THE GEOGRAPHY OF DISCIPLINARY AMNESIA: ELEVEN SCHOLARS REFLECT ON THE INTERNATIONAL STATE OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

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As an interactionist “promoter”¹ (Maines, 2001), who is neither an American nor working in a sociology department, I hold negative sentiments toward discussions of the past, present, and future of symbolic interactionism (SI) based on the assumptions that SI is nothing but an American sociological perspective and that its evolution ought to unfold according to the conditions of American sociology. This is a problem for at least two reasons. First, from a disciplinary perspective, these discussions fail to take into account that SI is at its very core an interdisciplinary perspective founded on principles of intersubjective communication as culture (Carey, 1989; Denzin, 1992) and that as such the application of theoretical principles of SI has taken place across several disciplines. Second, and from a geopolitical perspective, those reflections fail to consider that contemporary SI is the global outcome of intellectual forces as diverse as evolutionism, Scottish moralism, American pragmatism, German idealism and (Simmelian) formalism, European continental phenomenology

1 and existentialism, Polish social ecology, functional psychology, and even
 2 Greek philosophy (Helle, 2005; Lopata, 2003; Prus, 2003; Reynolds 2003).

3 Sociology-centric and Americo-centric discussions do nothing to combat
 4 the loss in global relevance of SI. Furthermore, they involuntarily (but
 5 inexcusably) strengthen the very conditions that have led to the dissolution
 6 of interactionist ideas across American sociology (Maines, 2001) and to the
 7 progressive “theoretical amnesia”² toward SI, typical of the attitude of
 8 British and European sociologists (Atkinson & Housley, 2003).

9 Drawing upon personal correspondence with 11 scholars who work
 10 outside the USA, in this article I reflect on the state of SI across the world.
 11 Summary of such correspondence yields the conclusion that SI suffers from
 12 what I call “poor brand recognition” across the world. This is because, in
 13 part, of its own state of disciplinary amnesia. Disciplinary amnesia – a
 14 concept related to but broader than that of “theoretical amnesia” (Atkinson &
 15 Housley, 2003) – is the symptom observed amongst those symbolic
 16 interactionist “promoters” and “utilizers” (Maines, 2001) who have
 17 forgotten about both the interdisciplinary nature and the global relevance
 18 of this perspective, as well as neglected to work toward fulfilling its potential
 19 for international and interdisciplinary growth. In what follows, I discuss the
 20 characteristics of disciplinary amnesia and the features of the contexts in
 21 which it has emerged. I conclude by identifying possible solutions to
 22 combating it and consequently to increasing SI’s “brand recognition.”
 23

24 25 SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM’S 26 27 GLOBAL DIVERSITY

28 Both the history and the historiography of SI show that multiple “different
 29 definitions and boundaries” have been applied to the subject of study
 30 (Atkinson & Housley, 2003, p. vii). Yet, despite the commonly agreed-upon
 31 understanding of SI’s heterogeneity, in practice the institutional and
 32 disciplinary core of SI unmistakably resides in its American heartland.
 33 For instance, Reynolds and Herman-Kinney (2003a, 2003b, p. ix) preface
 34 their fine *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* by aiming at making it
 35 “a fine addition to the *sociological* literature” (my emphasis). Maines (2001,
 36 2003) himself – the most visible critic of the dissolution of SI – focuses on
 37 the growing invisibility of interactionism across American *sociological*
 38 theory and research while Fine (1993) and Sandstrom and Fine (2003,
 39 p. 1041) find that the “glorious triumph” of SI is due to its successes in

1 “social psychology, medical sociology, deviance, social problems, collective
2 behavior, cultural studies, media studies, the sociology of emotions, the
3 sociology of art, environmental sociology, race relations, social organiza-
4 tion, social movements, and political sociology” – hardly an interdisciplin-
5 ary outlook.

