

Goffman, Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

INTRODUCTION

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him.

For those present, many sources of information become accessible and many carriers (or "sign-vehicles") become available for conveying this information. If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him. They can also assume from past experience that only individuals of a particular kind are likely to be found in a given social setting. They can rely on what the individual says about himself or on documentary evidence he provides as to who and what he is. If they know, or know of, the individual by virtue of experience prior to the interaction, they can rely on assumptions as to the persistence and generality of psychological traits as a means of predicting his present and future behavior.

However, during the period in which the individual is in the immediate presence of the others, few events may occur which directly provide the others with the conclusive information they will need if they are to direct wisely their own

activity. Many crucial facts lie beyond the time and place of interaction or lie concealed within it. For example, the "true" or "real" attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of the individual can be ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior. Similarly, if the individual offers the others a product or service, they will often find that during the interaction there will be no time and place immediately available for eating the pudding that the proof can be found in. They will be forced to accept some events as conventional or natural signs of something not directly available to the senses. In Ichheiser's terms,¹ the individual will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will in turn have to be impressed in some way by him.

The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off. The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he and the others are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way. As we shall have to see, this distinction has an only initial validity. The individual does of course intentionally convey misinformation by means of both of these types of communication, the first involving deceit, the second feigning.

Taking communication in both its narrow and broad sense, one finds that when the individual is in the immediate presence of others, his activity will have a promissory character. The others are likely to find that they must accept the individual on faith, offering him a just return

¹ Gustav Ichheiser, "Misunderstandings in Human Relations," Supplement to *The American Journal of Sociology*, LV (September, 1949), pp. 6-7.

while he is present before them in exchange for something whose true value will not be established until after he has left their presence. (Of course, the others also live by inference in their dealings with the physical world, but it is only in the world of social interaction that the objects about which they make inferences will purposely facilitate and hinder this inferential process.) The security that they justifiably feel in making inferences about the individual will vary, of course, depending on such factors as the amount of information they already possess about him, but no amount of such past evidence can entirely obviate the necessity of acting on the basis of inferences. As William I. Thomas suggested:

It is also highly important for us to realize that we do not as a matter of fact lead our lives, make our decisions, and reach our goals in everyday life either statistically or scientifically. We live by inference. I am, let us say, your guest. You do not know, you cannot determine scientifically, that I will not steal your money or your spoons. But inferentially I will not, and inferentially you have me as a guest.²

Let us now turn from the others to the point of view of the individual who presents himself before them. He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels toward them, or to obtain no clear-cut impression; he may wish to ensure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them. Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him.³ This control is achieved largely by influenc-

² Quoted in E. H. Volkart, editor, *Social Behavior and Personality*, Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1951), p. 5.

³ Here I owe much to an unpublished paper by Tom Burns of the University of Edinburgh. He presents the argument that in

ing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey. Since a girl's dormitory mates will glean evidence of her popularity from the calls she receives on the phone, we can suspect that some girls will arrange for calls to be made, and Willard Waller's finding can be anticipated:

It has been reported by many observers that a girl who is called to the telephone in the dormitories will often allow herself to be called several times, in order to give all the other girls ample opportunity to hear her paged.⁴

Of the two kinds of communication—expressions given and expressions given off—this report will be primarily concerned with the latter, with the more theatrical and contextual kind, the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind, whether this communication be purposely engineered or not. As an example of what we must try to examine, I would like to cite at length a novelistic incident in which Preedy, a vacationing Englishman, makes his first appearance on the beach of his summer hotel in Spain:

But in any case he took care to avoid catching anyone's eye. First of all, he had to make it clear to those potential companions of his holiday that they were of no concern to him whatsoever. He stared through them, round

all interaction a basic underlying theme is the desire of each participant to guide and control the responses made by the others present. A similar argument has been advanced by Jay Haley in a recent unpublished paper, but in regard to a special kind of control, that having to do with defining the nature of the relationship of those involved in the interaction.

⁴ Willard Waller, "The Rating and Dating Complex," *American Sociological Review*, II, p. 730.

The novelist means us to see that Preedy is improperly concerned with the extensive impressions he feels his sheer bodily action is giving off to those around him. We can malign Preedy further by assuming that he has acted merely in order to give a particular impression, that this is a false impression, and that the others present receive either no impression at all, or, worse still, the impression that Preedy is affectedly trying to cause them to receive this particular impression. But the important point for us here is that the kind of impression Preedy thinks he is making is in fact the kind of impression that others correctly and incorrectly glean from someone in their midst.

I have said that when an individual appears before others his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they come to have. Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain. Sometimes the individual will be calculating in his activity but be relatively unaware that this is the case. Sometimes he will intentionally and consciously express himself in a particular way, but chiefly because the tradition of his group or social status require this kind of expression and not because of any particular response (other than vague acceptance or approval) that is likely to be evoked from those impressed by the expression. Sometimes the traditions of an individual's role will lead him to give a well-designed impression of a particular kind and yet he may be neither consciously nor unconsciously disposed to create such an impression. The others, in their turn, may be suitably impressed by the individual's efforts to convey something, or may misunderstand the situation and come to conclusions that are warranted neither by the individual's intent nor by the facts. In any case, in so far as the others act as if the individual had conveyed a particular impression, we may take a functional or pragmatic view and say that the individual has "effectively" projected a given definition of the situation and "effectively" fostered the understanding that a given state of affairs obtains.

There is one aspect of the others' response that bears special comment here. Knowing that the individual is likely to present himself in a light that is favorable to him, the others may divide what they witness into two parts; a part that is relatively easy for the individual to manipulate at will, being chiefly his verbal assertions, and a part in regard to which he seems to have little concern or control, being chiefly derived from the expressions he gives off. The others may then use what are considered to be the ungovernable aspects of his expressive behavior as a check upon the validity of what is conveyed by the governable aspects. In this a fundamental asymmetry is demonstrated in the communication process, the individual presumably being aware of only one stream of his communication, the witnesses of this stream and one other. For example, in Shetland Isle one crofter's wife, in serving native dishes to a visitor from the mainland of Britain, would listen with a polite smile to his polite claims of liking what he was eating; at the same time she would take note of the rapidity with which the visitor lifted his fork or spoon to his mouth, the eagerness with which he passed food into his mouth, and the gusto expressed in chewing the food, using these signs as a check on the stated feelings of the eater. The same woman, in order to discover what one acquaintance (A) "actually" thought of another acquaintance (B), would wait until B was in the presence of A but engaged in conversation with still another person (C). She would then covertly examine the facial expressions of A as he regarded B in conversation with C. Not being in conversation with B, and not being directly observed by him, A would sometimes relax usual constraints and tactful deceptions, and freely express what he was "actually" feeling about B. This Shetlander, in short, would observe the unobserved observer.

