

Playing Chamber Music at a Rock Festival? –
The Social Construction of Reality in US Sociology



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ADVENTURES OF AN
**ACCIDENTAL
SOCIOLOGIST**

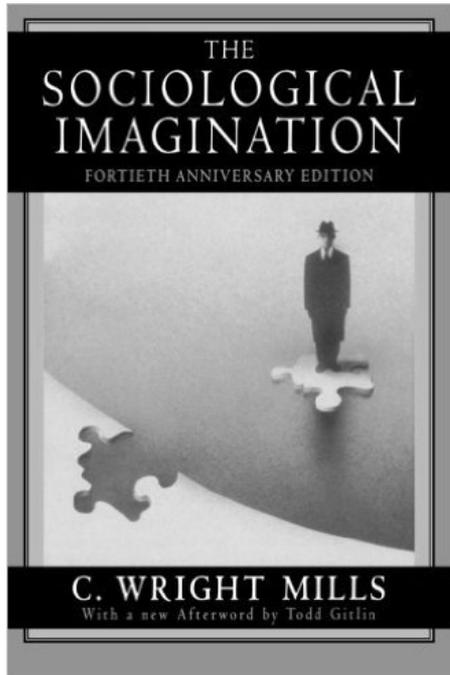
HOW TO EXPLAIN THE WORLD
WITHOUT BECOMING A BORE



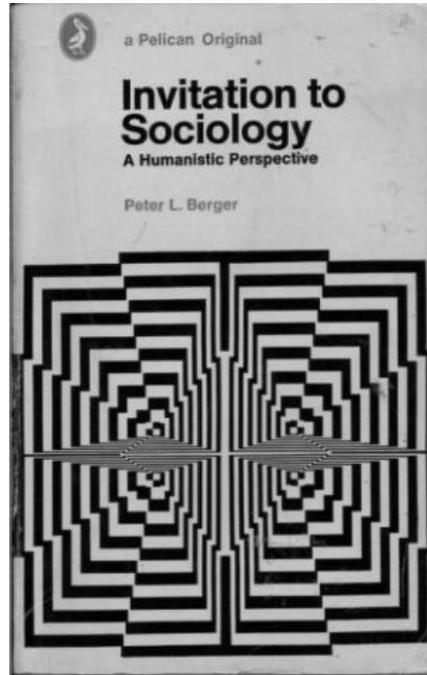
„The Big Three“:

- Albert Salomon
- Alfred Schütz
- Carl Mayer

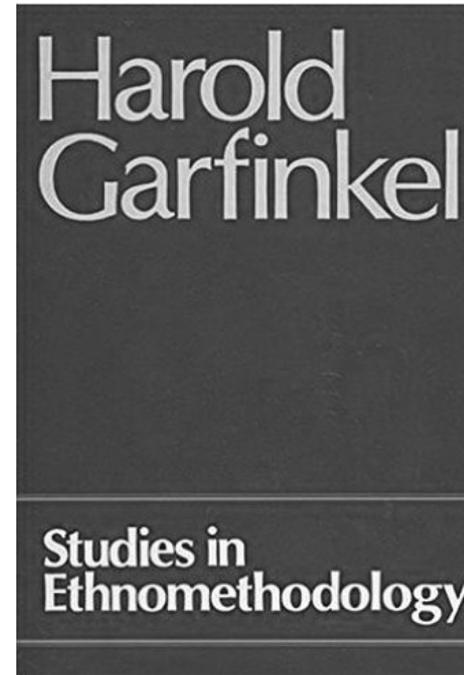
New approaches from the 1960s



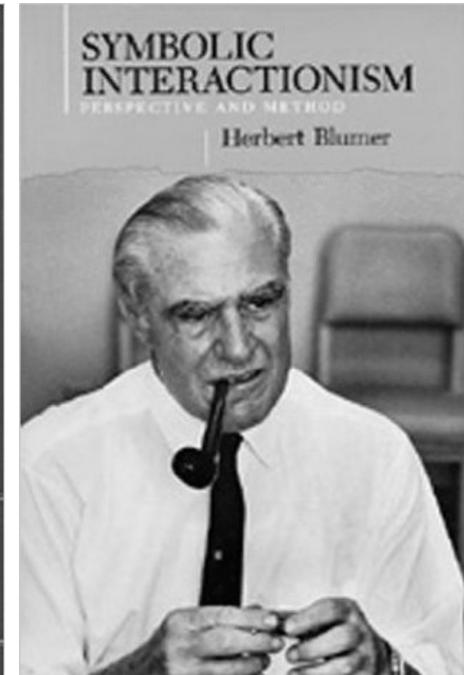
1959



1963



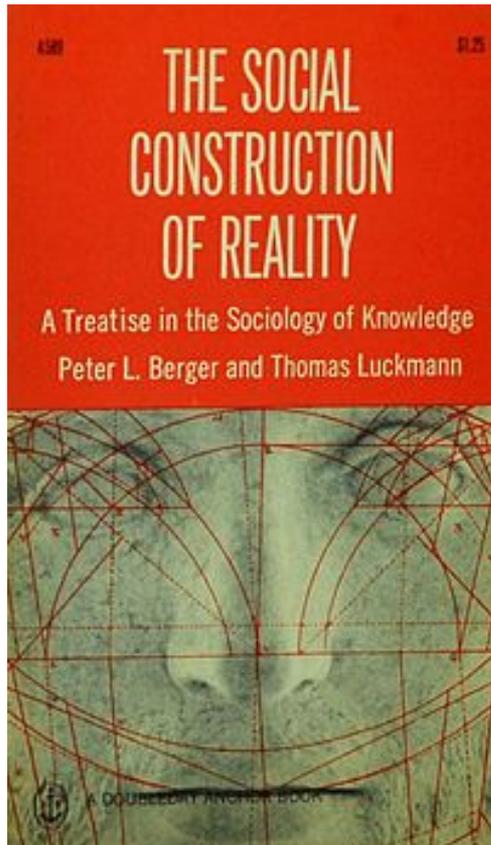
1967



1969

Proposition 2:

Social Construction became a bestseller due to a misunderstanding not only of its theoretical argument, but also of its (alleged) political implications.



Berger/Luckmann on Parsons's structural functionalism

“The logic does not reside in the institutions and their external functionalities, but in the way these are treated in reflection about them. Put differently, reflective consciousness superimposes the quality of logic on the institutional order” (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 82).

“Furthermore, we hope we have shown cause for our conviction that a purely structural sociology is endemically in danger of reifying social phenomena. Even if it begins by modestly assigning to its constructs merely heuristic status, it all too frequently ends by confusing its own conceptualizations with the laws of the universe” (ibid.: 208).

“Contemporary American sociology tends towards leaving out the first moment [Externalization]. Its perspective on society thus tends to be what Marx called a reification (Verdinglichung), that is, an undialectical distortion of social reality that obscures the latter's character as an ongoing human production, viewing it instead in thing-like categories appropriate only to the world of nature” (ibid.: 222, footnote 29).

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R. Gordon Kelly on *Social Construction*

“Given their critique of structural functionalism, we may properly regard *The Social Construction of Reality* as an exercise [...] in ‘dereification,’ as an effort, that is, to restore to modern man the necessary and saving sense in which he is rightly understood to be the author of himself.”

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“Although Berger and Luckmann nowhere say it so baldly, their argument appears to lead ineluctably to this conclusion: If reality is socially constructed, men can *restructure* it – on the basis of an understanding of the processes in and through which the reality of everyday life is maintained” (Kelly 1983: 52f., original emphasis).