6 Coming to terms with SI’s heterogeneity in practice, rather than in
7 principle, is necessary if there is interest in widening the global and
8 interdisciplinary recognition of the SI brand. Let me make this clear: it is
9 unfair to criticize someone for who they are, and I do not want to come
10 across as suggesting that American sociologists who do SI should not reflect
11 on the history of SI as a perspective within American sociology. My
12 argument is different, hopefully more insightfully critical, and twofold:
13 (1) I am advancing the claim that most symbolic interactionists who do
14 work in American sociology have made very few efforts at learning about SI
15 theory and research taking place outside the USA; and (2) outside sociology;
16 and therefore they have done very poorly at recognizing the centrality of
17 that body of knowledge for the historical intellectual development of the
18 perspective. This is a case, in my mind, of disciplinary amnesia.

19 This state of disciplinary amnesia makes it difficult to agree with the idea
20 that “we are all interactionists now” as Atkinson and Housley (2003,
21 pp. 144–175), and similarly Maines (2001), have argued. In fact, the use of
22 the pronoun “we” in that statement and in related attitudes is symptomatic
23 of the fact that “we” are after all a very small group of people and that at
24 the very margins of “our” movement lie interactionist utilizers and
25 promoters – let alone unaware interactionists – who “we” have either never
26 truly listened to or spoken with, or sometimes even explicitly muted. In an
27 attempt to listen to and speak with interactionist sympathizers who work
28 away from the hallways of American academia, I have corresponded with 11
29 scholars whose work is of clear relevance to the interactionist project.³
30 Despite their differences, these 11 scholars agree that SI’s amnesias are
31 worthy of interest, concern, and for some, even preoccupation.

32 Conversations with these scholars clearly show that the definition of SI is
33 highly dependent on the historical and political particulars of contexts
34 defined by nation state and supranational regional boundaries. An analysis
35 of these particulars yields the conclusion that the recent evolution of SI in
36 the USA has followed a somewhat unique trajectory. Rather than a struggle
37 to carve acceptance in a context – that typical of American sociology –
38 dominated by positivist and realist empiricism, across the world SI finds
39 itself struggling to gain visibility as an analytical perspective distinct from
40 qualitative or humanist research writ large. In large part, this is due to the

1 fact that whereas in the USA SI has evolved on the basis of its strength as an
 3 “American perspective,” elsewhere SI has to cope with lower historical and
 institutional visibility as a distinct perspective.

For example, Carol Grbich comments that in the Australian context,
 5 struggles over the definition of SI’s essence or values pertinent to theoretical
 or methodological purity count much less than potential for practical
 7 applicability (personal communication). In Australia, the true divide is
 between applied and theoretical disciplines (Grbich, personal communica-
 9 tion), and as a medical sociologist working in an applied arena, for Grbich:
 “theory has to link to and be reflected by practice” and thus in her field SI
 11 theory is used “very lightly and regard[ed] it as a useful way of identifying
 particular cultures [...] in a hospital ward or in explaining the interactions
 13 between people and among groups.”

Different conditions exist in Canada where a rather orthodox Blumerian
 15 tradition, fostered amongst others by Prus (1996), has been institutionalized
 in the yearly meetings of the Qualitative Analysis Conference (QAC).
 17 According to Deborah van den Hoonaard (personal communication),
 scholars who have gravitated toward the core of the QAC have emphasized
 19 in their research the importance of “generic social processes” – a concept
 which is not as central in American scholarship (D. Van den Hoonaard,
 21 personal communication). As Van den Hoonaard reports (personal
 communication), Canadian interactionism is also distinctly different from
 23 region to region, with limited presence in Quebec and a strong presence in
 central Canada, a solid tradition begun in Atlantic Canada by Nels
 25 Anderson – who taught at UNB later in his career – and a more diffuse
 presence in the West. Other qualitative Canadian scholars – such as the
 27 IIQM in Alberta and the institutional ethnography group – have instead
 strayed away from SI by blending an interactionist and ethnographic
 29 agenda with a, respectively, diffuse qualitative and critical, feminist, and
 emancipatory one following the charismatic leadership of Dorothy E.
 31 Smith. Despite the physical proximity to the USA – where almost all of the
 interactionist conferences have been held over the years – and despite the
 33 many similarities between American and Canadian social and cultural
 conditions, it is not uncommon to hear Canadian interactionists lament
 35 of their empirical research being pegged by American colleagues as
 “Canadian” and thus at best only marginally relevant to American
 37 sociology.