Now given the fact that others are likely to check up on the more controllable aspects of behavior by means of the less controllable, one can expect that sometimes the individual will try to exploit this very possibility, guiding the impression he makes through behavior felt to be reliably

informing.⁶ For example, in gaining admission to a tight social circle, the participant observer may not only wear an accepting look while listening to an informant, but may also be careful to wear the same look when observing the informant talking to others; observers of the observer will then not as easily discover where he actually stands. A specific illustration may be cited from Shetland Isle. When a neighbor dropped in to have a cup of tea, he would ordinarily wear at least a hint of an expectant warm smile as he passed through the door into the cottage. Since lack of physical obstructions outside the cottage and lack of light within it usually made it possible to observe the visitor unobserved as he approached the house, islanders sometimes took pleasure in watching the visitor drop whatever expression he was manifesting and replace it with a sociable one just before reaching the door. However, some visitors, in appreciating that this examination was occurring, would blindly adopt a social face a long distance from the house, thus ensuring the projection of a constant image.

This kind of control upon the part of the individual reinstates the symmetry of the communication process, and sets the stage for a kind of information game—a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery. It should be added that since the others are likely to be relatively unsuspecting of the presumably unguided aspect of the individual's conduct, he can gain much by controlling it. The others of course may sense that the individual is manipulating the presumably spontaneous aspects of his behavior, and seek in this very act of manipulation some shading of conduct that the individual has not managed to control. This again provides a check upon the individual's behavior, this time his presumably uncalculated behavior, thus re-establishing the asymmetry of the communication process. Here I would like only to add the suggestion that the arts of piercing an individual's effort at

⁶ The widely read and rather sound writings of Stephen Potter are concerned in part with signs that can be engineered to give a shrewd observer the apparently incidental cues he needs to discover concealed virtues the gamesman does not in fact possess.

calculated unintentionality seem better developed than our capacity to manipulate our own behavior, so that regardless of how many steps have occurred in the information game, the witness is likely to have the advantage over the actor, and the initial asymmetry of the communication process is likely to be retained.

When we allow that the individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before others, we must also see that the others, however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual and by virtue of any lines of action they initiate to him. Ordinarily the definitions of the situation projected by the several different participants are sufficiently attuned to one another so that open contradiction will not occur. I do not mean that there will be the kind of consensus that arises when each individual present candidly expresses what he really feels and honestly agrees with the expressed feelings of the others present. This kind of harmony is an optimistic ideal and in any case not necessary for the smooth working of society. Rather, each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable. The maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service. Further, there is usually a kind of division of definitional labor. Each participant is allowed to establish the tentative official ruling regarding matters which are vital to him but not immediately important to others, e.g., the rationalizations and justifications by which he accounts for his past activity. In exchange for this courtesy he remains silent or non-committal on matters important to others but not immediately important to him. We have then a kind of interactional *modus vivendi*. Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement

as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored. Real agreement will also exist concerning the desirability of avoiding an open conflict of definitions of the situation.⁷ I will refer to this level of agreement as a "working consensus." It is to be understood that the working consensus established in one interaction setting will be quite different in content from the working consensus established in a different type of setting. Thus, between two friends at lunch, a reciprocal show of affection, respect, and concern for the other is maintained. In service occupations, on the other hand, the specialist often maintains an image of disinterested involvement in the problem of the client, while the client responds with a show of respect for the competence and integrity of the specialist. Regardless of such differences in content, however, the general form of these working arrangements is the same.

In noting the tendency for a participant to accept the definitional claims made by the others present, we can appreciate the crucial importance of the information that the individual *initially* possesses or acquires concerning his fellow participants, for it is on the basis of this initial information that the individual starts to define the situation and starts to build up lines of responsive action. The individual's initial projection commits him to what he is proposing to be and requires him to drop all pretenses of being other things. As the interaction among the participants progresses, additions and modifications in this initial informational state will of course occur, but it is essential that these later developments be related without contradiction to, and even built up from, the initial positions taken by the several partic-

⁷ An interaction can be purposely set up as a time and place for voicing differences in opinion, but in such cases participants must be careful to agree not to disagree on the proper tone of voice, vocabulary, and degree of seriousness in which all arguments are to be phrased, and upon the mutual respect which disagreeing participants must carefully continue to express toward one another. This debaters' or academic definition of the situation may also be invoked suddenly and judiciously as a way of translating a serious conflict of views into one that can be handled within a framework acceptable to all present.

ipants. It would seem that an individual can more easily make a choice as to what line of treatment to demand from and extend to the others present at the beginning of an encounter than he can alter the line of treatment that is being pursued once the interaction is underway.

In everyday life, of course, there is a clear understanding that first impressions are important. Thus, the work adjustment of those in service occupations will often hinge upon a capacity to seize and hold the initiative in the service relation, a capacity that will require subtle aggressiveness on the part of the server when he is of lower socio-economic status than his client. W. F. Whyte suggests the waitress as an example:

The first point that stands out is that the waitress who bears up under pressure does not simply respond to her customers. She acts with some skill to control their behavior. The first question to ask when we look at the customer relationship is, "Does the waitress get the jump on the customer, or does the customer get the jump on the waitress?" The skilled waitress realizes the crucial nature of this question. . . .

The skilled waitress tackles the customer with confidence and without hesitation. For example, she may find that a new customer has seated himself before she could clear off the dirty dishes and change the cloth. He is now leaning on the table studying the menu. She greets him, says, "May I change the cover, please?" and, without waiting for an answer, takes his menu away from him so that he moves back from the table, and she goes about her work. The relationship is handled politely but firmly, and there is never any question as to who is in charge.⁸

When the interaction that is initiated by "first impressions" is itself merely the initial interaction in an extended series of interactions involving the same participants, we speak of "getting off on the right foot" and feel that it is crucial that

⁸ W. F. Whyte, "When Workers and Customers Meet," Chap. VII, *Industry and Society*, ed. W. F. Whyte (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946), pp. 132-33.

we do so. Thus, one learns that some teachers take the following view:

You can't ever let them get the upper hand on you or you're through. So I start out tough. The first day I get a new class in, I let them know who's boss . . . You've got to start off tough, then you can ease up as you go along. If you start out easy-going, when you try to get tough, they'll just look at you and laugh.⁹

Similarly, attendants in mental institutions may feel that if the new patient is sharply put in his place the first day on the ward and made to see who is boss, much future difficulty will be prevented.¹⁰

Given the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others, we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection. When these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused and embarrassed halt. Some of the assumptions upon which the responses of the participants had been predicated become untenable, and the participants find themselves lodged in an interaction for which the situation has been wrongly defined and is now no longer defined. At such moments the individual whose presentation has been discredited may feel ashamed while the others present may feel hostile, and all the participants may come to feel ill at ease, nonplussed, out of countenance, embarrassed, experiencing the kind of anomy that is generated when the minute social system of face-to-face interaction breaks down.

In stressing the fact that the initial definition of the situation projected by an individual tends to provide a plan for the co-operative activity that follows—in stressing this

⁹ Teacher interview quoted by Howard S. Becker, "Social Class Variations in the Teacher-Pupil Relationship," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, XXV, p. 459.

