

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Michael Hviid Jacobsen, Greg Smith** (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Goffman Studies*, Routledge, London 2022, XIV + 440 pages.

**Karl Lenz, Robert Hettlage** (eds.), *Goffman-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, J.B. Metzler, Berlin 2022, XXXVI + 583 pages.

It would be a virtually insurmountable task to list only the most important publications pertaining to the concepts put forward by Erving Goffman. Nevertheless, amongst the vast array of books, edited volumes, readers, and articles which refer to Goffman and his work, a prominent place will be reserved for two detailed monographs. Issued on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of his birth and the fortieth of his death, these tomes focus on one of the most influential sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – regularly read, albeit not always sufficiently in depth. Each volume has been published as part of a well-established series by a renowned publishing house: It is to Goffman that the latest addition to the *Routledge International Handbooks* and to the *Metzler Personen-Handbücher* has been dedicated.

Each of these series organises the contents of its respective volume differently. The English-language handbook is divided into the following parts: “Concepts and themes,” “Fields and studies,” and “Comparisons, interpretations and asides”; it contains a total of 35 articles by 37 authors. The German-language handbook, to which 51 authors have contributed, encompasses 72 chapters, organised in six

consecutive thematic blocks: “Introduction,” “Theoretical contexts,” “Authorities, teachers, and inspirers,” “Basic concepts,” “Works,” “Connections, references, differences,” and “Reception.” At first glance, it is clear that the mode in the *Routledge* book is simpler and slightly less formal – and yet intended more for readers already quite familiar with Goffman’s oeuvre. In contrast, the *Metzler* book combines the features of a comprehensive introduction to Goffman’s legacy with more sophisticated analyses. It would seem that this distinction stems from the fact that (for obvious reasons) Goffman is received more intensely by a German-language readership anchored in studies by German-speaking scholars. Significant from this standpoint is that the *Goffman-Handbuch*, in fact, opens this German publication to global contexts on the Goffmanian perspective as a number of English-speaking authors were invited to participate in this venture with a total of 17 texts included in their original English.

Faced with two tomes constructed thusly, the formulation of a standard review would be a daunting chore. Indeed, it would be impossible to refer – thoroughly and substantively – to the total of 107 discrete texts which constitute the contents. The following commentary should therefore be seen as motivated by a desire to encourage Goffmanophiles to read these compilations. This will be a concise review of the two volumes, combined with an attempt to compare them as well as to begin to delineate their place in the literature on this subject.

The 12 chapters which comprise Part I of *The Routledge International Handbook of Goffman Studies* deal with this social scientist’s most consequential concepts. Whereas some chapters concentrate on those texts by Goffman in which a specific concept plays a key role, most provide an overview referring to the broader body of his scholarly output. Thus the topics of subsequent articles are dramaturgy, self-presentation, ritual, stigma,<sup>1</sup> total institutions, moral career, face-work, interaction in public places, strategic interaction, frame analysis, “footing,” and interaction order. An analogous fragment in the *Goffman-Handbuch* is its fourth unit (“Basic concepts”), which provides distinct discussions of a higher number of concepts: interaction, the social situation and situation definition, expressive behavior, interpersonal rituals, performance, space, total institutions, secondary adjustments and the underlife, role and role distance, civil inattention, stigma, identity, normality, frames and framing, footing, and the interaction-society relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting contribution to the research on stigma is an article by Gwendolyn Gilliéron, entitled “Learning from Erving Goffman: Understanding the experiences of ‘mixed’ individuals in Switzerland and Morocco as a stigma management” which is to be found in this issue of *Przegląd Socjologiczny* (pages 105–131).

The fifth part of the German volume (“Works”) also includes elements that coincide and converge with the first part of *The Routledge International Handbook*. Discussed sequentially in the *Handbuch* are all of Goffman’s most significant texts – starting with his 1953 doctoral dissertation (first published in 2022),<sup>2</sup> through *The presentation of self in everyday life*, *Asylums*, *Encounters*, *Behavior in public places*, *Stigma*, *Interaction ritual*, and *Relations in public*, and ending with *Frame analysis*.<sup>3</sup> Also taken up in this tome is a range of publications which have not yet appeared in Polish: the book, *Strategic interaction*; two texts devoted to gender issues (the book, *Gender advertisements*, and the article, “The arrangement between the sexes”); two texts on conversation analysis (the book, *Forms of talk*, and the article, “Felicity’s condition”); and “The interaction order,” an article including an original systematization of Goffman’s scholarly oeuvre, published (like “Felicity’s condition”) posthumously.

