Microsociology

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Abstract: The article deals with the foundations, history, and developments of microsociological research in German-language sociology. After discussing the complex differentiation between micro and macro, it presents research that currently dominates this field with the aim of highlighting the distinct profile of contemporary German-language microsociology. This specific profile can be seen in its pursuit of a relationist theory program. Across the various subject areas of microsociological research, traditional individualistic and collectivist paradigms are giving way to research that revolves around relational analyses, such as situation analyses, and enactivist theory programs.

Keywords: Microsociology, interaction, situation, micro-macro distinction

1 Introduction

The designation “microsociology” is ambiguous. In the context of the rise of the distinction between “micro” and “macro”¹ in the 1970s, this label was applied to a diverse array of interrelated topical, theoretical, and methodological questions and problems. (1) In the field of sociology, the expression “micro” denotes areas of investigation that in their social dimension or in their spatial or temporal extension are either (a) related to the context of action and experience of single individuals and actors, that is, deal with processes of socialization (as a social practice of interaction à la Grundmann, 2006), of identity formation, biographies and careers, or (b) analyze the social context of a small number of action units such as face-to-face interactions, groups, families, or personal relationships. Microsociological interaction and sequence analyses are thus distinguished from more highly aggregative units such as mesophenomena and societal macrophenomena. (2) This object-oriented designation is then transferred to the level of theoretical research programs and reserved for approaches with corresponding priorities. Such an application is currently found frequently in international sociology, in which the classical approaches of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology are gathered together as “varieties of microsociology” (Benzecry and Winchester, 2017, see also Gibson and vom Lehn, 2018) but with which such theoretical developments as Collins’ microsociological approach are also classed (1981). However, this family of theories sometimes adopts a reserved attitude toward being classified as “microsociology” to the extent

¹ This orientation towards the distinction between macro and micro is not unique to sociology. In other areas of research in this period including economics, history, as well the natural sciences, these categories took over the function of fundamentally structuring their disciplines.

that this insinuates a research-pragmatic or methodological restriction to so-called microphenomena. In contrast to this, they often formulate a claim to universal competence in their discipline, a claim they justify methodologically by the fact that supposed macrophenomena result from the combinatorics of microphenomena or can be ascertained as relational interlinkages or networks of communicative or interactive units. (3) Thus the term “microsociology” can take on a third meaning, namely, a methodological one. This meaning of the term occurs in the following variants depending on the respective basic methodological orientation. (a) The expression “microsociology” stands for sociological approaches that deal with the analysis of the constructions of social and societal reality “from below,” of worlds of meaning, life-worlds, and everyday worlds. It thus encompasses approaches that can be attributed to interpretive, hermeneutical, phenomenological, or reconstructive social research. (b) Within the framework of explanatory sociology and in line with the methodological directives of methodological individualism, analytical microsociology is regarded—analogously to the comparatively unified discipline of “microeconomics” understood as the analysis of the decisions of economic actors—as an explanatory foundation for sociological analyses. Its aim is to identify microfoundations of social phenomena (cf. Greve, Schnabel, and Schützeichel, 2008). The various fractions of micro-founded action theories also turn up here, although actual action-theoretical analyses tend to be conducted with the assistance of the distinction between structure and action rather than that between macro and micro. (c) And finally, recent times have seen the development of situation analyses, a comparatively eclectic direction of research that is still methodologically fluid in its orientation towards pragmatist as well as practice-theoretical approaches and serves to analyze the ongoing accomplishment of activities in specific situational constellations (cf. Schützeichel, 2019).

From this short survey, the conclusion can be drawn that one cannot speak of the unity of microsociology as either a subdiscipline of sociology or as a methodological or explanatory approach. In sociology, “micro” is by no means always equal to “micro.” It is not a proper field of research with its own objects of investigation. The relevance of “microsociology” and thus the legitimacy of the distinction between “micro” and “macro” is to be found in its order-giving function, that is to say, in its ability to roughly sort out objects of investigation, subdisciplines, theories, methodologies, and research clusters in implicit alignment with other sociologically relevant dichotomies such as “small” versus “large,” “action” versus “structure,” “event” versus “duration,” “element” versus “relation,” or “part” versus “whole.” In this order-giving role, however, the duality of “micro” and “macro” is highly successful.² This duality seems in a certain way to be indispensable considering how it enables, from a research-pragmatic view, to isolate fields of objects and to abstract