British interactionism, as described by Atkinson and Housley (2003), has
 39 the disadvantage of having had to grow without a formal or even unofficial
 school of thought; yet much British qualitative research that is interpretive

1 and interactionist in nature has accumulated over the years. British
 2 interactionists and interactionist utilizers on the other hand have had the
 3 advantage of operating in an academic environment in which social
 4 scientific work has “become increasingly coloured by the so-called cultural
 5 turn” (Atkinson & Housley, 2003, p. xvii). Free from the preoccupation of
 6 having to defend itself from positivist attacks, SI could have had fertile
 7 ground to grow there, yet “the United Kingdom has rarely named symbolic
 8 interactionism as a key tradition, although it has been applied to health,
 9 deviance, and education empirically [...] and is a ‘key tradition’ in [some]
 10 school sociology” textbooks (Plummer, personal communication). The
 11 result is that many utilizers in the UK have come to “define themselves as
 12 ‘interactionists’ not ‘symbolic interactionists’” (Dingwall, personal commu-
 13 nication) and have liberally adopted elements from the Chicago School, the
 14 ethnomethodological tradition, Goffman and dramaturgy, British social
 15 anthropology, the qualitative tradition, and in much smaller part even the
 16 cultural studies heritage of Stuart Hall without much concern for the purity
 17 of the Mead–Blumer tradition (Dingwall, personal communication).

18 If British scholars have fused interactionism with the project of cultural
 19 sociology and qualitative social research broadly defined, Italian and
 20 German interactionists also have unique local adaptations of SI. Perrotta
 21 (2005), for example, has combined classic interactionism and dramaturgy
 22 with the theatrical tradition of Pirandello, whereas German scholars –
 23 introduced to the work of Mead by Joas, amongst others – have often
 24 blended SI with the interpretive tradition of Weber, Dilthey, Simmel, and
 25 Schutz and the German *Verstehen* tradition in the social sciences (Helle,
 26 personal communication; also see Helle, 2005). In the Italian case, despite
 27 the presence of a solid interpretive current embodied by sociologists like
 28 Perrotta, Ferrarotti, Gherardi, Strati, and Ciacci, interactionism itself is
 29 both “out of fashion” (Gobo, personal communication) and “a hidden but
 30 spread-out reality” as its principles are “a koiné, a way of thinking which
 31 almost everyone shares without mentioning symbolic interactionism [...] like
 32 a language which almost everyone [knows] in a tacit way without
 33 knowing where it comes from” (Gobo, personal communication). As Gobo,
 34 and Maines (2003), opine this is evidence of the success of SI, but at the
 35 same its main weakness is “because nobody recognizes SI as an autonomous
 36 and self standing theoretical perspective” (Gobo, personal communication),
 37 distinct from qualitative research.

38 A cultural, symbolic, and interactional view of society has deep roots in
 39 Polish sociology. As Elżbieta Halas (personal communication; also see
 Halas, 2006) has pointed out, this has “resulted in the strong orientation of

1 humanistic sociology as articulated by Florian Znaniecki and his principal
 3 of the ‘humanistic coefficient’ both for theory and methodology of cultural
 5 sciences, including sociology” (personal communication). Despite unfavor-
 7 able restrictions imposed during the Soviet era, this tradition has survived
 9 and even flourished since the 1980s (Halas, personal communication) due to
 11 the cultivation of affinities between the Polish and American tradition. Yet,
 13 even though SI is represented in departments of numerous universities
 across the country, “symbolic interactionism, is by no means the major
 current” (Halas, personal communication). Thus, despite a surge of
 sociological interest following the postcommunist transformation in
 dynamics such as negotiated order, identity constitution, and other “themes
 either originating from symbolic interactionism or akin” investigation has
 often proceeded “without much care about the symbolic interactionist
 perspective as such” (Halas, personal communication).

