routine or novel situations as they emerge, including, in this case, those accompanying the introduction of industrialization into a variety of spheres of established everyday community life.

As industrialization touches community activity at various "points of entry" (Blumer, 1990), individuals and groups define its manifestations in ways that make sense to *them* and not in some predetermined way or according, for example, to abstract

system requisites. Their interpretations of industrialization's manifestations and the subsequent definitions of situations they construct identify potential areas of social adaptation, acceptance, accommodation, or resistance. Such interpretations provide rationale for adjustments relating, for example, to the community's established patterns of social interaction, occupational, class, status, or power structures (Blumer, 1990: 42–49). So, change (or a lack of it) that occurs in the structure of the existing social order depends on the meanings that people create in interaction and on the situational definitions they formulate as they confront their new experiences. Consequently, society usually exhibits among the different points of entry a mix of collective responses to industrialization's appearance (Blumer, 1990: 101).

Blumer's point, supported by empirical studies, is that industrialization's impact varies greatly depending upon how its actual or imagined consequences are defined in areas where it contacts individual and community life. Such outcomes are emergent and, ultimately, indeterminable. In terms of causation, he also notes the desirability of attempting to understand industrialization as an agent of social change by contextualizing it within larger intra- and extra-societal processes, including, for example, cultural traditions, internal political machinations, or the state of the global economy (Blumer, 1990: 150). Such factors as these may exert influences despite individual or collective definitions of situations and subsequent acts, hindering or facilitating ongoing industrializing processes.

As does his analysis of industrialization as an agent of social change, Blumer's (1958) seminal work on race prejudice as a function of group position illustrates the importance of his perspective and his structure-as-process macro-sociology. It poses a serious challenge to psychological theories of prejudice (Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1966) that locate its source in individuals' psychologically generated negative feelings about perceived difference (Lyman, 1984). Blumer (1958: 3) asserts that prejudice develops as the result of a process of collectively defining and sharing an identity and a "sense of group position" and is not a function of personality. It emerges as superordinate groups perceiving threats to their position of control attempt to diminish or eliminate the impact of such threats. Central to this argument, his observation that super- and sub-ordinate group images or identities are formed not in primary interactions but in leader-influenced and media-shaped public contexts seems particularly relevant to understanding the character of today's media-saturated social world. Perry's (2007) ethnographic exploration of the notion of a "universal white identity" supports Blumer's insight into how perceived threats to group positions play into collective identity. Minescue and Poppe (2011) lend further support to Blumer's group positional model and generalize it beyond its applicability to understanding the origins and dynamics of race prejudice when they explore contesting groups' relative sizes as related to intergroup conflicts among national minorities in Russia. And, Bobo's (1999) and Bobo and Hutchings' (1996) examinations of the dynamics of prejudice build upon Blumer's thesis by stressing the need for studies of group identity formation, threat perception, public leadership, the role of interest

groups and the media in shaping images of oppression and stereotypes, and the cultural framing of racial identities. Here, as is typically the case, Blumer's substantively oriented work expands research horizons relating to social action and community life.

Conclusion

The foregoing comments on Blumer's view of industrialization as a macro social phenomenon and on the social origin of race prejudice offer just two of countless examples of how scholars striving to extend the relevance of symbolic interactionism and Blumer's work continue to see them as critically important sources with the potential to further our understanding of the nature and complexity of human association and group life. As Fine (1993) pointed out some time ago, Blumer's core theoretical ideas now inform a wide range of views, including feminist, phenomenological, postmodernist, and semiotic perspectives, and they have been linked to major theorists other than Park and Mead, among whom are Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Karl Marx, and Jürgen Habermas. Scholars continue to plumb the depths of Blumer's theoretical insights today.

Still, for those who attend more closely and directly to Blumer's symbolic interactionism, there is immensely more to be gleaned from his theoretical, methodological, analytic-conceptual, and substantive work. Thus, for instance, Prus (1996, 1997, 1999) and Prus and Grills (2019) draw extensively on Blumer in addressing and articulating generic features of social life as they

pertain to a wide range of human knowing, acting, and interacting.