¹⁰ Harold Taxel, "Authority Structure in a Mental Hospital Ward" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1953).

action point of view—we must not overlook the crucial fact that any projected definition of the situation also has a distinctive moral character. It is this moral character of projections that will chiefly concern us in this report. Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is. In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. He also implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be¹¹ and hence forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals. The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they *ought* to see as the “is.”

One cannot judge the importance of definitional disruptions by the frequency with which they occur, for apparently they would occur more frequently were not constant precautions taken. We find that preventive practices are constantly employed to avoid these embarrassments and that corrective practices are constantly employed to compensate for discrediting occurrences that have not been successfully avoided. When the individual employs these strategies and tactics to protect his own projections, we may refer to them as “defensive practices”; when a participant employs them to save the definition of the situation projected by another, we speak of “protective practices” or

¹¹ This role of the witness in limiting what it is the individual can be has been stressed by Existentialists, who see it as a basic threat to individual freedom. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 365 ff.

"tact." Together, defensive and protective practices comprise the techniques employed to safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others. It should be added that while we may be ready to see that no fostered impression would survive if defensive practices were not employed, we are less ready perhaps to see that few impressions could survive if those who received the impression did not exert tact in their reception of it.

In addition to the fact that precautions are taken to prevent disruption of projected definitions, we may also note that an intense interest in these disruptions comes to play a significant role in the social life of the group. Practical jokes and social games are played in which embarrassments which are to be taken unseriously are purposely engineered.¹² Fantasies are created in which devastating exposures occur. Anecdotes from the past—real, embroidered, or fictitious—are told and retold, detailing disruptions which occurred, almost occurred, or occurred and were admirably resolved. There seems to be no grouping which does not have a ready supply of these games, reveries, and cautionary tales, to be used as a source of humor, a catharsis for anxieties, and a sanction for inducing individuals to be modest in their claims and reasonable in their projected expectations. The individual may tell himself through dreams of getting into impossible positions. Families tell of the time a guest got his dates mixed and arrived when neither the house nor anyone in it was ready for him. Journalists tell of times when an all-too-meaningful misprint occurred, and the paper's assumption of objectivity or decorum was humorously discredited. Public servants tell of times a client ridiculously misunderstood form instructions, giving answers which implied an unanticipated and bizarre definition of the situation.¹³ Seamen, whose home away from home is rigorously he-man, tell stories of coming back home and inadvertently asking mother to "pass the

¹² Goffman, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-27.

¹³ Peter Blau, "Dynamics of Bureaucracy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, Columbia University, forthcoming, University of Chicago Press), pp. 127-29.

fucking butter."¹⁴ Diplomats tell of the time a near-sighted queen asked a republican ambassador about the health of his king.¹⁵

To summarize, then, I assume that when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation. This report is concerned with some of the common techniques that persons employ to sustain such impressions and with some of the common contingencies associated with the employment of these techniques. The specific content of any activity presented by the individual participant, or the role it plays in the interdependent activities of an on-going social system, will not be at issue; I shall be concerned only with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting the activity before others. The issues dealt with by stagecraft and stage management are sometimes trivial but they are quite general; they seem to occur everywhere in social life, providing a clear-cut dimension for formal sociological analysis.

It will be convenient to end this introduction with some definitions that are implied in what has gone before and required for what is to follow. For the purpose of this report, interaction (that is, face-to-face interaction) may be roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence. An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence; the term "an encounter" would do as well. A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute

¹⁴ Walter M. Beattie, Jr., "The Merchant Seaman" (unpublished M.A. Report, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1950), p. 35.

¹⁵ Sir Frederick Ponsonby, *Recollections of Three Reigns* (New York: Dutton, 1952), p. 46.

the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a "part" or "routine."¹⁶ These situational terms can easily be related to conventional structural ones. When an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise. Defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status, we can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons.

¹⁶ For comments on the importance of distinguishing between a routine of interaction and any particular instance when this routine is played through, see John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, *The Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (2nd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 49.

Chapter III

REGIONS AND REGION BEHAVIOR

A region may be defined as any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception. Regions vary, of course, in the degree to which they are bounded and according to the media of communication in which the barriers to perception occur. Thus thick glass panels, such as are found in broadcasting control rooms, can isolate a region aurally but not visually, while an office bounded by beaver-board partitions is closed off in the opposite way.

In our Anglo-American society—a relatively indoor one—when a performance is given it is usually given in a highly bounded region, to which boundaries with respect to time are often added. The impression and understanding fostered by the performance will tend to saturate the region and time span, so that any individual located in this space-time manifold will be in a position to observe the performance and be guided by the definition of the situation which the performance fosters.¹

Often a performance will involve only one focus of visual attention on the part of performer and audience, as, for example, when a political speech is presented in a hall or when a patient is talking to a doctor in the latter's consulting room. However, many performances involve, as constituent

¹ Under the term "behavioral setting," Wright and Barker, in a research methodology report, give a very clear statement of the senses in which expectations regarding conduct come to be associated with particular places. See Herbert F. Wright and Roger G. Barker, *Methods in Psychological Ecology* (Topeka, Kansas: Ray's Printing Service, 1950).

parts, separate knots or clusters of verbal interaction. Thus a cocktail party typically involves several conversational subgroups which constantly shift in size and membership. Similarly, the show maintained on the floor of a shop typically involves several foci of verbal interaction, each composed of attendant-customer pairs.

Given a particular performance as a point of reference, it will sometimes be convenient to use the term "front region" to refer to the place where the performance is given. The fixed sign-equipment in such a place has already been referred to as that part of front called "setting." We will have to see that some aspects of a performance seem to be played not to the audience but to the front region.

The performance of an individual in a front region may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards. These standards seem to fall into two broad groupings. One grouping has to do with the way in which the performer treats the audience while engaged in talk with them or in gestural interchanges that are a substitute for talk. These standards are sometimes referred to as matters of politeness. The other group of standards has to do with the way in which the performer comports himself while in visual or aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them. I shall use the term "decorum" to refer to this second group of standards, although some excuses and some qualifications will have to be added to justify the usage.

When we look at the requirements of decorum in a region, requirements of the kind not related to the handling of others in conversation, we tend to divide these again into two subgroupings, moral and instrumental. Moral requirements are ends in themselves and presumably refer to rules regarding non-interference and non-molestation of others, rules regarding sexual propriety, rules regarding respect for sacred places, etc. Instrumental requirements are not ends in themselves and presumably refer to duties such as an employer might demand of his employees—care of property, maintenance of work levels, etc. It may be felt that the

term decorum ought to cover only the moral standards and that another term should be used to cover the instrumental ones. When we examine the order that is maintained in a given region, however, we find that these two kinds of demands, moral and instrumental, seem to affect in much the same way the individual who must answer to them, and that both moral and instrumental grounds or rationalizations are put forth as justifications for most standards that must be maintained. Providing the standard is maintained by sanctions and by a sanctioner of some kind, it will often be of small moment to the performer whether the standard is justified chiefly on instrumental grounds or moral ones, and whether or not he is asked to incorporate the standard.

