

Postmodernism: The Evolution of Symbolic Interactionism and Critical Theory

John Asimakopoulos¹

Symbolic interactionism has not stalled with the works of major figures such as Goffman. Rather, there is a continuity from symbolic interactionism to post-structuralism / postmodern theory and sociological conflict theory. The paper shows that there has always been an overlap between micro and macro theory, often by intellectuals considered early founders of theoretical approaches at both levels. Furthermore, this evolution demonstrates the viability of symbolic interactionism as critical theory and its applicability for the analysis of inequality from its origins in interactions to the macro-structures that institutionalize stratification. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2022 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS: Critical Theory, Postmodern, Social Exchange Theory, Castoriadis, Debord, Baudrillard.

THE SYMBOLIC INSTITUTION OF SOCIETY

George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley are founders of symbolic interactionism, one out of three major sociological perspectives focusing on microsociology and social psychology. Symbolic interactionism is derived from the American philosophy of pragmatism. The term itself was coined by Mead's student Herbert Blumer. Blumer argued people act toward things based on the meaning they ascribe to them (1986). These meanings are derived from social interaction and

¹ **John Asimakopoulos**, Ph.D., is Full Professor of Sociology at the City University of New York. He has advanced degrees in and has taught sociology, political science, and economics resulting in a unique interdisciplinary perspective. His students include undergraduates and graduates from diverse ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds who honor him for over 20 years with the highest teaching evaluations. His research is focused on social movements, critical theory, and international political economy. Asimakopoulos is author of *Social Structures of Direct Democracy* (Brill/Haymarket Books), *The Accumulation of Freedom* (AK Press) and *Revolt!* (TSI Press).