Those who gain greater familiarity with Blumer's work are apt to discover within it an extensive array of theoretical insights. Such familiarity provides access to an exceptionally potent methodology and to a conceptual guide to producing empirically informed ethnographic research. His perspective directly challenges conventional models of social causation that disregard the actualities of human group life. Blumer also provides a macro sociology that respects the character of social life and all its emergent complexities as ongoing streams of situations and interchanges. He champions a social science that examines community life as experienced by symbolically enabled humans, who, through their acts and interactions with self and others, create, sustain, and change the social worlds in which we live.

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STRAUSSIAN NEGOTIATED ORDER

THEORY C. 1960–PRESENT

Adele E. Clarke

To understand social science is to understand the metaphors that social scientists use.

Gary Alan Fine (1984: 239)

One fundamental metaphor in the social sciences is ‘negotiations.’ Negotiated order, developed by Anselm Strauss (1916–1996), is an enduring ‘generic (widely applicable) social process’ (Schwalbe et al., 2000), providing useful analytic entrée into a vast array of topics.¹ Now in circulation for over 60 years, the influence of this perspective has been substantial, with Google Scholar listing approximately 9,400 entries with ‘negotiated order’ in the title and/or text as of 27 June 2020.

Strauss specialized in discerning such generic social processes and, through intensively empirical research, transforming them into what Leigh Star (1989a) called ‘theory/methods packages.’ These packages were Strauss’s frameworks of practice through which theorizing informs research, which in turn informs theorizing and so on, abductively enriching, strengthening and integrating interactionist scholarship.

At the core of Strauss's work from the 1950s on were his sustained anti-dualistic efforts to clarify relations among social structures and social processes (e.g. Charmaz and Clarke, 2020; Strübing, 2019). Initially, his empirical and theoretical negotiated order work centred on social processes (e.g. Strauss et al., 1964; Strauss, 1978a). For example, in early fieldwork, Strauss (1978a: 4–5) found negotiations pervasive, noting that 'Everyone seemed to be negotiating about something.' Strauss (1978a: 1, original emphasis) also introduced his book *Negotiations* with a processual definition:

Negotiation goes by many names, is referred to by many synonyms: *bargaining, wheeling and dealing, compromising, making deals, reaching agreements after disagreement, making arrangements, getting tacit understandings, mediating, power-brokering, trading off, exchanging, and engaging in collusion...* [N]egotiations appear in many forms, ... in every and all areas of life.

Negotiated orders are sets of *temporary* processual arrangements among various social actors that must be actively sustained or renegotiated.

But Strauss's anti-dualism soon provoked him. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 239–242) had asserted that sociologically: '[S]tructure and process are related more complexly (and more interestingly) than is commonly conceived.' It was time to return to more structural concerns. Strauss (e.g., 1978b, 1982b, 1984, 1993) then developed social worlds/arenas theory. With roots in Mead's work (Cefaï, 2016), this theory can be viewed as a more structural 'flip side' of negotiated order theory.²

Briefly, *social worlds* are groups of varying sizes that generate a life of their own with shared perspectives that form the basis of both individual and collective identities and action. As groups with shared commitments to certain activities, they generate shared ideologies about how to go about their affairs and share resources to facilitate their actions. Larger *arenas* of concern are constituted by multiple social worlds that are focused on particular shared interests and that are *prepared to act collectively in some way*. 'In arenas, various issues are debated, negotiated, fought out, forced, and manipulated by representatives of the various worlds and subworlds' (Strauss, 1978b: 124; see also Clarke et al., 2018: 61–77). Significantly, *social worlds and arenas can serve as structural units of analysis for the study of processual negotiated orders, including conflict and negotiations*.

Here, I first frame Strauss's and his colleagues' collaborative versions of negotiated order from their earliest publication in 1963 to the last in 1993. I then ask pragmatist questions: How and why did the negotiated order perspective come to be? What has it been useful for? How has it been taken up *and extended* as an analytic tool? My review covers the first 30 years (c. 1960–1990) as 'early' negotiated order work, including Strauss's and others' development of social worlds/arenas theory. The second period (1990–2020) constitutes 'later' work. Here my focus is largely on the wide-ranging applications of the perspective and little on the minutia of debates within it.

Last, I engage three contemporary 'conceptual reincarnations' through which negotiated order and social worlds/arenas perspectives are sustained in contemporary scholarship: 1) boundary objects; 2) infrastructures, classifications and standards;

and 3) situational analysis. *All three incarnations* have deep roots in pragmatism and emphasize different facets, aiding and abetting an array of fresh applications of the perspectives.