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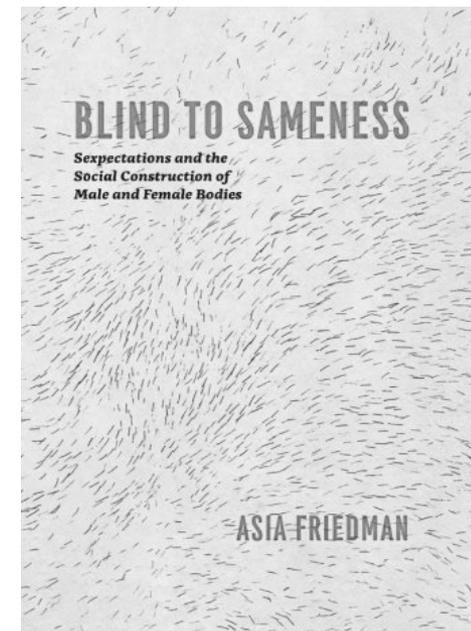
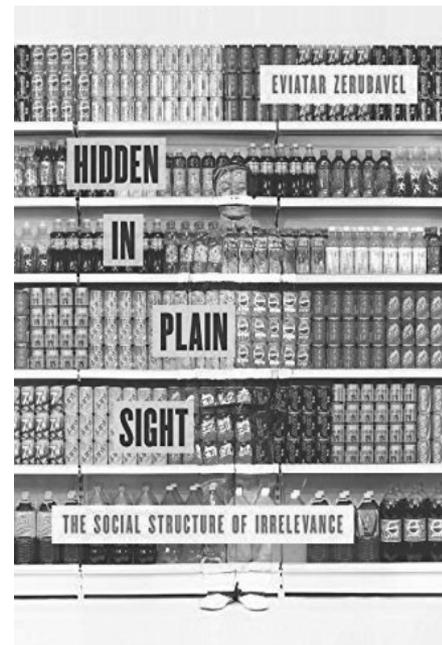
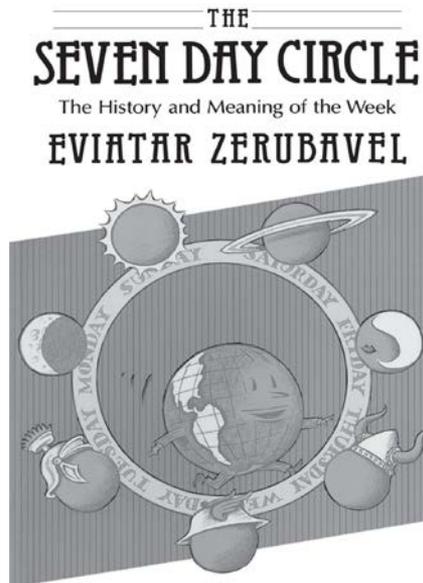
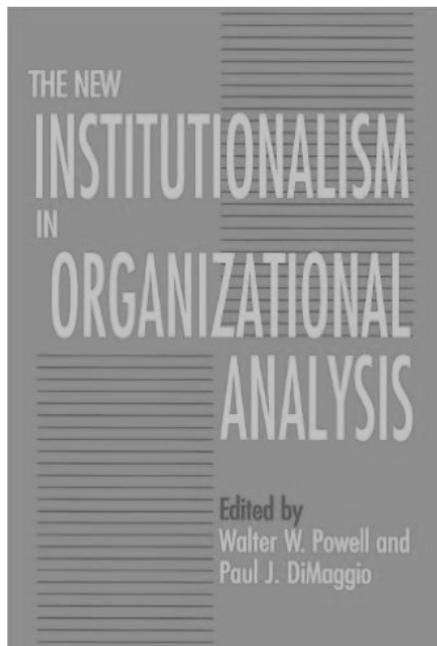
The beginning of the “rock festival”:
Campus protests at Columbia
University in 1968

Luckmann on social constructivism

“Social constructivism, whatever that might mean – if it means anything – may refer metaphorically to the building, to the construction of a house, of a human world by human actors. But the idea that some so-called social constructivists have is that you can make houses without bricks, that this is a sort of autopoietic exercise in thin air. I consider this total nonsense. The bricks are the human body, evolutionary givens and preconditions, et cetera. What Berger and I set out in the book that seems to be partly forgotten, is the weight – and occasionally heavy weight – of tradition, of history, of past constructions, if you wish (cited from Dreher/Vera 2016: 124).

Proposition 3:

In terms of sociological theory *Social Construction* contributed significantly to the “interpretive approach” to society, a perspective that is anything but limited to the discipline of sociology. But there are only rare *direct* theoretical follow-ups in US sociology.



Conclusion

When the book was first published in 1966, it helped to develop a new understanding of what sociology can be about. In this sense it could hardly have captured the *Zeitgeist* better. This made it a bestseller.

However, by narrowing down the book's complex argument to focus solely on its debunking implications, it contributed (involuntarily) to the soundtrack of the "rock festival" (which impeded carefully examining the contents of the book).

Many thanks!



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