

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Michael Hviid Jacobsen, ed., *The Contemporary Goffman*. Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought. New York: Routledge, 2009, 396 pp. \$US 95.00 hardcover (978-0-415-99681-5)

In his contribution to *The Contemporary Goffman*, Charles Lemert asks: “Who, in his day, would have thought that Erving Goffman’s writings would endure as long as they have?” While there is no question that sociological interest in the work of Goffman persists, *The Contemporary Goffman* contributes to appraising and sustaining Goffman’s oeuvre by emphasizing its contemporary significance. Appearing 50 years after the publication of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, it also presents a case for considering Goffman’s oeuvre and sustained focus on the Interaction Order as classic within the sociological canon.

The book is comprised of fifteen original essays, some from established Goffman scholars such as Charles Lemert, Greg Smith, Yves Winkin, Peter Manning and Thomas Scheff, others showing the interest taken in Goffman by a younger generation of scholars, including several from Denmark and Norway. As Lemert and Jacobsen note, it is a testament to Goffman that his work inspires scholars working in these and many others countries as well.

The Contemporary Goffman is divided into three sections: Dissecting Goffman; Reframing Goffman; Extending Goffman. Michael Jacobsen’s introduction provides a thorough overview of Goffman’s current status, his major sociological contributions, the debates on his work, and the reach of his influence. Yves Winkin begins the first section with a nice account of Goffman’s early years growing up in Manitoba, looking at the “main characteristics of the habitus which shaped Goffman the kid.” We get insights into his personality, and the family and social life of Jewish immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s. Jacobsen’s “Labelling Goffman” does a fine job of showing Goffman’s affinity to, and difference from other approaches: symbolic interactionist, functionalist, structuralist, existentialist, phenomenological, critical theory, and postmodernist. The originality of Goffman’s approach (“A Maverick”) is made evident through these comparisons.

Peter Manning’s “Continuities in Goffman” discusses Goffman’s focus on the Interaction Order as his most significant contribution, and

also provides an analysis of the interaction orders of two Boston campus bars. Greg Smith's and Michael Jacobsen's "Goffman's Textuality" is a rich and insightful essay on Goffman's writerliness, showing that "Goffman's persuasiveness is a thoroughly textual accomplishment" located "betwixt and between sociology and literature." The authors explicate Goffman's use of the essay form (demonstrating Simmel's influence), and the metaphor and irony which contribute so much to his unique sociological vision. This chapter really brought home for me why I've appreciated Goffman, particularly his use of humour which, as the authors point out, is lacking in most sociologists. In the concluding chapter of the first section, Charles Lemert links Goffman's oeuvre to American and global historical and political constellations at the time. While discussing the significance of *The Presentation of Self* and "Felicity's Condition," he focuses on *Stigma* and its dark tone. Lemert suggests that the irony of the writing — a comment on American culture of the early 1960s — might explain why we read "Goffman, Still" in the uncertain times of today.

Reframing Goffman begins with Greg Smith's reminder of Goffman's major contribution to and interest in visual sociology, and the pioneering achievement of *Gender Advertisements*. Smith takes on the important task of comparing Goffman's analysis of gender displays to Judith Butler's conception of gender performativity. Smith notes the non-essentialist positions of the two thinkers (including passages from each that say pretty much the same thing), except that Goffman was covering this ground sociologically (to less acclaim) more than a decade earlier. Smith proffers that the feminist criticisms of Goffman have not adequately appreciated this early and significant contribution to gender analysis.

Thomas Scheff reiterates what he takes to be Goffman's creative and innovative contribution to social science: the development of a new vocabulary for the analysis of micro-interaction, an emphasis on emotions, and trope clearing. Scheff is one of the few to emphasize Goffman's treatment of emotions (primarily embarrassment) as a feature of interaction. He also notes the importance of Goffman's trope clearing — the "deconstruction of the self" aimed at the western notion of the self-contained individual. Using Robert Fuller's work, Scheff looks at the concept of facework with respect to such issues as dignity and humiliation, and the phenomenon of rankism. For Scheff, this extends the application of originally micro-context concepts to the analysis of macro-entities.