Straussian negotiated order and social worlds/arenas theories

The realm of rules could ... be usefully pictured as a tiny island of structured stability around which swirled and beat a vast ocean of negotiation. But we could push the metaphor further and assert ... that there is *only* vast ocean.

(Strauss et al., 1964: 313, original emphasis)

Like many other interactionist concepts, 'negotiation' as a key social process is now part of the accepted American sociological canon, its pragmatist interactionist origins largely obscured (e.g. Becker, 1999; Fine, 1993; Maines, 2001). To wit, my web searches found recent papers using the term 'negotiated order' lacking *any* citation.

The concept of 'negotiations' emerged in the late 1950s in the scholarly literatures on organizations and organizational behaviour in discussions of bargaining. Usually part of the literature on economics/industrial relations, the nascent *labour organizational* bargaining literature included work by sociologists Herbert Blumer (e.g. 1978) and Alvin Gouldner (e.g. 1954a, 1954b).³ During the Cold War, interest in bargaining also reached into the study of international relations (e.g. Morse, 1976).

Strauss's more sociological concepts of negotiations, social

Strauss's more sociological concepts of negotiations, social worlds, and arenas had their empirical roots in his collaborative research group's study of work in hospitals:

In the late 1950s, quite by accident, my coresearchers and I stumbled on that very notion of arena, of flexibly acted-out organisational scripts without firm rules, and on the crucial importance of negotiation to social order... The problem forced itself on our attention, as we observed personnel and patients in two psychiatric hospitals, for everyone seemed to be negotiating about something. So central did this negotiation seem to the events being studied that when writing up the conclusions we made negotiation a key concept ... and coined the term *negotiated order*.

(Strauss, 1978a: 4–5, *original emphasis*)

Strauss and colleagues' (Leonard Schatzman, Danuta Erlich, Rue Bucher and Melvin Sabshin) classic article appeared in 1963, and their empirical and theoretical negotiated order book, *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions*, in 1964. Bucher and Strauss (1961) also initiated work on 'Professions in Process,' Schatzman and Bucher (1964) on negotiating the division of labour, and Bucher (1962) on 'segments' of a profession as potential reformist social movements. *All* of these inspired ongoing threads of negotiations research.

Process (rather than structure) was then very hot in sociology; related interactionist works included Goffman's (1961) *Asylums*, Glaser and Strauss's (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Blumer's (1958) work on negotiating the colour line and *Symbolic Interactionism* (1969), Thomas Scheff's (1968) 'Negotiating Reality,' and more. Indeed, the dominance of this

and related work led Herbert Gans to remark around 1975 that, 'in many ways America has become a negotiating society' (quoted in Strauss, 1978a: 2).

Strauss (1978a) viewed negotiated order as what we now term a 'generic social process' (Prus, 1996; Schwalbe et al., 2000). He posited the following key assumptions of his negotiated order theory:

- 1 *Social order is negotiated order...* . There can be no organisational relationships without accompanying negotiations. (emphasis added)
- 2 Specific negotiations are contingent on specific structural conditions ... patterned, not accidental. They can be studied in terms of their conditions, character and consequences for persons and organisations.
- 3 The products of negotiation (contracts, understandings, ...) all have temporal limits, for eventually they will be reviewed, reevaluated, revised, revoked, and/or renewed.
- 4 Negotiated order has to be worked at [and] ... *is continually reconstituted...* (emphasis added)
- 5 The negotiated order *on any given day* can be conceived of as the sum total of the organisation's rules and policies, along with whatever agreements, understandings, pacts, contracts, and other working arrangements currently obtained ... at every level of the organisation... (emphasis added)
- 6 Any changes impinging on the negotiated order ... such as the introduction of a new technological element ... calls for renegotiation or reappraisal... (Strauss, 1978a: 5–6).

Ultimately for Strauss (1978a: 6), the *empirical* question was 'How do negotiation and appraisal play into each other and into the rules, policies and other "more stable" elements of social order?'

John Scanzoni's (1979: 529) review of Strauss's *Negotiations* in *Contemporary Sociology* noted that his examples were mostly at the group or organization level, refuting the critique of SI as solely focused on micro phenomena. In *Symbolic Interaction*, Harvey Farberman (1979: 153–159) raved: 'Strauss opens up the possibility of developing an *empirically grounded general theory of social order*.' With a classic grump, Carl J. Couch (1979: 159–163) wrote: 'What a sad effort... [yet] There is nothing better.'