It may be noted that the part of personal front I have called "manner" will be important in regard to politeness and that the part called "appearance" will be important in regard to decorum. It may also be noted that while decorous behavior may take the form of showing respect for the region and setting one finds oneself in, this show of respect may, of course, be motivated by a desire to impress the audience favorably, or avoid sanctions, etc. Finally, it should be noted that the requirements of decorum are more pervasive ecologically than are the requirements of politeness. An audience can subject an entire front region to a continuous inspection as regards decorum, but while the audience is so engaged, none or only a few of the performers may be obliged to talk to the audience and hence to demonstrate politeness. Performers can stop giving expressions but cannot stop giving them off.

In the study of social establishments it is important to describe the prevailing standards of decorum; it is difficult to do so because informants and students tend to take many of these standards for granted, not realizing they have done so until an accident, or crisis, or peculiar circumstance occurs. It is known, for example, that different business offices have different standards as regards informal chatter among clerks, but it is only when we happen to study an office that has a sizable number of foreign refugee employees that we suddenly appreciate that permission to

engage in informal talk may not constitute permission to engage in informal talk in a foreign language.²

We are accustomed to assuming that the rules of decorum that prevail in sacred establishments, such as churches, will be much different from the ones that prevail in everyday places of work. We ought not to assume from this that the standards in sacred places are more numerous and more strict than those we find in work establishments. While in church, a woman may be permitted to sit, daydream, and even doze. However, as a saleswoman on the floor of a dress shop, she may be required to stand, keep alert, refrain from chewing gum, keep a fixed smile on her face even when not talking to anyone, and wear clothes she can ill afford.

One form of decorum that has been studied in social establishments is what is called "make-work." It is understood in many establishments that not only will workers be required to produce a certain amount after a certain length of time but also that they will be ready, when called upon, to give the impression that they are working hard at the moment. Of a shipyard we learn the following:

It was amusing to watch the sudden transformation whenever word got round that the foreman was on the hull or in the shop or that a front-office superintendent was coming by. Quartermen and leadermen would rush to their groups of workers and stir them to obvious activity. "Don't let him catch you sitting down," was the universal admonition, and where no work existed a pipe was busily bent and threaded, or a bolt which was already firmly in place was subjected to further and unnecessary tightening. This was the formal tribute invariably attending a visitation by the boss, and its conventions were as familiar to both sides as those surrounding a five-star general's inspection. To have neglected any detail of the false and empty show would have been interpreted as a mark of singular disrespect.³

² See Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

³ Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1947), p. 159.

Similarly, of a hospital ward we learn:

The observer was told very explicitly by other attendants on his first day of work on the wards not to "get caught" striking a patient, to appear busy when the supervisor makes her rounds, and not to speak to her unless first spoken to. It was noted that some attendants watch for her approach and warn the other attendants so that no one will get caught doing undesirable acts. Some attendants will save work for when the supervisor is present so they will be busy and will not be given additional tasks. In most attendants the change is not so obvious, depending largely on the individual attendant, the supervisor, and the ward situation. However, with nearly all attendants there is some change in behavior when an official, such as a supervisor, is present. There is no open flouting of the rules and regulations, . . .⁴

From a consideration of make-work it is only a step to consideration of other standards of work activity for which appearances must be maintained, such as pace, personal interest, economy, accuracy, etc.⁵ And from a consideration of work standards in general it is only a step to consideration of other major aspects of decorum, instrumental and moral, in work places, such as: mode of dress; permissible sound levels; proscribed diversions, indulgences, and affective expressions.

Make-work, along with other aspects of decorum in work places, is usually seen as the particular burden of those of low estate. A dramaturgical approach, however, requires us to consider together with make-work the problem of staging its opposite, make-no-work. Thus, in a memoir written about life in the early nineteenth century among the barely genteel, we learn that:

People were extremely punctilious on the subject of calls—one remembers the call in the *Mill on the Floss*.

⁴ Willoughby, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁵ An analysis of some major work standards may be found in Gross, *op. cit.*, from which the above examples of such standards are taken.

The call was due at regular intervals, so that even the day should almost be known in which it was paid or returned. It was a ceremonial which contained a great deal of ceremony and make-believe. No one, for instance, was to be surprised in doing any kind of work. There was a fiction in genteel families that the ladies of the house never did anything serious or serviceable after dinner; the afternoon was supposed to be devoted either to walking, or to making calls, or to elegant trifling at home. Therefore if the girls were at the moment engaged upon any useful work—they crammed it under the sofa, and pretended to be reading a book, or painting, or knitting, or to be engaged in easy and fashionable conversation. Why they went through this elaborate pretense I have not the least idea, because everybody knew that every girl in the place was always making, mending, cutting out, basting, gusseting, trimming, turning and contriving. How do you suppose that the solicitor's daughters made so brave a show on Sunday if they were not clever enough to make up things for themselves? Everybody, of course, knew it, and why the girls would not own up at once one cannot now understand. Perhaps it was a sort of suspicion, or a faint hope, or a wild dream, that a reputation for ladylike uselessness might enable them to cross the line at the county Ball, and mingle with the Country people.⁶

It should be plain that while persons who are obliged to make-work and make-no-work are likely to be on the opposite sides of the track, they must yet adapt themselves to the same side of the footlights.

It was suggested earlier that when one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed. It is clear that accentuated facts make their appearance in what I have called a front region; it should be just as clear

⁶ Sir Walter Besant, "Fifty Years Ago," *The Graphic Jubilee Number*, 1887, quoted in James Laver, *Victorian Vista* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), p. 147.

that there may be another region—a “back region” or “backstage”—where the suppressed facts make an appearance.

A back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course. There are, of course, many characteristic functions of such places. It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of actions and characters.⁷ Here grades of ceremonial equipment, such as different types of liquor or clothes, can be hidden so that the audience will not be able to see the treatment accorded them in comparison with the treatment that could have been accorded them. Here devices such as the telephone are sequestered so that they can be used “privately.” Here costumes and other parts of personal front may be adjusted and scrutinized for flaws. Here the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted by them; here poor members of the team, who are expressively inept, can be schooled or dropped from the performance. Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character. Simone de Beauvoir provides a rather vivid picture of this backstage activity in describing situations from which the male audience is absent.

What gives value to such relations among women is the truthfulness they imply. Confronting man woman is

⁷ As Métraux (*op. cit.*, p. 24) suggests, even the practice of voodoo cults will require such facilities:

Every case of possession has its theatrical side, as shown in the matter of disguises. The rooms of the sanctuary are not unlike the wings of a theater where the possessed find the necessary accessories. Unlike the hysteric, who reveals his anguish and his desires through symptoms—a personal means of expression—the ritual of possession must conform to the classic image of a mythical personage.

always play-acting; she lies when she makes believe that she accepts her status as the inessential other, she lies when she presents to him an imaginary personage through mimicry, costumery, studied phrases. These histrionics require a constant tension: when with her husband, or with her lover, every woman is more or less conscious of the thought: "I am not being myself:" the male world is harsh, sharp edged, its voices are too resounding, the lights are too crude, the contacts rough. With other women, a woman is behind the scenes; she is polishing her equipment, but not in battle; she is getting her costume together, preparing her make-up, laying out her tactics; she is lingering in dressing-gown and slippers in the wings before making her entrance on the stage; she likes this warm, easy, relaxed atmosphere. . . .