² Just one recent example that can be cited here is the *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Abrutyn, 2016), in which the duality of micro and macro serves not only to reformulate classical sociological problems but also—following a pioneering model (Alexander and Giesen, 1987)—to hunt for the “macro-micro links” in nearly all social phenomena and fields.

objects from their context and, from an explanatory view, to assert reductive relationships between phenomena, but precisely in order to also—in a contrary way, on a path “from reduction to linkage” (Alexander and Giesen, 1987)—postulate the famous links within the spheres of whatever is separated into “micro” and “macro.” This distinction becomes problematic when, in a reifying way, its ordering and orienting function is overlooked.

Since objects of study such as families and personal relationships, careers and biographies, and groups and networks, which by all accounts do belong to the more narrow thematic heart of microsociology, are taken up in other contributions to this volume (Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, *FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS*, this volume; Huinink/Hollstein, *LIFE COURSE*, this volume; Häußling, *SOCIAL NETWORKS*, this volume), the following account will be restricted to two areas of research that have shifted into the thematic as well as methodological center of German-language microsociology: interaction and situation. In recent times, the by all means variably applied concept of “interaction” has served as a point of departure (cf. Dennis et al., 2013) for developing microsociological research in various dimensions (Ch. 3). But in addition to “interaction,” the concept of “situation” has also come increasingly to the fore. Situations are places of interactive production of social reality (Ch. 4). This will be followed by a brief look at convergences and divergences in German-language microsociology (Ch. 5). But first, the introductory chapter will discuss the particularities of German-language microsociological research (Ch. 2).

2 Microsociology in German-Language Sociology?

If one intends to address the particularities of German-language microsociology, it is important to start from the discrepancy between the breadth of research and its labeling. German-language microsociology is significantly more comprehensive than that which is explicitly designated by this term. To understand this, one must register the following disjuncture in the history of theory: The widespread international introduction of the micro-macro distinction that began in the 1970s served, and continues to serve, to make national research traditions comparable and to place them in a common frame of reference. In this way, specific research programs can now be viewed retrospectively as microsociological and made to correspond to comparable approaches. This applies, for example, to the research programs of Georg Simmel (cf. Bergmann, 2011) and Norbert Elias (cf. Dunning and Hughes, 2013), whose respective microsociological analyses of elementary “forms of interaction” and “social figurations” are now understood as early microsociological studies. At the same time, this fundamental distinction between macro and micro is also applied to the reception and classification of international developments. It was in this way that important studies in symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis as well as sociolinguistics were first gathered under the label of microsociology and made accessible to a German-speaking public (cf. Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen, 1973).

Yet the micro–macro distinction could not and cannot be used merely in order to generate comparabilities and correspondences in the context of the internationalization of sociology. Its adoption has also entailed losses. It has had the result that certain microsociological approaches that did not achieve wide resonance in international sociology in particular were forgotten, for example, Siegfried Kracauer's groundwork of sociology (Kracauer, 1922) and studies in the sociology of everyday life (Kracauer, 1930), but also the pioneering work of Herman Schmalenbach on the "sociological category of *Bund* [union]" (Schmalenbach, 1922), which has been neglected even in more recent times in the context of the analysis of community formation (Maffesoli, 1991; Hitzler, Honer, and Pfadenhauer, 2008).

The success of the distinction between micro and macro has also entailed considerable shifts in the disciplinary fabric of sociology. Predominantly it was American theoretical traditions that were viewed as the foundational theories of microsociology (cf. Bergmann and Hildenbrand, 2018). Corresponding German traditions, such as the theoretical formations of social phenomenology, now tended to be assigned to the camp of sociological theory or to the newer and equally successful sociology of knowledge, or else they had hardly any further impact in sociology. This applies, for example, to such subject areas and research questions as the analyses associated with the early phenomenology of Husserl, Scheler, and Stein on the conditions of the possibility of sociality and intersubjectivity. Indeed, their significance in current discussions of the foundations of social theory can hardly be overestimated, for instance, in studies of social cognition and empathy (cf. Schlicht, 2018), which are also highly relevant to sociology. Yet they are largely unknown in sociology or they have been carried on only in the version of their pragmatist kindred in the line of Cooley, Dewey, and Mead ("taking the role of the other").