In Strauss's final engagement with this topic in 1993 in his capstone book, *Continual Permutations of Action* (1993: 254), he suggests replacing 'negotiated order' with 'processual ordering': 'My use of a verb – ordering – instead of the usual noun is meant to emphasize the creative or constructive aspect of interaction, the "working at" and "working out of" ordering in the face of inevitable contingencies.' Echoing Everett Hughes's (1971: 52–64) 'going concerns,' our obligation is to analyze the *goingness*, including conditions which facilitate and hinder it. Processual ordering captured the range of negotiations from easy agreement to coercion and 'the lack of fixity of social order, its temporal, mobile, and unstable character' (Strauss, 1993: 255), the very flexibility that renders it a *generic* social process.

In 1978, Strauss (1978b) also published the first of several articles explicating his more structural *social worlds and arenas theory*, centred largely on negotiations within and among struc-

tural entities he now called social worlds and arenas (described earlier). Strauss (1982b, 1984) later elucidated legitimation and segmentation processes of social worlds and arenas – negotiated phenomena indeed! (See also Becker [1982].)

Strauss continued to publish on *both* negotiations and social worlds/arenas for the rest of his career (Strauss, 1982a, 1982b, 1991, 1993; Strübing, 2019), and his research and theorizing continued to reconcile the conventional binarism of structure and process.

Early negotiated order research (c. 1960–1990)

... not everything is either equally negotiable or ... negotiable at all. One of the researcher's main tasks, as it is that of the negotiating parties themselves, is to discover just what is negotiable at any given time.

(Strauss, 1978a: 252)

Thanks to its empirical potency, the negotiated order perspective quickly became a resounding academic success, initially especially in sociology. For the first 30 years, there were about 800 Google Scholar listings. Key early empirical interactionist works on negotiated order appeared in a special issue of *Urban Life* (11, 3).⁴ David Maines' (1982b) introduction, 'In Search of Mesostructure,' strongly promoted the perspective. Larry Busch's (1982) paper in that special issue revealed the historical processes through which negotiations produce structural conditions, noting that once produced, they then shape subsequent negotiations. That is, *negotiations can and do sediment into struc-*

tural arrangements. There were also papers on emotions as context for negotiations (Sugrue, 1982) and negotiations between hospice and medical institutions (Levy, 1982), among others.

Given its roots in organization studies, Strauss's (1982a) paper on 'Interorganisational Negotiation' aptly challenged organizations theories of the day. Strauss innovatively reconceptualized industries as social worlds in a broader arena, promoting alternative sectoral analyses. Fine's (1984) very positive review of the contributions of negotiated order theory to studies of organizational culture brought this work to the attention of mainstream sociology. Clarke (1991) sustained interactionist organizational analysis, comparing negotiated order and social worlds/arenas analyses with then potent mainstream institutional and ecological approaches.

During the early years, many papers focused on theoretical contributions of negotiated order to interactionism. Maines (1977, 1982a, 1982b; Maines and Charlton, 1985) was a primary contributor. Focusing on 'social organisation and social structure,' Maines refuted critiques of SI for its 'astructural bias.' He also drew attention to assessing just *what is negotiable* as a significant *empirical* question (see also Maines, 1991, 2001).

Peter Hall (1972) was another major early contributor to organizational negotiated order theory in the sociology of politics and education (see also Martin, 1976). Seeking to specify conditions facilitating and hindering negotiative activities (Hall and Spencer-Hall, 1982), he focused especially on 'Asymmetric Relationships and Processes of Power' (Hall, 1985; see also Hall, 1987; Hall and McGinty, 2002).⁵

In *medical sociology*, negotiated order research was ably sustained across the early period, also often focused on organizational phenomena and sociology of work. Strauss and col-

leagues' outstanding project *The Social Organisation of Medical Work* (1985/1997) centred on hospital work as negotiated and performed by diverse providers. *Hazards in Hospital Care: Ensuring Patient Safety* (Fagerhaugh et al., 1987) centred on new medical technologies as sites of inter-professional negotiation and subspecialty emergence, ongoing and highly researchable phenomena.