Jacobsen follows the tenor of Scheff's focus on emotions and the issues of dignity and humiliation in arguing convincingly for Goffman's contribution to the sociology of recognition. Rather than taking a moral-

philosophical interest in recognizing others' innate subjectivity, Goffman emphasizes how recognition is done in interaction through the enactment of interaction rituals and the giving and receiving of deference. Jacobsen argues that the dominant conceptions in recognition theory — psychological, normative, and theoretical — all suffer from biases that fail to consider the ways in which recognition is a phenomenon of the interaction order itself. Closing out the second section, Ann Branaman offers a personal account of her encounters with Goffman's work and the interpretive shifts that occurred as her understanding became more sophisticated. In her current, fourth reading, she places Goffman's understanding of the individual in the context of historical developments and social-theoretical accounts of the self. Goffman's conception of the self (presented in the texts of the 1950s and 1960s) is located between the older individualism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the newer, detraditionalized, "liquid" self of the twenty-first century. In contrast to Goffman's era, where social bonds mattered more than individuals and their identities, Branaman argues that in the "new individualism" of the present, the priorities are reversed.

The last section contains applications of Goffman. Richard Jenkins examines the ramifications of "face to face work in digital time," and discusses email, social networking sites and the interconnections between first and "second lives." In the "21st Century Interaction Order," the boundaries between physical and digital realms are "osmotic," and a rethinking of spatial, and not only temporal, metaphors is called for. In "The Unboothed Phone," Rich Ling discusses the dramaturgical demands of mobile telephony, which produces mobile front stages, where we are all personally addressable, potentially anywhere. Actors must often negotiate interaction with their co-present and telephonic interlocutors simultaneously, producing a "dual front stage." The mobile telephonic context (where we call people rather than land line-based places) generates the production of courtesies and etiquettes that require a redialing of conceptions that were originally formulated on the basis of physically co-present interaction. In "The Question of Calculation," Espen Ytreberg shows the relevance of Goffman for communication theory, in particular the requirements of "planning in communication," which have become prevalent in a world shaped by the interests and discursive demands of bureaucratic organizations and the mass media. This chapter also serves as an invaluable primer on Goffman's writings on mass media, and the forms of talk found in broadcasting.

In "Goffman and The Tourist Gaze," Jonas Larsen shows the influence of Goffman on tourism research, which has tended to frame tourism either as a quest for authenticity, or as a manipulated experience where

apparently “authentic” back stage cultural scenes are actually staged “back” regions. Against the dominance of the gaze in such research, Larson affirms the pertinence of Goffman for the “performative turn” in tourist research, where tourists are understood to be embodied beings performing in, and making alive, the various scenes they find themselves in. Ole B. Jensen, in “Erving Goffman and Everyday Life Mobility,” shows how Goffman can be drawn upon to consider the links between macro-social conditions of mobility and the “‘little practices’ of everyday life.” In a world where mobility is a defining feature of everyday life, mobile technologies add to the experience. Jensen uses Goffman to develop the ideas of the “mobile with” (being mobile with others) and the “networked self” to demonstrate the dramaturgical implications of mobility as well as the implications for the self of IT and the “digital layer.” While Goffman’s analyses predate digital technologies, the macro-conditions of mobility invite applications of Goffman’s work to a new field, opening up the linkages between global migrations and everyday practices. In the book’s final essay, “Close Strangers,” Dag Album draws upon *Asylums* and “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” to consider patient-patient interaction in acute care hospitals. The rituals of interaction enacted by patients in hospitals arise from their physical closeness and mutual observability, where being strangers to each other must be negotiated. It is the “selves of hospital situations that are being exposed,” where there is an expectation to be sociable if one is able. However, the interaction rituals in the setting do not support the expression of feelings over one’s condition, complaining, boasting, nagging, or talk that is too personal. Album thus notes the “collective ritual efforts ... employed to support ordinariness and normality in a context of threatening deviance.” The self as ordinary is the sacred object in these “out-of-the ordinary circumstances.”

I have only minor criticisms of the book. Repetition of lists of Goffman’s publications might have been eliminated, and the book should have been subject to a thorough proof-reading and copy-editing. These aside, *The Contemporary Goffman* offers much insight and commentary on the world of Goffman, and will stimulate anybody to consider the breadth of analysis and application that this world offers. It also makes a vigorous case for viewing the oeuvre as truly original in sociology, and Goffman himself as one of its most creative, if not finest, writers. While it is possible to imagine sociology without certain thinkers, Goffman is surely not one of them. Goffman as classic? No argument here.

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