These and other developments in the history of science and the history of theory have led to a situation in which there are good reasons for treating the label "microsociology" with some reserve when it is applied to the German-language traditions. They may also explain why this term is still not fully recognized and still lacks definitive contours. Macrosociology on the basis of rational choice can be practiced as "microsociology" in just the same way that a socialization study in the vein of Oevermann's genetic structuralism or an identity and interaction study in the tradition of Goffman can.

It may be considered a further indication of this diffuse situation that, in contrast to nearly every other subdiscipline of sociology, there is still no comprehensive handbook for the field of microsociology. Introductory works explicitly designated as microsociological are also few and far between. Under the title of microsociology, Schüle (1983) presents an interaction-analytical view of the fields of practice of action, which are distinguished from macrosociology as an analysis of abstract and generalized structures of action. Brüsemeister (2008) focuses his introduction on the connection between biography, learning, and suffering and addresses theoretical approaches such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and aspects of phenomenological sociology, but also considers the analysis of subjectification and of

the conditions of action in advanced modernity as a central task of microsociological analyses. In contrast, the monograph on *Microsociology* (2017) by Kai-Olaf Maiwald and Inken Sürig takes interaction as its starting point and develops a microsociological agenda—ranging from questions of socialization and perspective-taking, via the genesis of emotions, norms, and typifications, all the way to the institutionalization of structural features—framed by the problem of how interactions, understood as the paradigmatic case of the formation of social order, are possible. At the same time, interaction is regarded as the epicenter of socially relevant facts from which other social and societal phenomena can be extrapolated. This introduction also posits an explicit methodological understanding: microsociology deals with the social processes of structure formation in elementary interactive relationships. Thus, a concept of interaction is applied that is not exclusively aligned with the understanding of interaction as a “face-to-face relationship,” which still often prevails in German-language sociology, but instead presupposes a broader concept that refers to the breadth of co-action in social relationships. This microsociological perspective is supported by a special argument: interactions constitute not merely the elementary social facts and the irreducible unity of the social sphere; they are also the place where social reality is performed and created. In recent years, this emphasis on the interactive production—and on the interactively produced performance—of social reality under structural restrictions and given structural opportunities has become a brand essence of microsociology.

3 Microsociological Interaction Research

More recent interaction research has in common the idea that “interaction” is a fact that cannot be further reduced, that is, that it can—with a certain degree of caution—be described as emergent. “Interaction” thus represents an order *sui generis* in which actions, individuals, and artifacts are constituted in their meanings and functions (cf. Goffman, 1983; Tavory, 2016). However, it is controversial whether interactions represent a general or a specific social form among others. With regard to this question, we can distinguish a narrow and a broad concept (cf. Schützeichel, 2018a):

(a) The broad sense posits a conceptual congruence of interaction and social relations. This broad concept stands in the tradition of pragmatic sociology and symbolic interactionism, but also of Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology, which pits the concept of interaction against a view of social relations based on formal models of communication such as the classical sender–receiver model. In these traditions, interaction is regarded as an elementary social form that can be further subdivided by means of differentiating specific formats of action and communication. This broad concept is particularly useful for those approaches that regard interactions as a basis for the reduction of social phenomena. (b) The theoretical approaches that prefer a narrow concept [of interaction] set interactions apart from other forms of social relations, for example, by discussing interactions as oral communication (conversation

analysis and sociological or sociolinguistic conversation research), as social action in the mode of face-to-face relationships, or as simple social systems or communication subject to the condition of presence (systems theory) and by distinguishing them from other types or forms of communication, membership, or complexification.

In following the broad concept of interaction in particular, microsociological research has in recent years deepened and expanded in various ways and put the focus on specific dimensions of interactions. Interactions have been analyzed alternatively as embodied, affective, technologically mediatized, and as triadic relations:

(a) Embodied interaction: The fact that interactions are relationships of bodily resonance has been discussed in recent research under the keyword “embodied interaction.” In this respect, sociological research is closely connected to recent phenomenological studies, going by the name of “natural phenomenology,” that have been pursuing enactivist reformulations of phenomena that are also of significance for sociology (cf., e.g., Gallagher, 2017). Their findings are not only important for interaction research in the narrower sense—their relevance extends all the way to the foundations of the formulation of sociological theory because they challenge the internalist premises of many approaches, from classical social phenomenology and action theories to systems theory, which assume that consciousness or cognitive processes are constituted representationally in an internal field of consciousness (cf. Schützeichel, 2018b). By contrast, the concept of enactivism is linked to an antirepresentationalist program that traces behavior, cognitions, and affects in the broadest sense back to an organism’s active confrontation with its environments. Many fields and subdisciplines of sociology, from economic sociology and the sociology of religion to the sociology of knowledge and culture, depend—just like the sociological theories they are rooted in, ranging from phenomenology to the various action-theoretical and interactionist schools and systems theory—on the ultimately “Cartesian” notion that the meaningful construction of the (not only social) world is performed through some version of representational acts in the inner or communicated world of actors. In contrast, enactivist approaches emphasize that “sense-making” is performed in the context of an organism’s active engagement with its various environments and that these environments therefore play a constitutive role in “sense-making.” Recent interaction research therefore assumes that perceptions and cognitions themselves can be understood as “embodied action” in the sense of a prereflective being-toward-the-world rather than as representations of an object by a subject. A further important implication of this is the particular way it points out the prereflective and preconscious dimension of human experience of the world, and thus also of social interaction. This point has been teased out theoretically and empirically in studies on “intercorporeality” or “intercorporeality.” (Deppermann and Streeck, 2018; Eberlein, 2016; Meyer, 2017; Meyer, Streeck, and Jordan, 2017; Meyer and von Wedelstaedt, 2017). The concept of “intercorporeality” is linked to the early work of Merleau-Ponty. “Intercorporeality means a prereflective intertwining of lived and living bodies, in which my own is affected by the other’s body as much as his by mine, leading to an embodied communication” (Fuchs, 2017: 9). According to these analyses, the co-action or inter-

action of actors is grounded in intuitive and prereflective, embodied acts of experiencing and behavior, acts of bodily “compresence” that are not further individuable, for they rest on a constitutive referentiality of the acts of one to the acts of the other or to further actors. This originally shared field of resonance is the horizon—in an ontogenetic as well as phenomenological perspective—that enables the experiences of an “I” and of a “you” to crystallize. Contrary to many recent action-theoretical approaches, it thus not merely the dimension of “embodied action” that is highlighted so much as the fact that it too has its basis in lifeworld acts of “embodied interaction.” This conception of “practice as a shared accomplishment” has also been held up against the monological arguments of some practice theories (Brümmer and Alkemeyer, 2017). This kind of “shared accomplishment” has been impressively analyzed in the video-based analyses of sporting co-activities such as handball, basketball, and boxing as well as of artistic practices such as ballet (Müller, 2016) (cf. the contributions in Meyer and von Wedelstaedt, 2017, as well as Alkemeyer, 2011, and Alkemeyer and Michaeler, 2013). Intercorporality is a fact of all situations of co-action on condition of co-presence. They can be distinguished as symmetrical (hiking together), agonistic (competitions), complementary (acrobatics), or symbiotic (a mother breastfeeding a child). Intercorporeal interaction is performed in situations that are conceived as tactile “inter-kinaesthetic fields,” whereby “inter” not only refers to the dimension of physical interaction but also integrates material objects and artifacts as sensed and perceived things (Streeck, 2011). Intercorporality, inter-kinaestheticity, and enactivity are thus reciprocally referential dimensions of an interaction-research program that would also finally do away with the last remaining Cartesian assumptions underlying sociological research and theory formation. And yet intercorporality does not require the immediate co-presence of actors. In his analysis of digitalized interaction, Schmidl (2017) makes it clear that relations of intercorporality exist even when co-presence is mediated by media or technology. Fritz-Hoffmann (2018; see also Goodwin, 2017; Müller, 2010), in his study on touch in the everyday lives of disabled people, examined a mode of embodied interaction that has been rarely considered despite its deep lifeworld anchoring.