For some women this warm and frivolous intimacy is dearer than the serious pomp of relations with men.⁸

Very commonly the back region of a performance is located at one end of the place where the performance is presented, being cut off from it by a partition and guarded passageway. By having the front and back regions adjacent in this way, a performer out in front can receive backstage assistance while the performance is in progress and can interrupt his performance momentarily for brief periods of relaxation. In general, of course, the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude.

Since the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage and since performers behave out of character while there, it is natural to expect that the passage from the front region to the back region will be kept closed to members of the audience or that the entire back region will be kept hidden from them. This is a widely practiced technique of impression management, and requires further discussion.

⁸ De Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

Obviously, control of backstage plays a significant role in the process of "work control" whereby individuals attempt to buffer themselves from the deterministic demands that surround them. If a factory worker is to succeed in giving the appearance of working hard all day, then he must have a safe place to hide the jig that enables him to turn out a day's work with less than a full day's effort.⁹ If the bereaved are to be given the illusion that the dead one is really in a deep and tranquil sleep, then the undertaker must be able to keep the bereaved from the workroom where the corpses are drained, stuffed, and painted in preparation for their final performance.¹⁰ If a mental hospital staff is to give a good impression of the hospital to those who come to visit their committed kinfolk, then it will be important to be able to bar visitors from the wards, especially the chronic wards, restricting the outsiders to special visiting rooms where it will be practicable to have relatively nice furnishings and to ensure that all patients present are well dressed, well washed, well handled and relatively well behaved. So, too, in many service trades, the customer is asked to leave the thing that needs service and to go away so that the tradesman can work in private. When the customer returns for his automobile—or watch, or trousers, or radio—it is presented to him in good working order, an order that incidentally conceals the amount and kind of work that had to be done, the number of mistakes that were first made before getting it fixed, and other details the client would have to

⁹ See Orvis Collins, Melville Dalton, and Donald Roy, "Restriction of Output and Social Cleavage in Industry," *Applied Anthropology* (now *Human Organization*), IV, pp. 1-14, esp. p. 9.

¹⁰ Mr. Habenstein has suggested in seminar that in some states the undertaker has a legal right to prevent relatives of the deceased from entering the workroom where the corpse is in preparation. Presumably the sight of what has to be done to the dead to make them look attractive would be too great a shock for non-professionals and especially for kinfolk of the deceased. Mr. Habenstein also suggests that kinfolk may want to be kept from the undertaker's workroom because of their own fear of their own morbid curiosity.

know before being able to judge the reasonableness of the fee that is asked of him.

Service personnel so commonly take for granted the right to keep the audience away from the back region that attention is drawn more to cases where this common strategy cannot be applied than to cases where it can. For example, the American filling station manager has numerous troubles in this regard.¹¹ If a repair is needed, customers often refuse to leave their automobile overnight or all day, in trust of the establishment, as they would do had they taken their automobile to a garage. Further, when the mechanic makes repairs and adjustments, customers often feel they have the right to watch him as he does his work. If an illusionary service is to be rendered and charged for, it must, therefore, be rendered before the very person who is to be taken in by it. Customers, in fact, not only disregard the right of the station personnel to their own back region but often also define the whole station as a kind of open city for males, a place where an individual runs the risk of getting his clothes dirty and therefore has the right to demand full backstage privileges. Male motorists will saunter in, tip back their hats, spit, swear, and ask for free service or free travel advice. They will barge in to make familiar use of the toilet, the station's tools, the office telephone, or to search in the stockroom for their own supplies.¹² In order

¹¹ The statements which follow are taken from a study by Social Research, Inc., of two hundred small-business managers.

¹² At a sports car garage the following scene was reported to me by the manager regarding a customer who went into the storeroom himself to obtain a gasket, presenting it to the manager from behind the storeroom counter:

Customer: "How much?"

Manager: "Sir, where did you get in and what would happen if you went behind the counter in a bank and got a roll of nickels and brought them to the teller?"

Customer: "But this ain't a bank."

Manager: "Well, those are my nickels. Now, what did you want, sir?"

Customer: "If that's the way you feel about it, OK. That's your privilege. I want a gasket for a '51 Anglia."

to avoid traffic lights, motorists will cut right across the station driveway, oblivious to the manager's proprietary rights.

Shetland Hotel provides another example of the problems workers face when they have insufficient control of their backstage. Within the hotel kitchen, where the guests' food was prepared and where the staff ate and spent their day, crofters' culture tended to prevail. It will be useful to suggest some of the details of this culture here.

In the kitchen, crofter employer-employee relations prevailed. Reciprocal first-naming was employed, although the scullery boy was fourteen and the male owner over thirty. The owning couple and employees ate together, participating with relative equality in mealtime small talk and gossip. When the owners held informal kitchen parties for friends and extended kin, the hotel workers participated. This pattern of intimacy and equality between management and employees was inconsistent with the appearance both elements of the staff gave when guests were present, as it was inconsistent with the guests' notions of the social distance which ought to obtain between the official with whom they corresponded when arranging for their stay, and the porters and maids who carried luggage upstairs, polished the guests' shoes each night, and emptied their chamber pots.

Similarly, in the hotel kitchen, island eating patterns were employed. Meat, when available, tended to be boiled. Fish, often eaten, tended to be boiled or salted. Potatoes, an inevitable item in the day's one big meal, were almost always boiled in their jackets and eaten in the island manner: each eater selects a potato by hand from the central bowl, then pierces it with his fork and skins it with his knife, keeping the peels in a neat pile alongside his place, to be scooped in with his knife after the meal is finished. Oilcloth was used as a cover for the table. Almost every meal was

Manager: "That's for a '54."

While the manager's anecdote may not be a faithful reproduction of the words and actions that were actually interchanged, it does tell us something faithful about his situation and his feelings in it.

preceded by a bowl of soup, and soup bowls, instead of plates, tended to be used for the courses that came after. (Since most of the food was boiled anyway, this was a practical usage.) Forks and knives were sometimes grasped fist-like, and tea was served in cups without saucers. While the island diet in many ways seemed to be adequate, and while island table manners could be executed with great delicacy and circumspection—and often were—the whole eating complex was well understood by islanders to be not only different from the British middle-class pattern, but somehow a violation of it. Perhaps this difference in pattern was most evident on occasions when food given to guests was also eaten in the kitchen. (This was not uncommon and was not more common because the staff often preferred island food to what the guests were given.) At such times the kitchen portion of the food was prepared and served in the island manner, with little stress on individual pieces and cuts, and more stress on a common source of servings. Often the remains of a joint of meat or the broken remains of a batch of tarts would be served—the same food as appeared in the guest dining hall but in a slightly different condition, yet one not offensive by island kitchen standards. And if a pudding made from stale bread and cake did not pass the test of what was good enough for guests, it was eaten in the kitchen.