15 From New Zealand, Chris Brickell laments conditions similar to other
 17 countries. As he rightly points out: “one of the strengths of symbolic
 19 interactionism is the applicability of its insights to a wide range of types of
 inquiry and disciplinary situations” including history, yet due to the low
 recognizability of symbolic interaction, misconceptions and misunderstand-
 ings about its identity and principles often take shape. For example, asks
 21 Brickell: Why do some theorists whose work is obviously congruent with
 interactionist principles fail to acknowledge its theoretical influence? Brickell
 23 holds that old and new scholars find SI’s principles valid and useful when
 they are finally introduced to them in seminars and conference rooms, while
 25 classrooms seem to have never known about SI. “Who is hiding SI from the
 world?!” – poignantly asks Brickell (personal communication).

27 In France, SI has been experiencing considerable interest since the 1990s.
 A solid core of interactionism-friendly scholars like Henri Peretz, Jean
 29 Peneff, and Jean-Michele Chapoulie have done research that is interactionist
 in nature, but as Jean-Michele Chapoulie (personal communication)
 31 describes:

33 In France, there are few groups of sociologists with an explicit intellectual affiliation
 now. There is no association such as Society for the Study of Symbolic interaction, etc.
 35 [...] What the label means for young sociologists seems to be: analysis grounded on
 fieldwork, sometimes observation *in situ*, with attention to details in the relationships
 37 between people under study. But very few of them have read Blumer and have an idea of
 the meaning of “interaction” in Park’s or Blumer’s work.

39 There is good fieldwork in France, fieldwork that draws from the Chicago
 School tradition and SI, and that in line with the French ethnographic

1 tradition in sociology has been markedly “realist” (Chapoulie, personal
communication).

3 Israel also is witnessing a clear growth of interest in SI. Perhaps due to the
close relation between American and Israeli universities, and perhaps due to
5 the fine editorial lead of *Symbolic Interaction* by Simon Gottschalk who has
lived in Israel for a number of years, more and more interactionist work is
7 appearing amongst Israeli social scientists. Despite this, “Symbolic
Interactionism today has little impact on Anthropology anywhere; and
9 is weak in Israeli curricula” – finds Don Handelman (personal commu-
nication).

11 As much as various nation states have their own unique peculiarities,
what truly distinguishes an “overseas” (speaking from my North American
13 point) approach to SI is its higher transnational interdependence. Even
though such interdependence tends to be international, rather than
15 interdisciplinary (Atkinson & Housley, 2003), the value of cross-fertilization
is nonetheless high. This point is forcefully captured in the following
17 statement by Gobo (personal communication):

19 Most of the US sociologists live in a world apart. They do not read other languages than
English so they miss completely all international sociological work (that is the European
21 sociological production, the Asiatic one, the Latin American one, the African one and so
on). They have a colonial way of thinking and they think to be international even if they
23 are just belonging and deeply rooted in the close cultural boundaries of one country. So
the main difference between US and my country is that we have a more international
breath in our sociological work because we read French, German, UK, US, Spanish
25 sociologists.

27 However, despite instances of cross-influence and (very few) cases of
international collaboration and coauthorship, infrastructures directed at
29 facilitating dialog are sparse at best and nonexistent at worst.

31 TOWARD SYMBOLIC INTERACTION STUDIES?

33 SI is a highly heterogenous perspective. As Plummer (1996), Atkinson and
35 Housley (2003), and Reynolds (2003) have remarked, SI has an identity for
as many interpreters. Plummer (1996, p. 225) captures this phenomenon
37 elegantly in arguing that “if the world is as the interactionists depict it, then
we can assume that (1) there is no one fixed meaning of SI; (2) that
39 ‘accounts’ of its nature and origins will change over time, and indeed be
open to renegotiation; and (3) that what it ‘means’ will indeed depend upon

1 the definitions of the significant others whose interaction constitutes its meaning.”