(b) It is not a long way from embodied interaction to affective interaction (Scheff, 1994). The affective or emotional dimension of interactions is currently another focus of microsociological interaction research. The questions of how emotions are formed in interactions and how emotions in turn shape interactive events play a central role here. The genesis of specific emotions in their respective social contexts depends on how one interprets the action situation, in particular on the attribution of positions of power and the availability of resources for action. Accordingly, the positional and socio-structural constitution of interaction situations is an important explanatory variable for the social genesis of emotions (cf. von Scheve, 2012; 2013). A different analytical foundation, and one that has been displaced to the discursive and cultural levels, is evinced by studies that, following so-called affect-control theory (Smith-Lovin and Heise, 2016; Heise, 2019), ascribe the genesis of emotions to the difference between culturally and linguistically institutionalized affective meanings on the one

hand and concrete, situational forms of action on the other. Thus, these microanalytical studies (Homer-Dixon et al., 2014; Schröder, 2012) show the dynamics of interaction that arise from the genesis of emotions from such affective semantic spaces. Conversely, emotions are responsible for the situational framing of interaction situations; they decisively shape the definition of the situation and thus the selection among available options for action. This is highlighted especially by analyses that examine collective feelings or, to use Durkheim's term, the "collective effervescence" in specific orders of interaction, such as those of soccer fans (Leistner and Schmidt-Lux, 2010 and 2012). In such affective-interactive dynamics, interactions also generate themselves in their own orders and formats, as analyses of forgiveness (Fücker and von Scheve, 2017) and humiliation (Schützeichel, 2018c) have shown. These studies show that interactions must be understood as affectively dimensioned and emotion-generating social relationships that not only pose a challenge in terms of identity management but also require the constant management of one's emotions.

(c) A third research cluster challenges, against the backdrop of a sociology of artifacts and technology, the notion that relations of interactivity can be reduced to human actors alone. In a technologized lifeworld, it is not merely that actions and interactions are intensively related to natural, artificial, and technological things and apparatuses; rather, as many microsociological, technographic analyses (Janda, 2018; Stubbe, 2017) have concluded, there is no way to avoid assigning them an action and interaction status and understanding them as integral components of social practice. Technology can be understood as an interaction partner, as Krummheuer's (2010) analysis of interaction with virtual agents shows or Pfadenhauer and Dukat's (2016; cf. also Pfadenhauer, 2014) analyses of the use of social robots in dementia care. In contrast to an older understanding of technologization based on phenomenological and systems-theoretical analyses as a process of reduction and routinization of possible courses of action and interaction, these microsociological analyses equally emphasize the innovative and uncertain aspects of technologization. The controversial issue in these studies is not the notion that technologies and technologization processes are to be understood as inter-agents, but rather the question of how and in what way conventional sociological concepts of action, interaction, and communication must be modified in order to account for the technologization of lifeworlds and social practices (cf. Muhle, 2013 and 2018; Rammert and Schubert, 2006; Rammert, *TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION*, this volume). A likewise controversial issue is how to construe the "interactive relationship" between human and technological or artificial co-worlds. Here, too, as already mentioned in the survey of research on "embodied interaction," the concept of enactivism with its notion of "extended cognition" (cf. Rowlands, 2010) could be appropriate, thus serving as a bridge between these microsociological research clusters.

(d) At this point one further thematic orientation of microsociological interaction research must be briefly pointed out. Interactions are often triadic constellations. Although it is typically intuitively assumed that in interactions there are dyadic relations between ego and alter, this is by no means the rule. The constitutive and in-

teractive function of third actors in the constitution and reproduction of interactions is rarely considered (cf. Bedorf, Fischer, and Lindemann, 2010). To mention just one analysis, Heck (2016) uses the example of mediators, judges, and referees to demonstrate the conflict-transforming function of third parties in interactions. Sporting competitions, especially in their professionalized form, also constitute triadic events (cf. Müller, 2015).