Crofter clothing and postural patterns also tended to appear in the hotel kitchen. Thus, the manager would sometimes follow local custom and leave his cap on; the scullery boys would use the coal bucket as a target for the well-aimed expulsion of mucus; and the women on the staff would rest sitting with their legs up in unladylike positions.

In addition to these differences due to culture, there were other sources of discrepancy between kitchen ways and parlor ways in the hotel, for some of the standards of hotel service that were shown or implied in the guests' regions were not fully adhered to in the kitchen. In the scullery wing of the kitchen region, mold would sometimes form on soup yet to be used. Over the kitchen stove, wet socks would be dried on the steaming kettle—a standard practice

on the island. Tea, when guests had asked for it newly infused, would be brewed in a pot encrusted at the bottom with tea leaves that were weeks old. Fresh herrings would be cleaned by splitting them and then scraping out the innards with newspaper. Pats of butter, softened, misshapen, and partly used during their sojourn in the dining hall, would be rerolled to look fresh, and sent out to do duty again. Rich puddings, too good for kitchen consumption, would be sampled aggressively by the finger-full before distribution to the guests. During the mealtime rush hour, once-used drinking glasses would sometimes be merely emptied and wiped instead of being rewashed, thus allowing them to be put back into circulation quickly.¹³

Given, then, the various ways in which activity in the kitchen contradicted the impression fostered in the guests' region of the hotel, one can appreciate why the doors leading from the kitchen to the other parts of the hotel were a constant sore spot in the organization of work. The maids wanted to keep the doors open to make it easier to carry food trays back and forth, to gather information about whether guests were ready or not for the service which was to be performed for them, and to retain as much contact as possible with the persons they had come to work to learn about. Since the maids played a servant role before the guests, they felt they did not have too much to lose by being observed in their own milieu by guests who glanced into the kitchen when passing the open doors. The managers, on the other hand, wanted to keep the door closed so that the middle-class role imputed to them by the guests would not be discredited by a disclosure of their kitchen habits. Hardly a day passed when these doors were not angrily banged shut and angrily pushed open. A kick-door

¹³ These illustrations of the discrepancy between the reality and appearances of standards should not be considered extreme. Close observation of the backstage of any middle-class home in Western cities would be likely to disclose discrepancies between reality and appearance that were equally as great. And wherever there is some degree of commercialization, discrepancies no doubt are often greater.

of the kind modern restaurants use would have provided a partial solution for this staging problem. A small glass window in the doors that could act as a peephole—a stage device used by many small places of business—would also have been helpful.

Another interesting example of backstage difficulties is found in radio and television broadcasting work. In these situations, back region tends to be defined as all places where the camera is not focused at the moment or all places out of range of “live” microphones. Thus an announcer may hold the sponsor’s product up at arm’s length in front of the camera while he holds his nose with his other hand, his face being out of the picture, as a way of joking with his teammates. Professionals, of course, tell many exemplary tales of how persons who thought they were backstage were in fact on the air and how this backstage conduct discredited the definition of the situation being maintained on the air. For technical reasons, then, the walls that broadcasters have to hide behind can be very treacherous, tending to fall at the flick of a switch or a turn of the camera. Broadcasting artists must live with this staging contingency.

A somewhat related instance of special backstage difficulty is to be found in the architecture of some current housing projects. For walls that are really thin partitions can separate domestic establishments visually, but allow the backstage and frontstage activity of one unit to sound through into the neighboring establishment. Thus, British researchers employ the term “party wall,” and describe its consequences in this way:

Residents are aware of many “vicinal” noises, extending from the usual clamor of birthday celebrations to the sound of the daily routine. Informants mention the wireless, the baby crying at night, coughing, shoes dropped at bedtime, children running up and down the stairs or on the bedroom floors, strumming at the piano, and laughing or loud talk. In the connubial bedroom, the intimations from the neighbor may be shocking: “You

can even hear them use the pot; that's how bad it is. It's terrible"; or disturbing: "I heard them having a row in bed. One wanted to read, and the other one wanted to go to sleep. It's embarrassing to hear noises in bed, so I turned my bed the other way round" . . . "I like to read in bed and I'm light of hearing, so it disturbs me to hear them talk"; or a little inhibiting: "You sometimes hear them say rather private things, as, for example, a man telling his wife that her feet are cold. It makes you feel that *you* must say private things in a whisper"; and, "It does make you feel a bit restrained, as if you ought to walk on tiptoe into our bedroom at night."¹⁴

Here neighbors who may know each other very little find themselves in the embarrassing position of knowing that each knows about the other too well.

A final example of backstage difficulties may be cited from the contingencies of being an exalted person. Persons may become so sacred that the only fitting appearance they can make is in the center of a retinue and ceremony; it may be thought improper for them to appear before others in any other context, as such informal appearances may be thought to discredit the magical attributes imputed to them. Therefore members of the audience must be prohibited from all the places the exalted one is likely to relax in, and if the place for relaxation is large, as in the case of the Chinese emperor in the nineteenth century, or if there is uncertainty about where the exalted one will be, problems of trespass become considerable. Thus Queen Victoria enforced the rule that anyone seeing her approach when she was driving in her pony-cart on the palace grounds should turn his head or walk in another direction; therefore great statesmen sometimes were required to sacrifice their own dignity and jump behind the shrubbery when the queen unexpectedly approached.¹⁵

¹⁴ Leo Kuper, "Blueprint for Living Together," in Leo Kuper and others, *Living in Towns* (London: The Cresset Press, 1953), pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

While some of these examples of back region difficulty are extreme, it would seem that no social establishment can be studied where some problems associated with backstage control do not occur.

Work and recreation regions represent two areas for backstage control. Another area is suggested by the very widespread tendency in our society to give performers control over the place in which they attend to what are called biological needs. In our society, defecation involves an individual in activity which is defined as inconsistent with the cleanliness and purity standards expressed in many of our performances. Such activity also causes the individual to disarrange his clothing and to "go out of play," that is, to drop from his face the expressive mask that he employs in face-to-face interaction. At the same time it becomes difficult for him to reassemble his personal front should the need to enter into interaction suddenly occur. Perhaps that is a reason why toilet doors in our society have locks on them. When asleep in bed the individual is also immobilized, expressively speaking, and may not be able to bring himself into an appropriate position for interaction or bring a sociable expression to his face until some moments after being wakened, thus providing one explanation of the tendency to remove the bedroom from the active part of the house. The utility of such seclusion is reinforced by the fact that sexual activity is likely to occur in bedrooms, a form of interaction which also renders its performers incapable of immediately entering into another interaction.

One of the most interesting times to observe impression management is the moment when a performer leaves the back region and enters the place where the audience is to be found, or when he returns therefrom, for at these moments one can detect a wonderful putting on and taking off of character. Orwell, speaking of waiters, and speaking from the backstage point of view of dishwashers, provides us with an example:

It is an instructive sight to see a waiter going into a hotel dining-room. As he passes the door a sudden

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Leo Kuper
(Press, 1953),

change comes over him. The set of his shoulders alters; all the dirt and hurry and irritation have dropped off in an instant. He glides over the carpet, with a solemn priest-like air. I remember our assistant *maitre d'hôtel*, a fiery Italian, pausing at the dining-room door to address his apprentice who had broken a bottle of wine. Shaking his fist above his head he yelled (luckily the door was more or less soundproof).