By the end of the early period, change was very much in the sociological air. Norman K. Denzin (1992) emphasized interpretive interactionism and cultural studies, while Gil Richard Musolf (1992) applauded 'New Directions within Symbolic Interactionism,' especially research addressing gender and race *as structural* (e.g. Hochschild, 1983).

Later negotiated order research (c. 1990–2020)

In short, if decisions are arrived at through interactive negotiation, the bureaucrat's de facto discretion ... can be seen ... as negotiated discretion.

(Johannessen, 2019: 517)

Since about 1990, the 'negotiated order' has blossomed, glean-ing approximately 8,600 new Google Scholar listings (as of 27 June 2020). The major trend is how incredibly far the approach has travelled disciplinarily beyond sociology. In *communications studies* (e.g. Stamato, 1991), one useful paper focused on 'Relational Development as Negotiated Order in Hostage Negotiation' (Donohue and Roberto, 1993), analyzing transcripts to specify successful strategies for hostage release.

Negotiated ordering in *criminology* included Albert J. Meehan's (1992) work emphasizing how juvenile policing attempts to reduce police *calls* rather than *crime*, and Rebecca Trammell's (2012) ethnography of organized violence found negotiated ordering in California prisons.

Reflecting the rise of animal studies (Arluke, 2002), in 'Animal adoption as negotiated order,' Sarah Balcom and Arnold Arluke (2001) compared open-trial adoption and traditional (animal protection primary) shelters. In practice, however, shelter workers negotiated how best to safeguard animals *on a case-by-case basis*, regardless of shelter policy.

Inequality studies have a dense legacy in interactionism. Explicitly drawing on Straussian negotiated ordering, Michael L. Schwalbe and colleagues' (2000) stellar work on 'Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality' focused on how inequalities are created and reproduced – negotiated – in concrete settings. Major processes linking local action and extra-local inequalities are identified, including processes such as othering, subordinates' adaptation, boundary maintenance and emotion management. All are useful in analyzing relationships arising 'between those who seek, or seek to preserve, an unequal share of resources, power, and privilege for themselves and those who resist or adapt' (Schwalbe et al., 2000: 440). Schwalbe extended his negotiated power perspective with *Rigging the Game: How Inequality is Reproduced in Everyday Life* (2008, 2015) and *Manhood Acts: Gender and the Practices of Domination* (2014), excellent classroom negotiated order works.

Negotiated order research in *organization and business studies*

was sustained by Maria L. Nathan and Ian I. Mitroff (1991), who found it useful in cooperative planning for crisis management related to product tampering as an inter-organizational field (Strauss, 1982a). Paul R. Schulman (1993) extended negotiated ordering to organizational reliability studies, finding that complex patterns of reciprocal yet unstated agreements typical of medical settings were even discernable within a nuclear power plant! Thus, an implication of this work is that *negotiating matters even where technical knowledge is requisite* and where standardization is a preeminent organizational requirement. Schulman found that not only were informal inter-organizational agreements observable, but their negotiation and continual renewal were recognized and formally embraced as integral to safe and reliable operation of the plant (cf. Vaughan, 1996).

Michael J. Fischer and Mark W. Dirsmith (1995) found audit technology development and implementation in Big 6 public accounting firms was frequently *renegotiated* – resisted, transformed and redirected – to serve the goals of the operating core of firms, rather than front-line workers. Clearly power matters in negotiations (See also Basu et al., 1999).

Later research also returned to industrialization issues, updated to examine performance assessment in businesses under contemporary endemic neoliberal conditions of upheaval (see also Charmaz, 2019). Swiss scholars Eva Nadai and Christoph Maeder (2007: 45) found that ‘[I]t is not merely enough to do one’s job during a specified time, one has to sell one’s efforts as a personal and special contribution.’ Today such performances are demanded even of workers in routine jobs. Methodologically,

they assert that (2007: 53) negotiated order theory allows analysis not only at micro but also meso and macro levels, facilitating exploration of connections among them.

In later medical sociology research, Roland Svensson (1996) found key changes in care delivery in Swedish hospitals created new 'negotiation spaces' for nurses, leading to less servant-like relations with doctors. Following Svensson, Davina Allen (1997) found nurses also negotiated enhanced occupational jurisdiction in British hospitals.