3 In light of its diversity, can we coherently speak of such a thing as
 “symbolic interactionism?” My correspondence shows that indeed we can,
 5 but my conclusion is that we must first be prepared to abandon any notions
 of “core essence” or “purity” and “orthodoxy.” As Halas (personal
 7 communication) puts it: “‘The’ symbolic interactionism has never existed,
 being rather a pluralistic set of proposals – sometimes headed as interpretive
 9 interactionism, structural interactionism, cultural interactionism or – only
 postulated – synthetic interactionism.” Similarly, and with an eye to the
 11 empirical world to which SI directs its attention to, Plummer (1990, p. 159)
 finds that “the empirical world exists through endless negotiations and
 13 interpretations via joint actions in a ceaseless flux of emerging and emergent
 meaning. There is no core, no centre and no linear development. The
 15 empirical world will not reveal an absolute truth....”

Indeed, the “endless negotiation” of the empirical world – or in Park’s
 17 words, interactionists’ tendency to get “the seat of [their] pants dirty in real
 research” (in Hammersley, 1990, p. 76) – is what truly distinguishes the
 19 interactionist strategy. After all, if there is no pure empirical reality, where
 should there be a pure analytical lens for it? Thus, despite their numerous
 21 differences, all scholars contacted agree that analytical eclecticism is a
 necessity and a central feature of the interactionist approach to empirical
 23 data. For example, while Grbich recognizes that what makes SI useful is its
 value for applicability in applied contexts, in her research Deborah Van Den
 25 Hoonard admits the following “Howard S. Becker’s idea that we look for
 theories that help us understand our data” and argues that “if it’s not in the
 27 data, we can’t [talk about] ‘it’” (personal communication). Similarly,
 Chapoulie (personal communication) finds that despite their differences, all
 29 interactionist approaches ultimately share an “idea about research in
 sociology, good documentation (notably from field work), analysis and
 31 writing, essentially critical against functionalism and the positivist concep-
 tion of science.” Brickell – with an eye toward interdisciplinarity – states
 33 that what is truly “appealing about SI’s reflexivity is its emphasis on both
 the symbolic and the interactive. As this reaches well beyond the limits of
 35 sociology” SI’s “insights need to be put to broad use, and not confined to a
 particular sociological approach out of some idea of theoretical or
 37 methodological purity” (personal communication). His views are echoed
 by Helle who also finds that an interactionist approach needs to be
 39 hermeneutic and multifaceted as “the object under study must be assumed
 to have a genuine perspective on reality and to hold certain value

1 preferences which the researcher is to find out and respect [and] [t]his implies
an interactive process between the researcher and his or her object”
3 (personal communication).

As Halas (personal communication) insightfully remarks, if interaction-
5 ism is to become more relevant it has to get “out of the walls of Chicago”
since its orientation in actuality “emerged out of a broader” (e.g., the
7 Columbia tradition; see Halas, 2006) and “international current of thought”
exemplified by scholars such as “Znaniecki, MacIver, and Sorokin who
9 came to American from Europe” (Halas, personal communication; also see
Halas, 2001). Halas adds: “Symbolic interactionism does not have one
11 progenitor [...] It might be refreshing to look critically at the foundational
myth of symbolic interactionist orientation, in other words, to look
13 reflexively through symbolic interactionist lenses at the constructed identity
of this very perspective.” Doing so will reveal that “spatial metaphors of the
15 field” and that past and current notions of “boundaries” are “inconvenient
for they lead easily to the idea of the struggle over it and the legitimacy of its
17 guardians” (Halas, personal communication). Skepticism toward ortho-
doxies and “schools of thought” is also evident in the published work of
19 Chapoulie (2001) and in my correspondence with him. It is a risk to use
“labels” as a way to exert “intellectual legitimacy” (Chapoulie, personal
21 communication), but the “demarcation” debate is the positive sign of a
“theoretical zeal” (Halas, personal communication).