4 Microsociological Situation Research

The microsociological studies mentioned so far all assume that interactions are always only situationally bound and located relationships. In more recent years, however, a methodological situationism has established itself in various research clusters in microsociology that brings the situational nature and situational emergence of interactions to the fore and, via this explicit situational reference, brings the emergent character of interactions and the comprehensive enactivist contexts of interactive action such as materialities, affects, and atmospheres to the fore, on the one hand, while it also places greater emphasis on the drawing of boundaries in, and of, interaction situations, on the other. In this field, the situational reference serves not only to anchor sociological research at the micro level but also to defend against the methods and explanatory models of variable-oriented sociology. Its range of concepts extends on one end from older notions of situations as empirical units of data collection or the depotentializing conception of situations as the mere “environment” of action to concepts on the other end that, with reference to John Dewey’s pragmatism, emphasize the relational, holistic properties of situations and their events and components (cf. Tavory, 2018). The latter concept of situation in this way serves to investigate the enactive connections of interactively generated actions with their material and symbolic contexts and to regard situations as synthetic situations (cf. Knorr-Cetina, 2009) in which social realities are performed. Situations are also regarded as temporal phenomena in which certain dynamics can unfold in accordance with their rhythms and self-organizing structures. For methodological reasons, the situations often chosen for this are extraordinary borderline situations that are not the routine substance of daily life (cf. Bergmann, 2013; Feith, 2018; Feith et al., 2020), such as situations of dire need, experiences of illness, or the dissolution of personal relationships.

In the following, we can consider only three research programs. In the more recent sociology of violence, methodological situationism has become an analytical cornerstone (cf. the papers in Bakonyi and Bliesemann de Guervara, 2012, as well as in Equit et al., 2016), whereby, however, a pragmatist understanding of situation is often superimposed with the rather objectivist concept of situation found in Randall Collins’s (1981, 2004, 2009, 2011; cf. also papers in Weininger, 2019) microsociology. The studies by Hartmann (2015) and Hoebel (2016) deal with the situational constellations in which acts of collective and interactive violence emerge and proceed. They draw attention to the situational contingency of such phenomena, but at the same time also

in a certain way to the fact that, in certain situational constellations, violence is normalized in spite of all normative regulations. The empirical analyses of the sociology of violence also draw attention to the vagueness of the concept of situation—where are the limits of situations, who defines what the given situation is, and who or what is part of it? And is not only what is given, but also what is possible, an integral part of situations? Accordingly, Sutterlüty (2015; 2017) speaks of considerable pitfalls inherent in the program of methodological situationism. But above all it is precisely in this research context that the social-theoretically significant question arises as to whether “macrosociological” structures are not simply presupposed or unnecessarily copied into microsociological analyses, and whether thus at least certain microsociological claims to reduction performatively contradict each other.

The various scenes and situations of public or urban space represent, alongside the analysis of violence, a second established object of microsociological research. Müller (2015 and 2017) for example analyzes situations that arise by way of specific objects of focus, such as street rubbish, or processes such as the stigmatization of people. Hüttermann (2018; cf. also Hüttermann and Minas, 2016) examines interaction processes between migrants and long-established residents in urban figurational spaces in his ethnographic analyses combining questions of interaction, migration, and urban sociology, which he understands as contributions to a general “sociologic” of social facts. The term “sociologic” is used to designate the ensembles of actions and interactions that drive the emergence and transformation of social facts, which is considered to be sociology’s definitive object of analysis. This sociologic represents a confluence of two sociological traditions in particular: Simmel’s sociology, whose “interactions” were, as is well known, transformed on their way through early American sociology into a semantics of “interaction,” and, as can easily be seen, Elias’ figurational sociology with its analytical focus on the constitution and shifting of power relations understood as dynamic relations of force and conflict. Both traditions and thus also Hüttermann set their analytical focus less on the relations between individual persons than on those between groups. Sociologic in this vein thus observes the formation of group cohesion in figurations, and the change of figurations in group constellations. Hüttermann is particularly interested in the shifts in the balance of power between the various groups in societies of immigrants that find themselves confronted with one another in the everyday life of urban figurational spaces, which range from encounters in trams to the pedestrian zones of inner cities—long-time residents and recent arrivals, police and street corner groups, established and outsiders, the various generations of immigrants, but also the representatives of the various functional roles that emerge in such figurational processes. The concept of interaction used by Hüttermann is at odds with the conventional distinction between microsociology and macrosociology. Interactions constitute the basic operations in figurations, regardless of whether they take place face-to-face or in temporally and spatially distanced constructs. Hüttermann’s conceptual approach shares the understanding of interaction that crystallized in the context of sociology’s influencing by

pragmatism, but it acquires its innovative character through its liaison with figurations and power dynamics as conceived by Elias' sociology.