Monica J. Casper's (1998) research on fetal surgery lies at the intersection of the *sociologies of work and medicine*. In operating and recovery rooms, surgeons, neonatologists and obstetricians often negotiated distinct and competing agendas, including seeing themselves as having different *work objects* – primary patients (the fetus or mother). Simultaneously, they were negotiating both individual *and* collective career trajectories involving the other specialists *in those very rooms*.

Carolyn Wiener (2000) applied negotiated order and arena analyses to the 'elusive quest' for accountability in hospitals. The outcome of negotiations was that the *appearance* of quality care via completion of forms not only sufficed but also usefully displaced potentially problematic examinations of *actual* care. Interactionist Stefan Timmermans (1998) ambitiously drew together two of Strauss's key concepts – negotiations and trajectories – analyzing their interrelations in a medical setting.

In 2014, McGinty notably lamented the later era as 'divided and drifting' vis-à-vis organizational concerns among interactionists. Happily, these were recently engaged by a 2019 special

issue on 'Interaction and Organisations' of *Symbolic Interaction*. Here, Lars E.F. Johannessen (2019) analyzes 'negotiated discretion' among 'street-level bureaucrats,' and Anders Blok and colleagues (2019) return to core negotiated order issues of 'ecologies of boundaries' regarding professional jurisdiction, among others.

Contemporary reincarnations of negotiated order theory and research, c. 1990-present

[C]ooperation here does not necessarily mean consensus.

(Star, 1993)

Over half a century since its original formulations, negotiated order work continues not only in its own name but also simultaneously through three widely utilized conceptual reincarnations: 1) *boundary objects*; 2) *infrastructures, classifications and standards*; and 3) *situational analysis*. All emphasize more *structural facets* of Barney Glaser and Strauss's (1967: 239–242) 'structural process,' and all assume that *negotiated processual ordering* undergirds their focal concerns. Moreover, each reincarnation facilitates *empirical* analyses of actual negotiations.

Boundary objects: Boundaries as negotiated entities have been sites of interactionist interest since early Chicago School ecological work, especially that of G.H. Mead (e.g. Cefai, 2016), as sustained by Herbert Blumer (1958), especially his work on movements of the colour line as foregrounding relationality and *collective negotiation of positionality*.⁶ Further, in Strauss's (1978b,

1982b, 1984, 1993) social worlds/arenas theory, boundaries are the focus of many negotiations both within and between worlds in arenas.

Boundary object is Leigh Star's most noted contribution to negotiated order and social worlds/arenas theories and interactionism.⁷ Drawing on Robert Ezra Park's (1952) concerns with intersections of human communities, extended by Hughes's (1971) conception of workplaces as sites 'where [diverse] peoples meet,' elaborated by Strauss (1978b, 1993) as social worlds and arenas, Star shifted the focus to 'the in-between' and 'invisible.'

Boundary objects are negotiated phenomena that dwell at the intersections – in-between – multiple social worlds in arenas. Loosely structured *across* worlds, they are more tightly tailored *within* particular social worlds for local use as needed. Star examined boundary objects in multiple sites including maps in brain research (1989a), programmes in computer and information sciences (e.g. 1989b), and specimens in a zoology museum (Star and Griesemer, 1989).

The boundary object concept has travelled widely (Griesemer, 2015), including as a means of studying visual representations (e.g. Henderson, 1999). In British medical sociology, Allen (e.g. 1997; Allen and Hughes, 2017) examined nursing boundary objects. In France, Ilana Löwy (1992) studied 'loose concepts' as useful boundary objects in research collaborations in immunology. Methodologically, following boundary objects can provide revelatory analytic pathways into complicated situations.

Star (1999: 377) defined *infrastructure* as:

both relational and ecological – it means different things to different groups and it is part of the balance of action, tools, and the built environment, inseparable from them. It also is frequently mundane to the point of boredom, involving things such as plugs, standards, and bureaucratic forms.

Infrastructures are often analytically invisible and taken for granted. They can be construed along a continuum from hard to soft. Classic *hard infrastructures* include electrical, gas and other energy, electronic and transportation grids, town and city plans. Classic *soft infrastructures* include standards and classification systems, major objects of study in science and technology studies provoked by both Michel Foucault's work (e.g. 1973) and Geoffrey C. Bowker and Star's (1999) *Sorting Things Out*.⁸

As in other negotiated orders, *cooperation here does not necessarily mean consensus* (Star, 1993) but refers instead to power differentials. For example, in studying Pap smears, Casper and I (1996) tragically found classification systems were increasingly negotiated to meet needs of transnational researchers rather than local clinicians trying to determine whether patients had pre-cancer or cancer.