23 Since “there was never a single school of interactionism” (Atkinson &
Housley, 2003, p. vxi) and probably there will never be one, it might be wise
25 to abandon pretensions of unity. Such approach could gain from a
continued dialog with its historical origins, not only for “historical
27 reconstruction” and a “better understanding of the key problems constitut-
ing the perspective” but also for the potential of fulfilling “the possibilities
29 of its creative elaboration” (Halas, personal communication). This
perspective, which I like to refer to as “Symbolic Interaction Studies”
31 might extend an explicit welcome to “tertiary interactionists” (Katovich,
2003, p. 58) – those who eclectically mix SI with other congruent ideas –
33 rather than subtly marginalizing them as outsiders (Katovich, 2003).
Symbolic Interaction Studies could finally shed its image as a “loyal
35 opposition” to American sociology, and focus instead on befriending, albeit
with a distinct identity of its own, international and postcolonial qualitative
37 inquiry. It could become a way of seeing “SI as a much more critical
humanist tradition” marked by attention to “the development of humanistic
39 inquiry: a humanistic method, seeing the world through a humanistic
imagination, adopting a humanistic politics and researching ‘human’ issues”

(Plummer, personal communication). It would maintain its emphasis on “down to earth empirical tools” by shunning “any pure abstract form” and by looking “at the creation of meaning and the emergence of social life as interactive” with “a focus on stories and narratives” (Plummer, personal communication), “social action, language, and social identities... and the embodied character of social life” (Atkinson & Housley, 2003, p. xvi), rituals (Handelman, personal communication), “discourses and, broadly defined, culture” (Halas, personal communication).

ENDING THE INVISIBILITY OF INTERACTIONISM

Ending the invisibility of SI will require a “re-branding” plan. “Brand” refers to a whole of images and ideas associated with a producer of goods or services. Brands often entail systems of symbols such as names, logos, styles, and designs. When their brands are easily identified by consumers – a phenomenon known as brand recognition – companies often enjoy acceptance, esteem, trust, and positive sentiment across markets. On the other hand, poor brand recognition may result in low company visibility and ultimately in failure to grow.

SI’s disciplinary amnesia must end through concrete practice directed at increasing SI’s brand recognition across disciplines and across the world. The “market of interactionists yet to be tapped and incorporated into SSSI opportunities and operations” is “tremendous” (Maines, 2003, p. 14). Any such endeavor takes time and effort, but through organized, planned, concerted action SI can both continue to exercise influence and increase its visibility. While it is unadvisable to put too much trust in the probability of short-term success, some of the actions I briefly sketch here may yield immediate positive results. Others will pay off in the long run. Nonetheless, rebranding SI should aim at the following goals:

1. Distinguishing SI from local and global “competitors;”
2. Increasing the visibility of the relationship between research of interactionist nature and the SI tradition;
3. Increasing the perceived use-value or applicability of SI theory in both empirical and applied research, as well as in social and cultural criticism;
4. Attracting international attention to SI research and activities;
5. Making the activities of SSSI-sponsored events easy to recognize;
6. Increasing the visibility of classic and contemporary SI research and theory in the classroom so that it is easy to recognize.