The museum visit is another situational format that has been intensively investigated by microsociology. Ethnomethodologically based video analyses are used to analyze the interactive "construction" of museum or art objects in the choreography of bodily interactions in exhibition spaces (vom Lehn, 2006; 2013a; 2013b). In this choreography, the interactive organization of the gaze—that is, the perception of the perception of the gaze, of bodily expression, and of motor intercorporality—plays a decisive role. These analyses make use of a methodological technique that has considerably enriched sociological interaction research in recent years, namely, video analysis (vom Lehn, 2018; Tuma et al., 2013), which represents a common feature in the concert of the various methodological approaches dominating microsociology, such as situation analysis as understood by grounded theory (Clarke, 2012), hermeneutics of the sociology of knowledge, or ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (cf. also Hollstein/Kumkar, *QUALITATIVE METHODS*, this volume).

5 Convergences and Divergences

The foregoing discussion only sketches a narrow picture of German-language microsociology. There are many relevant and important questions and lines of research that could not be taken into account. These desiderata include, for example, the study of micrological politics in organizations and networks, termed "micropolitics" (cf. e.g. Fritzsche, 2011), the microsociological studies of religion and religiosity subsumed under the title of "practiced religion" (cf. Schützeichel, 2018d), the analysis of personal relationships (cf. Lenz and Nestmann, 2009), and of networks. The important question of why interactions, compared to other social forms, are particularly prone to reproduce—but sometimes also to neutralize—social inequality and symbolic domination cannot be taken up here either. These lacunae are not only due to the fact that there is no uniform microsociology but also to the fact that each sociological sub-discipline or each theoretical approach has its own microsociology. As explained above, the expression "microsociology" does not refer to a well-delineated or definable subject area; its task is rather to create order.

But what is the specific signature of microsociology and in particular of situation and interaction research in contemporary German-language sociology? As already emphasized, it was precisely the increasing prevalence of the distinction between micro and macro in the second half of the last century that dismantled the analytical and methodological discrepancies compared to "mainstream" international research. Like the latter, the microsociology undertaken within German-language sociology is also organized in a multiparadigmatic way. It may contain more ongoing research programs than other traditions, including phenomenology in its various forms, ethnomethodology and the various fractions of symbolic interactionism, and programs from the traditions of discourse analysis and the sociology of knowledge as well as

philosophical anthropology. But they too are being carried out in the mode of serial isolation—at the same time, there are many microsociologies and varieties of interaction research that do not overlap in any significant way. Due to these tendencies, it is difficult to speak of a specifically German-language microsociology today. This can also be seen in the patterns of reception, in the way the reception of microsociology is paradigm-oriented instead of nationally oriented. This may distinguish microsociological research from macrosociological research, whose national cultures are currently passing down theoretical priorities that are only noted with reserve elsewhere, for example, systems theory in Germany, “cultural sociology” and mechanism-based historical sociology in the United States, and critical realism in Great Britain.

But despite these structural convergences and paradigmatic divergences, a common signature in German-language microsociology does become visible on the methodological level: Microsociological studies in their entire bandwidth—that is, encompassing not only interaction or situation but also biography, identity, and socialization—are relationally oriented. They thus place—in contrast to both individualist and collectivist methodologies—social relationships and relations in their different dimensions in the foreground and strive for sociological explanations that seek to establish the facts by means of factors immanent in relations, that is, by means of what is realized in performance. Thus, the old key question of sociology, of how social order is possible, is renegotiated. Social relations and in particular interactions in their various situational forms are regarded as the privileged forms in which social order is performed multimodally at different levels of reflexivity, explicitly and implicitly, reflectively and prereflectively, in regularities and rules, meaningfully and sensually, cognitively and affectively, dyadically and triadically. Therefore, interactions (in a broad sense) are also of special significance from the perspective of social theory. But this is also where we find one of the future challenges of interaction research. As a rule, respective research programs examine a mode of order formation in interactions in a prominent and singular way. Interactions themselves, however, are potentially multimodally structured; they can fall back on a multitude of modes. But how are “switches” between different modes organized within interactions themselves, and how do relationships of dominance arise between different modes? If one focuses on this research question, then the individualistically grounded “pattern variables” (Parsons, 1951), whose taxonomy of possible action orientations formulates an action-theoretical hinge between actions and social orders, could be augmented by a more comprehensive model of “interaction pattern variables,” which not only deals with the question of possible combinations and “switches” in multimodal interactions, but which could also act as a corrective to the danger—always lurking in interaction research—of restricting oneself to methodological situationism.

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