Comprising Part II of the English-language volume edited by Michael H. Jacobsen and Greg Smith, “Fields and studies” consists of chapters pointing out Erving Goffman’s contributions to the sociology of emotions, medical sociology, communication (as an academic discipline), media studies, research on digital culture, sociolinguistics, sociology of the body, disability studies, visual studies, gender studies, gambling studies, mobility studies, police studies, and the sociology of death. The counterpart to this section of the *Routledge* handbook is the seventh section of the *Goffman-Handbuch* entitled “Reception,” which begins with studies pertaining to the influence of Erving Goffman on the two most important theoretical concepts found in German social sciences of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action and Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory. Further chapters in this section refer to how inspirations drawn from Goffman have played out in rational choice theory, research on interaction and digital media, ethnography, visual sociology, sociology of the body, disability studies, sociology of emotions, gender studies, game studies, organization studies, linguistics, educational science, psychiatry, criminology, and history. As is evident, the themes deliberated in these two segments – in Part II of *The Routledge International Handbook* and the seventh

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<sup>2</sup> Found earlier in this issue is a reprint of Yves Winkin’s introduction to that 2022 edition (see “The Cradle,” pages 23–38).

<sup>3</sup> The author of the chapter discussing *Frame analysis* – as well as two additional texts included in the *Goffman-Handbuch* (regarding Goffman’s reception in the field of ethnography and the impact of Mead and Cooley on Goffman) – is Jürgen Raab. The issue at hand offers a different text by this scholar: “The theory-method-link in Erving Goffman’s sociology of the interaction order” (pages 63–86).

unit in the *Goffman-Handbuch* – are largely comparable, even if those themes are treated more comprehensively in the German volume. Nonetheless, the approach taken towards each individual topic does differ – and therefore both of these sections across the two volumes are worthy of the reader’s attention and interest.

The above-described contents alone testify to the amazingly multifaceted impact of Goffman’s thinking. Each respective chapter points to a specific area of the social sciences, opening anew the eyes of many who consider themselves experts on Goffman. It is worth emphasizing that – despite his omnidirectional influence – a feature indisputably shared in common across the works of Erving Goffman, is a focus on the microlevel of social reality. The authors of the chapters included in both volumes under review rightly emphasise this trait of Goffman’s sociology – though one might expect them to undertake certain such aspects somewhat more extensively.

In reality, his crucial contribution and merits do not entail the already known and developed microsociology, dealing with relatively stable social microstructures within small social groups (e.g., role structure in task groups), but rather a new strain of microsociology: analysis of the relatively autonomous interaction order, meaning social microstructures as part of fleeting face-to-face interactions (i.e., features of “encounters” as opposed to “gatherings”). Goffman’s declaration on behalf of a sociology of interaction was extraordinarily manifest – even in comparison to other subdisciplines (e.g., ethnomethodology, conversation analysis or symbolic interactionism) which were developing concurrent, and to a certain degree, alternative ways of analyzing interaction processes. An important question therefore arises about the relationship between microstructures of the first and second type.

Consequently, Goffman’s decision to analyse the interaction order can be approached in at least three ways. Firstly, we may observe that this decision is a noteworthy indication of the meaningfulness of a previously undervalued research field. Secondly, discerned here, too, is a deficit associated with Goffman’s repudiation of social macroprocess analysis. The first more positive tone, quite understandably, dominates in both volumes reviewed here; the second more negative tone, also for understandable reasons, emerges rarely and remains in the background. It seems that the third tone, albeit present in both volumes, deserves still broader consideration, confirming Goffman’s obvious centering on interaction-analysis. At the same time, however, this third way should also make it possible to utilise Goffman’s perspective in the analysis of the rules of social

organization, the dynamics of social macroprocesses, and the links between the micro- and macroscale of social reality.<sup>4</sup>