1 The following strategies might be useful for meeting some of the goals
outlined above:

- 3
5 1. Increasing the number of explicit SI publications. For example, by
7 launching a series of edited books on subdisciplinary topics which
feature original essays written by junior and senior interactionist
scholars;
- 9 2. As editors and reviewers, enforcing the recognizability of classic and
11 especially contemporary SI research and theory by stressing the need for
intertextuality and accumulation of knowledge: not enough people, even
13 amongst die-hard symbolic interactionists, read and cite useful articles
published in *Symbolic Interaction*;
- 15 3. Aiming to highlight the unique past and present of the interactionist
perspective as a research strategy, and therefore the unique identity of SI
as a methodological perspective (Maines, 2003, p. 11);
- 17 4. Increasing the number and scope of SI-related events across disciplines.
For example, the back cover of *SSSI Notes* lists a number of associations
19 across disciplines, together with their coordinators for “SI activity
within” those associations. What is that activity? We need to make those
activities regular, accountable, useful, and clearly recognizable. Further-
21 more, we need to strive to increase the number of associations with whom
we coordinate activities;
- 23 5. Making SI “cosmopolitan” yet careful to highlight the uniqueness of the
local by taking our research across the world (Lopata, 2003, p. 167) and
25 further, by increasing the number and scope of SI-related events across
countries and thus by making SSSI a “cosmopolitan invisible college”
27 (Lopata, 1998, p. 386). This can also be done by making the activities of
international corresponding editors regular, accountable, useful, and
29 clearly recognizable. For example, we could work together to seek
opportunities to host colleagues from other countries for lecture tours,
31 workshops, and seminars. Furthermore, we should strive to translate,
publicize, read, and seriously engage with SI literature appearing in
33 countries other than the USA;
- 35 6. Similar to what the “Theory, Culture, and Society Centre” has done,
interactionists should aim at building an International Center for the
Study of Symbolic Interaction. This could be an Internet-based network
37 at first, but it could later gather enough strength to be housed within a
university. Such network would facilitate both research and teaching, and
39 perhaps eventually even lay the groundwork for the offering of graduate
interdisciplinary degrees in “Qualitative Research with a Specialization in

Symbolic Interaction.” The network could also offer summer workshops, seminars, and later both face-to-face and online courses;

7. Increasing the visibility of SI on the Internet. Both SSSI and *Symbolic Interaction* have done very little to benefit from the powers of the Internet medium in facilitating dissemination of information and networking;

8. Striving to incorporate more SI research and theory in existing and new courses and in curricula. Just like courses in cultural studies or feminism are regularly offered, so should courses in SI;

9. Popularizing SI by capturing as much as possible the attention of mass media and the general reading public. A critical component of cultural studies’ success over the past two decades has been its fashionableness in the eye of magazines and bookstores. We need to do better at publicizing – not only publishing – SI.

These are just some suggestions that await further debate. Perhaps it may seem pure folly to “brand” and “rebrand” an intellectual tradition like one would with a soft drink or a perfume. Others may dislike the idea of sticking so closely to a label – even a diffuse one like Symbolic Interaction Studies – for their intellectual endeavors. Yet the suggestions I indicated make a good deal of sense if we believe that the label is broad enough to capture different kinds of good social science, and yet distinct enough from alternatives. None of these proposed actions are easy to follow up; they will require focus, dedication, and determination. Some will only be possible over time, even a great deal of time. And some will only be possible if interactionist promoters are willing to roll up their sleeves and do work. Be that as it may; the only alternative is *inaction*, followed by lamentful discussion, and too much of that has been done already without positive results.

UNCITED REFERENCE

Charmaz and Lofland (2003).

NOTES

1. For Maines (2001), interactionist promoters are the strongest advocate of SI and those who are closer to SSSI and to the journal *Symbolic Interaction*. Maines identifies two additional categories: interactionist utilizers are those scholars who apply SI principles in an eclectic fashion, and unaware interactionists are instead those who use SI principles and concepts without being aware of doing so.

2. The concept of amnesia has a deep tradition in the social sciences. For illustrations of its relevance, see Sorokin (1956), Merton (1968), and Gans (1989).

3. I initially selected scholars for my sample amongst the international corresponding editors of *Symbolic Interaction*. I added additional names to my list through a loose “snowball sample” selection process in order to reach a higher number of respondents. It was not always possible to successfully contact and initiate correspondence with all the names in my list, which included a total of 24 scholars from all six continents of the world.

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