"*Tu me fais*— Do you call yourself a waiter, you young bastard? You a waiter! You're not fit to scrub floors in the brothel your mother came from. *Maquereau!*"

Words failing him, he turned to the door; and as he opened it he delivered a final insult in the same manner as Squire Western in *Tom Jones*.

Then he entered the dining-room and sailed across it dish in hand, graceful as a swan. Ten seconds later he was bowing reverently to a customer. And you could not help thinking, as you saw him bow and smile, with that benign smile of the trained waiter, that the customer was put to shame by having such an aristocrat to serve him.¹⁶

Another illustration is provided by another English downwardly-participating observer:

The said maid—her name was Addie, I discovered—and the two waitresses were behaving like people acting in a play. They would sweep into the kitchen as if coming off stage into the wings, with trays held high and a tense expression of hauteur still on their faces; relax for a moment in the frenzy of getting the new dishes loaded, and glide off again with faces prepared to make their next entrance. The cook and I were left like stagehands among the debris, as if having seen a glimpse of another world, we almost listened for the applause of the unseen audience.¹⁷

¹⁶ George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951), pp. 68–69.

¹⁷ Monica Dickens, *One Pair of Hands* (London: Michael Joseph, Mermaid Books, 1952), p. 13.

The decline of domestic service has forced quick changes of the kind mentioned by Orwell upon the middle-class housewife. In serving a dinner for friends she must manage the kitchen dirty work in such a way as to enable her to switch back and forth between the roles of domestic and hostess, altering her activity, her manner, and her temper, as she passes in and out of the dining room. Etiquette books provide helpful directions for facilitating such changes, suggesting that if the hostess must withdraw to a back region for an extended period of time, as when making up the beds, then it will protect appearances if the host takes the guests for a little walk in the garden.

The line dividing front and back regions is illustrated everywhere in our society. As suggested, the bathroom and bedroom, in all but lower-class homes, are places from which the downstairs audience can be excluded. Bodies that are cleansed, clothed, and made up in these rooms can be presented to friends in others. In the kitchen, of course, there is done to food what in the bathroom and bedroom is done to the human body. It is, in fact, the presence of these staging devices that distinguishes middle-class living from lower-class living. But in all classes in our society there is a tendency to make a division between the front and back parts of residential exteriors. The front tends to be relatively well decorated, well repaired, and tidy; the rear tends to be relatively unprepossessing. Correspondingly, social adults enter through the front, and often the socially incomplete—domestics, delivery men, and children—enter through the rear.

While we are familiar with the stage arrangements in and around a dwelling place, we tend to be less aware of other stage arrangements. In American residential neighborhoods, boys of eight to fourteen and other profane persons appreciate that entrances to back lanes and alleys lead somewhere and are to be used; they see these openings in a vivid way that will be lost to them when they become older. Similarly, janitors and scrubwomen have a clear perception of the small doors that lead to the back regions of business buildings and are intimately familiar with the pro-

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fane transportation system for secretly transporting dirty cleaning equipment, large stage props, and themselves. There is a similar arrangement in stores, where places "behind the counter" and the storeroom serve as back regions.

Given the values of a particular society, it is apparent that the backstage character of certain places is built into them in a material way, and that relative to adjacent areas these places are inescapably back regions. In our society the decorator's art often does this for us, apportioning dark colors and open brickwork to the service parts of buildings and white plaster to the front regions. Pieces of fixed equipment add permanency to this division. Employers complete the harmony by hiring persons with undesirable visual attributes for back region work, placing persons who "make a good impression" in the front regions. Reserves of unimpressive-looking labor can be used not only for activity that must be concealed from the audience, but also for activity that can be concealed but need not. As Everett Hughes has suggested,¹⁸ Negro employees can more easily than otherwise be given staff status in American factories if, as in the case of chemists, they can be sequestered from the main areas of factory operation. (All of this involves a kind of ecological sorting that is well known but little studied.) And often it is expected that those who work backstage will achieve technical standards while those who work in the front region will achieve expressive ones.

The decorations and permanent fixtures in a place where a particular performance is usually given, as well as the performers and performance usually found there, tend to fix a kind of spell over it; even when the customary performance is not being given in it, the place tends to retain some of its front region character. Thus a cathedral and a schoolroom retain something of their tone even when only repairmen are present, and while these men may not behave reverently while doing their work, their irreverence tends to be of a structured kind, specifically oriented to what in some sense they ought to be feeling but are not. So, too, a given

¹⁸ In seminar, University of Chicago.

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place may become so identified as a hide-out where certain standards need not be maintained that it becomes fixed with an identity as a back region. Hunting lodges and locker rooms in athletic social establishments may serve as illustrations. Summer resorts, too, seem to fix permissiveness regarding front, allowing otherwise conventional people to appear in public streets in costumes they would not ordinarily wear in the presence of strangers. So, too, criminal hangouts and even criminal neighborhoods are to be found, where the act of being "legit" need not be maintained. An interesting example of this is said to have existed in Paris:

In the seventeenth century, therefore, in order to become a thorough Argotier, it was necessary not only to solicit alms like any mere beggar, but also to possess the dexterity of the cut-purse and the thief. These arts were to be learned in the places which served as the habitual rendezvous of the very dregs of society, and which were generally known as the *Cours des Miracles*. These houses, or rather resorts, had been so called, if we are to believe a writer of the early part of the seventeenth century, "Because rogues . . . and others, who have all day been cripples, maimed, dropsical, and beset with every sort of bodily ailment, come home at night, carrying under their arms a sirloin of beef, a joint of veal, or a leg of mutton, not forgetting to hang a bottle of wine to their belts, and, on entering the court, they throw aside their crutches, resume their healthy and lusty appearance, and, in imitation of the ancient Bacchanalian revelries, dance all kinds of dances with their trophies in their hands, whilst the host is preparing their suppers. Can there be a greater *miracle* than is to be seen in this court, where the maimed walk upright?"¹⁹

In back regions such as these, the very fact that an important effect is not striven for tends to set the tone for

¹⁹ Paul LaCroix, *Manners, Custom, and Dress during the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance Period* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876), p. 471.

interaction, leading those who find themselves there to act as if they were on familiar terms with one another in all matters.

