



Industrialization as an Agent of Social Change: A Critical Analysis (Communication and Social Order)

By Herbert Blumer

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Herbert Blumer wrote continuously and voluminously, and consequently left a vast array of unpublished work at the time of his death in 1987. This posthumously published volume testifies further to his perceptive analysis of large-scale social organizations and elegant application of symbolic interactionist principles.

Blumer's focus on the processual nature of social life and on the significance of the communicative interpretation of social contexts is manifest in his theory of industrialization and social change. His theory entails three major points: industrialization must be seen in processual terms, and the industrialization process is different for different historical periods; the consequences of industrialization are a function of the interpretive nature of human action and resembles a neutral framework within which groups interpret the meaning of industrial relations, and the industrial sector must be viewed in terms of power relations; industrial societies contain inherently conflicting interests.

The editors' introductory essay outlines Blumer's metatheoretical stance (symbolic interactionism) and its emphasis on the adjustive character of social life. It places Blumer's theory in the context of contemporary macro theory, including world systems theory, resource dependence theory, and modernization theory.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A posthumous publication of a study Blumer most likely began in 1959. The book does much to clarify and enhance Blumer's legacy, and the editors' introductory essay is most useful in establishing Blumer's monograph in its appropriate intellectual context. At a general level, the book provides a strong demonstration of how Blumer's symbolic interactionism can be successfully applied to the analysis of social structural phenomena. More substantively, the work gives an extended, clear, and definitive statement of what industrialization does and does not include. Although industrialization is an indisputable agent of social change, Blumer argues that industrialization is "indeterminate or neutral with regard to what happens in its wake"... As usual, Blumer's writing style is exceptionally clear and flowing as he systematically constructs his arguments in a classic essay style.”

—W. P. Nye, *Choice*

About the Author

Thomas J. Morrione is Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology at Colby College and he is currently Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the college. He was a Research Associate (1977, 1985) and Visiting Professor (1984) at the University of California, Berkeley.

David R. Maines is professor and chair of sociology and anthropology at Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan, where he teaches courses on urban sociology and social stratification. He was one of the founding members of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, and in 1999 received the SSSI George Herbert Mead Award for lifetime contributions to scholarship.

Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), formerly chairperson, department of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, was the theoretical and methodological leader of “symbolic interactionism,” and was identified as its foremost proponent for a half-century. His publications include works on industrial relations, research methods, mass society, collective behavior, race relations, and social movements.

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