



Continual Permutations of Action (Communication and Social Order)

Anselm L. Strauss

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Although it has not been his intention to promulgate theory for its own sake, Anselm Strauss has proven himself a formidable theorist. What has prompted this new treatise on human action (or as Strauss would prefer, acting) was a dissatisfaction with the accounts of social phenomena in the received, mainline sociological literature. Derived from the survey and functionalist traditions, such accounts have simplified complexities drastically, and mostly left implicit the underlying action assumptions of their research. Rejecting Parsons and Lazarsfeld as models, Strauss traces the perspective on human action presented in *Continual Permutations of Action* to a very different tradition, that of the Pragmatists.

Strauss's account begins with the concept of trajectory, referring to a course of action but also embracing the interaction of multiple actors and contingencies. Certain Straussian terms and motifs come rapidly into play in the earlier sections, where he maps out his account: conditional matrix, temporality, and the like. The later sections are given over to major topics, including work and its relations with other forms of action; the body; thought processes; symbolizing; social worlds and arenas; representation; the interplay of routine and creative action; and the relevance of the concept of social worlds to understanding the interplay of several levels of social order in contemporary society.

Like Strauss's previous works, *Continual Permutations of Action* is richly grounded in case histories and biographical narratives that illustrate its points. He draws not only on the full range of the Chicago interactionist tradition, but on the 'writing of his intellectual opponents, on personal correspondence, on autobiographical interludes, and on a wide range of non-sociological reading, from survivors' accounts of the concentration camps to Henry James and James Joyce. Extending the limits of interactionist theory, Strauss has raised questions about - interpreting social phenomena that will be debated for some time to come.

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