

On Egon Bittner

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Egon and I came to Boston about the same time, 1968, he at Brandeis, I at Boston University.

He introduced me to Cabot's, a place to eat and to savour ice cream as well, where we had our first lunch together.

He was the kind of colleague we'd all love to have – helpful, cooperative, friendly and scholarly. It was wonderful to have another ethnomethodologist in the Boston area. Working together with other colleagues we thought we might make a dent in the intellectual freeze-out that confronted us. We could be naïve as well.

We met in my living room, together with Kurt Wolff (Brandeis), David Rasmussen (Boston College), Victor Kestenbaum and Jeff Coulter (Boston University) to plan the establishment of a new journal, *Human Studies*, which we would launch if we could find a publisher – and enough good manuscripts. The group eventually formed part of the editorial board of *Human Studies* and recruited as well as reviewed new manuscripts. We had said we would launch a journal only if we had enough manuscripts for at least two issues. We not only launched this publication (in 1978) but continued to work together for many years as the journal is now in its 32nd volume year. He had already contributed a paper, 'Objectivity and Realism in Sociology' to a volume I edited, *Phenomenological Sociology* (Psathas 1973), as well as participating in evening meetings with a group we had gathered in the Boston area, the phenomenology and social science seminar.

Egon had worked with Garfinkel at the time of the development of ethnomethodology. He is cited as a 'collaborator' by Garfinkel in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* in a footnote to Chapter 6, 'Good Organizational Reasons for Bad Clinic Records', and again in Chapter 7 where he is cited for a chapter written 'with the assistance of Egon Bittner'. These cited contributions are most likely only a part of his work with Garfinkel. He is mentioned as one of the members of the famous west coast seminar that is acknowledged as the starting point of ethnomethodology.

We had started to meet together at the Carroll Centre for the Blind, when Garfinkel came east and together we met with the research director whom Garfinkel knew. At that time, Harold was interested in tactile recognition, mobility and orientation.

However, Egon went his own way and to my knowledge did not do research on blindness. He developed a teaching interest in the sociology of law and did research on as well as consulting with the police.

This later work represents some of his major contributions – four books (*The Functions of the Police in Modern Society*, *Aspects of Police Work*, and two edited volumes of the *Criminology Review Yearbook* in 1979 and 1980), many talks, committee work and frequent consultations with the police whose work he also studied. For his contributions he was honoured by the police with awards. One was named in his honour, The Egon Bittner Award, given annually to police executive officers for their distinguished service in law enforcement.

Many, if not most, of his studies on or with the police were not known to his sociologist colleagues but they represented the way he worked, quietly and consistently, on problems he found of interest and which he saw as particularly important for those he studied.

As we went our different ways – no more lunches at Cabot's – we kept in contact through our work on Human Studies. He consistently supported the journal though we did not meet regularly as editors once it was established and thriving.

He remained a loyal and good friend. I used to drive by the house he had occupied while on my way to work – it is still there – though he left it to move to California when he retired. Now he is no longer with us. He has made another, more permanent, move – and he shall be missed.

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