The final section, Part III of *The Routledge International Handbook of Goffman Studies* (“Comparisons, interpretations and asides”) incorporates two types of texts. On the one hand, there are chapters analyzing the relationship between the perspective taken by Erving Goffman and the concepts of other significant authors in contemporary social sciences (i.e., Norbert Elias, Harold Garfinkel,<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, and Anthony Giddens). Relatively equivalent to this is the extensive sixth section of the *Goffman-Handbuch* (“Connections, references, differences”) which focuses on his academic peers. These were, in a sense, his rivals for the hearts and souls of others – Harold Garfinkel (the founder of ethnomethodology), Harvey Sacks (the founder of conversation analysis), Norman K. Denzin and Anselm L. Strauss (influential representatives of symbolic interactionism), and Dell Hymes (founder of the ethnography of communication) – yet together with Goffman they shaped a new look on interpersonal communication. Closing this unit of the German tome is an essay by Yves Winkin on the lesser known relations between Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu, followed by a chapter on a similarly little known facet of his sphere of influence – Goffman as a teacher, a PhD dissertation supervisor, and an academic consultant.

On the other hand, the reader of Part III in the *Routledge* handbook is presented with especially valuable (in my opinion) essays which unveil the ways in which Goffman worked and thought. Greg Smith considers previously untapped aspects of Erving Goffman’s method broadly understood – aspects which attest to a high degree of coherence and consistency throughout his oeuvre, and contradict a widespread opinion regarding his diversification.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent authors here address Goffman’s way of conducting fieldwork, his view on the humorous elements of daily life, his application of his own conceptual framework, as well as the role footnotes played in his publications. Similar though more systematic in nature is the first, introductory part of the *Metzler* handbook which submits chapters dealing with the junctures between Erving Goffman’s biography and his scholarship, the characteristics of his theoretical accomplishments, his empirical

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<sup>4</sup> An attempt oriented in this direction is offered by Andreas Langenohl in his article, “Legacies and problematics of microsociology in the social studies of finance” (pages 87–104).

<sup>5</sup> The author of the chapter on the relationship between the perspectives of Goffman and Garfinkel is Andrew Carlin. In this issue of *Przegląd Socjologiczny* we have published a different piece by Carlin, “Erving Goffman’s systematic sociology of information” (pages 39–62).

<sup>6</sup> Expanding on part of his chapter is Greg Smith’s contribution to the issue at hand – “Goffman on Goffman: A 1975 letter” (pages 9–22).

mode, and the fascinating (though often formulaically-treated) topic of the image of the human being found in Goffman's texts.

Two parts of the German volume (the second and third sections respectively, "Theoretical contexts" and "Authorities, teachers, and inspirers") do not have clearly analogous counterparts in the English handbook. One could conclude that the *Goffman-Handbuch* bears an instantly recognisable advantage over *The Routledge International Handbook on Goffman Studies* were it not for the fact that the subjects undertaken in the former are, in fact, reflected in various parts of the latter. Still, the "Introduction" of the former is followed by a systematically-organized presentation of successive "Theoretical contexts" – that is, pragmatism, social constructionism, existentialism, the Chicago School, and symbolic interactionism, as well as social and cultural anthropology – which shed light on the worlds of ideas from which Goffman drew inspiration when shaping his own unique perspective. Moreover, the editors of the *Metzler* book accentuate the meaning of the intellectual milieu thanks to which Erving Goffman could become "Goffman." One chapter after another in the third, "Authorities, teachers, inspirers" section, each concerning a monumental figure in the history of sociology (some his elders, others more his successors), harks back to another of these worlds – that of Georg Simmel, Émile Durkheim, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, Everett Hughes, W. Lloyd Warner, and Alfred Schütz. Additional milieus in communication studies, broadly understood, were provided by Kenneth Burke, Gregory Bateson, and Ray Birdwhistell.

Both tomes discussed here – *The Routledge International Handbook of Goffman Studies* and *Goffman-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung* – although published on the occasion of the 2022 double anniversary, are likely to play a role going far beyond the circumstantial context of their inception. Extraordinary is the wealth of content, and impressive is the level of expert knowledge represented by the authors of the individual chapters. Particularly noteworthy are, among others, several contributions to both these volumes by Greg Smith and Yves Winkin, two of the most outstanding specialists in the field of Goffman's sociology. The admirable, well-conceived efforts taken on by the editors of these publications have rendered these books not only required reading for anyone interested in the achievements and legacy of Erving Goffman, but have also raised the bar high for scholars foreseeing reference to his works in their texts.