Making standards has also been a recent focus of negotiated order studies. Martha Lampland and Star's (2009) co-edited *Standards and their Stories* offers examples and a methodological appendix on strategies for unravelling standards to reveal their negotiated histories.

Situational analysis (SA), an extension of grounded theory (GT) that I developed is the third and final reincarnation considered here. Focused on relationality and negotiations, it inte-

grates Strauss's more structural social worlds/arenas theory with his more processual GT through the use of several analytic mapping strategies (Clarke, 2003, 2005; Clarke et al., 2015, 2018).⁹ In very pragmatist ways, relying deeply on John Dewey (1938), in SA 'the situation' becomes the fundamental unit of analysis (Clarke et al., 2018: 42–49, 68–70; Clarke and Frieze, in prep.; see also Frieze, Washburn and Clarke in this volume). Through the metaphors of 'negotiations,' 'the situation' and 'mapping,' a lot of entities – both human and nonhuman – get in on the act and into the interactions under study. In pragmatist fashion, this means that a radically democratic politics of representation and analytics can be called for and called upon to fully analyze those negotiations.¹⁰

Again, perhaps most remarkable about all the negotiated order reincarnations is the extent and highly transnational range of disciplines and specialties where they have been taken up.¹¹

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed 60 years of research and theorizing using the *negotiated order* interactionist conceptual framework. It vividly demonstrates the intellectual vitality generated through moving back and forth between researching and theorizing a 'generic social process.' Such processes need to be understood empirically in their fresh specificities again and again as they change over time and circumstance.

Notably, negotiated order theory, its empirical usefulness and pragmatist reincarnations have taken a sociological – and re-

lently social – concept far beyond sociology. Looking forward, the range of disciplines and specialties in which negotiated processual ordering pertains is vast. Its utility is far from exhausted but rather is renewed and enriched through additional research, theorizing and elaboration/reincarnation. As Strauss (1978a: 4–5) so vividly stated in his fieldnotes, ‘Everybody [is still] ... negotiating about something.’ These new negotiations await our analyses. Happily, we have a well-tested and efficacious interactionist toolkit in hand.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is dedicated to Anselm Strauss (1916–1996) and his student Susan Leigh Star (1956–2010). Special thanks to Gary Alan Fine for asking me to prepare it for the Carl Couch Symposium in 2012, to other interactionists whose work was inspirational (Herbert Blumer, Rue Bucher, Norm Denzin, Peter Hall, Reiner Keller, David Maines and Jörg Strübing) and to the editors of this handbook, who chose to include it. I cannot imagine a more appropriate home.
- 2 Initially, Strauss (e.g., Strauss, 1978b) developed the social worlds theory separately from his negotiated order work.
- 3 See also Hallett and Ventresca (2006: esp. 223–224).
- 4 In 1987, *Urban Life* became the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.
- 5 For a reflexive account of his career, see Hall (2003).
- 6 For recent work inspired by Blumer’s (1958) classic paper, see Esposito and Murphy (2000) and Evergeti (2011).

- 7 Google Scholar had 15,500 listings under 'boundary object' as of 27 June 2020. For reviews, see Clarke and Star (2003, 2007). The Star reader and festschrift (Bowker et al., 2015) includes her classic boundary object and infrastructure papers.
- 8 IFRIS sponsored a conference in Paris on the 20th anniversary of the publication of *Sorting Things Out*, now also available in French. See <https://stolegacy.sciencesconf.org/>.
- 9 Google Scholar had 6,970 listings for 'situational analysis' and 'Clarke' as of 7 January 2020.
- 10 The word 'democratic' is used here to denote analysis that is pursued equitably of all participating entities in the situation and does not focus only on those with the most power in that situation. This is a feature of Straussian social worlds/arenas analysis discussed earlier, and of SA (Clarke et al., 2018: 357–359).
- 11 Regarding SA, see exemplar listings by discipline and specialty in Clarke et al. (2018: 374–381), also at <https://study.sagepub.com/clarke2e/student-resources/exemplars-of-situational-analysis-projects>.

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