

Pages 463-492 (Symbolic Interactionism & Dramaturgy)

Symbolic Interactionism: An Overview

- Born in 1937; coined by Herbert Blumer
 - o Inspired by Mead (student of his at University of Chicago)
- Blumer highlighted the significance of meaning, interaction, and interpretation to the fitting together of individuals' lines of action.
 - o Interpretation - constructing meaning of objects of another's actions; based on interpretation they respond to physical/social surroundings.
- Also says that the process of interpretation is carried out through a conversation of gestures involving significant symbols (aka those words or gestures whose meaning is shared by those in the interaction).
 - o Internal dialogue - take attitude of other
 - o Self Consciousness - ability to see oneself as others do, therefore being able to anticipate responses to one's behavior.
 - o Joint Action - the larger collective form of action that fits together the behaviors of the different participants; could be simple collaboration of 2 people or huge organizations/institutions.
- In order to align behaviors with one another, individuals must make a shared interpretation of each other's gestures → joint action.
- Distinct from functionalism
- Social life = dynamic process in which people, through interpreting the gestures of their selves and others, are creating/recreating patterns of behavior that form social order.

Stryker's Identity Theory

- Social structural version of symbolic interactionism based on the reciprocal relationship between self and society - how each is a product of one another.
 - o Roles allow us to predict behavior of others and orient our own conduct; leading to coordinated, organized interaction.
- A person has as many "selves" as he or she has patterned relations with others.
- Three concepts:
 - o Identity - "part" of one's self that is used when interacting with others.
 - # identities = # structured role relationships
 - o Identity Salience - how self is organized in hierarchy of identities.
 - Not every identity has same importance to individual

- o Commitment - a reflection of identity salience; committed to being that type of person.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982): A Biographical Sketch

- Born in Canada in 1922
- Bachelor's Degree from University of Toronto in 1945
- Went to University of Chicago - Masters & Doctorate
- Three years at National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, MD
 - o St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. (*Asylums*)
- Sociology department at University of California, Berkeley until 1968
- Went to University of Pennsylvania until his death at age 60
- **Iconoclast** - never content to be conventional; rebellious intellectual course
 - o Referred to self as "empiricist" or "social psychologist", not symbolic interactionism.
 - Did not want to stick to one theoretical position
 - o Invented own terminology - the linguistic turn

Goffman's Intellectual Influences and Core Ideas

Symbolic Interactionism: George Herbert Mead and William I. Thomas

- **Impression Management (Mead)**
 - o The verbal/nonverbal practices employed in an attempt to present an acceptable image of yourself to others.
 - o Subtle ways we carry out performances.
- Explores how social arrangements themselves and the physical copresence of individuals (interaction order) shapes the organization itself.
- **Definition of Situation (Thomas)**
 - o Before any self-determined act of behavior, there is always a part in which we may call the definition of the situation; reactions aren't automatic, but must look at subjective meanings attached to their actions.
 - o Individuals do not create definitions, but use preexisting ones to determine meanings of events.
 - o "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."
 - Behavior is fundamentally shaped by the definition of the situation assigned by an individual.
 - Individuals create reality as they define it.
 - o Definitions and moral obligations constrain/enable actor's self-presentations in different ways.

Social Anthropology: Emile Durkheim, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, W. Lloyd Warner

- Durkheim's study of tribal religions
 - o Showed the inevitable presence of religion in all societies, even secular, modern ones.
 - o Worshipping God is the same as worshipping society; allegiance to our society.
 - o Unifying participants focus' through a shared practice can allow rituals to reaffirm a society's collective conscience - preserving social solidarity.
 - o Thus the continued existence of any society requires its members to periodically reunite in ritual ceremonies to "rekindle" their adherence to the collective conscience and commitment to upholding the moral order.
 - Rituals are designed to protect us.
 - o Goffman looks at the interaction rituals that pervade everyday encounters/interactions.
 - Individual reaffirms sacred status of others through these conventionalized acts.
- Warner's study of ritual practices that shape modern status systems and inequalities they hold.
 - o **Interaction rituals** - acts through whose symbolic component the actor shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it.
 - o **Demeanor** (conduct, dress) and **deference** (honor, dignity, respect)
 - Determined by interpretations others make of their behavior during interaction.
 - Also known as manners, rules, etiquette.
 - o **Symmetrical rules** - common courtesies; well-demeaned person is obligated to perform and expect to receive.
 - o **Asymmetrical rules** - require an individual to treat others differently from the way he is treated by them; convey status difference.

Dramaturgy: A Synthesis

- Analyzed interaction through the analogy of a theater.
- Introduced vocabulary associated with theater:
 - o Front - institutionalized; defines situation for those observing performance.
 - Setting - scenery/props to make up physical space
 - Personal Front - expressive equipment
 - o Backstage - unobserved
 - Ex: Restaurants
 - o Character - dramatic effect arising from a scene presented; credited/discredited.