However, while there is a tendency for a region to become identified as the front region or back region of a performance with which it is regularly associated, still there are many regions which function at one time and in one sense as a front region and at another time and in another sense as a back region. Thus the private office of an executive is certainly the front region where his status in the organization is intensively expressed by means of the quality of his office furnishings. And yet it is here that he can take his jacket off, loosen his tie, keep a bottle of liquor handy, and act in a chummy and even boisterous way with fellow executives of his own rank.²⁰ So, too, a business organization that employs a presentable fancy bond letterhead paper for correspondence with persons outside the firm may follow this advice:

Paper for interoffice correspondence is bound by economics more than by etiquette. Cheap paper, colored paper, mimeographed or printed paper—anything goes when “it’s all in the family.”²¹

And yet the same source of advice will suggest some limits to this backstage definition of the situation:

Personalized memo paper, usually intended for scribbled notes within the office, can also be practical and uninhibited. One caution: juniors should not order such

²⁰ The fact that a small private office can be transformed into a back region by the manageable method of being the only one in it provides one reason why stenographers sometimes prefer to work in a private office as opposed to a large office floor. On a large open floor someone is always likely to be present before whom an impression of industriousness must be maintained; in a small office all pretense of work and decorous behavior can be dropped when the boss is out. See Richard Rencke, “The Status Characteristics of Jobs in a Factory” (unpublished Master’s thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1953), p. 53.

²¹ *Esquire Etiquette*, p. 65.

memo pads, however convenient, on their own. Like a rug on the floor and a name on the door, the personalized memo pad is a status symbol in some offices.²²

Similarly, of a Sunday morning, a whole household can use the wall around its domestic establishment to conceal a relaxing slovenliness in dress and civil endeavor, extending to all rooms the informality that is usually restricted to the kitchen and bedrooms. So, too, in American middle-class neighborhoods, on afternoons the line between the children's playground and home may be defined as backstage by mothers, who pass along it wearing jeans, loafers and a minimum of make-up, a cigarette dangling from their lips as they push their baby carriages and openly talk shop with their colleagues. So also, in working-class *quartiers* in Paris in the early morning, women feel they have a right to extend the backstage to their circle of neighboring shops, and they patter down for milk and fresh bread, wearing bedroom slippers, bathrobe, hair net, and no make-up. One finds in the chief American cities that models, wearing the dress that they will be photographed in, may carefully hurry through the most formal streets, partly oblivious to those around them; hatbox in hand, net protecting their coiffure, they may carry themselves not to create an effect but to avoid disarranging themselves while in transit to the building-backdrop before which their real, photographed performance will begin. And, of course, a region that is thoroughly established as a front region for the regular performance of a particular routine often functions as a back region before and after each performance, for at these times the permanent fixtures may undergo repair, restoration, and rearrangement, or the performers may hold dress rehearsals. To see this we need only glance into a restaurant, or store, or home, a few minutes before these establishments are opened to us for the day. In general, then, it must be kept in mind that in speaking of front and back regions we speak from the reference point of a particular performance, and we speak of the function that

²² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the place happens to serve at that time for the given performance.

It was suggested that persons who co-operate in staging the same team-performance tend to be in a familiar relation to one another. This familiarity tends to be expressed only when the audience is not present, for it conveys an impression of self and teammate which is ordinarily inconsistent with the impression of self and teammate one wants to sustain before the audience. Since back regions are typically out of bounds to members of the audience, it is here that we may expect reciprocal familiarity to determine the tone of social intercourse. Similarly, it is in the front region that we may expect a tone of formality to prevail.

Throughout Western society there tends to be one informal or backstage language of behavior, and another language of behavior for occasions when a performance is being presented. The backstage language consists of reciprocal first-naming, co-operative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking, rough informal dress, "sloppy" sitting and standing posture, use of dialect or sub-standard speech, mumbling and shouting, playful aggressivity and "kidding," inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor physical self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching, and flatulence. The frontstage behavior language can be taken as the absence (and in some sense the opposite) of this. In general, then, backstage conduct is one which allows minor acts which might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present and for the region, while front region conduct is one which disallows such potentially offensive behavior. It may be noted here that backstage behavior has what psychologists might call a "regressive" character. The question, of course, is whether a backstage gives individuals an opportunity to regress or whether regression, in the clinical sense, is backstage conduct invoked on inappropriate occasions for motives that are not socially approved.

By invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform

any region into a backstage. Thus we find that in many social establishments the performers will appropriate a section of the front region and by acting there in a familiar fashion symbolically cut it off from the rest of the region. For instance, in some restaurants in America, especially those called "one-arm joints," the staff will hold court in the booth farthest from the door or closest to the kitchen, and there conduct themselves, at least in some respects, as if they were backstage. Similarly, on uncrowded evening airline flights, after their initial duties have been performed, stewardesses may settle down in the rearmost seat, change from regulation pumps into loafers, light up a cigarette, and there create a muted circle of non-service relaxation, even at times extending this to include the one or two closest passengers.

More important, one ought not to expect that concrete situations will provide pure examples of informal conduct or formal conduct, although there is usually a tendency to move the definition of the situation in one of these two directions. We will not find these pure cases because teammates in regard to one show will be to some degree performers and audience for another show, and performers and audience for one show will to some extent, however slight, be teammates with respect to another show. Thus in a concrete situation we may expect a predominance of one style or the other, with some feelings of guilt or doubt concerning the actual combination or balance that is achieved between the two styles.

I would like to emphasize the fact that activity in a concrete situation is always a compromise between the formal and informal styles. Three common limitations on backstage informality are therefore cited. First, when the audience is not present, each member of the team is likely to want to sustain the impression that he can be trusted with the secrets of the team and that he is not likely to play his part badly when the audience is present. While each team member will want the audience to think of him as a worthy character, he is likely to want his teammates to

think of him as a loyal, well-disciplined performer. Secondly, there are often moments backstage when the performers will have to sustain one another's morale and maintain the impression that the show that is about to be presented will go over well or that the show that has just been presented did not really go over so badly. Thirdly, if the team contains representatives of fundamental social divisions, such as different age-grades, different ethnic groups, etc., then some discretionary limits will prevail on freedom of backstage activity. Here, no doubt, the most important division is the sexual one, for there seems to be no society in which members of the two sexes, however closely related, do not sustain some appearances before each other. In America, for instance, we learn the following about West Coast shipyards:

In their ordinary relationships with women workers most of the men were courteous and even gallant. As the women infiltrated the hulls and the remoter shacks of the yard, the men amiably removed their galleries of nudes and pornography from the walls and retired them to the gloom of the tool box. In deference to the presence of "ladies," manners were improved, faces were shaved more often, and language was toned down. The taboo against improprieties of speech within earshot of women was so extreme as to be amusing, particularly since the women themselves frequently gave audible proof that the forbidden words were neither unfamiliar nor disturbing to them. Yet I have often seen men who wanted to use strong language, and with good excuse for it, flush with sudden embarrassment and drop their voices to a mutter on becoming conscious of a feminine audience. In the lunchtime companionship of men and women workers and in the casual chat at any leisure moment, in all that pertained to familiar social contacts, even amid the unfamiliar surroundings of the shipyards, the men preserved almost intact the pattern of behavior which they practiced at home: the respect for the decent wife and the good mother, the circumspect friendliness with the sister,

and even the protective affection for the inexperienced daughter of the family.²³

Chesterfield makes a similar suggestion about another society:

In mixed companies with your equals (for in mixed companies all people are to a certain degree equal) greater ease and liberty are allowed; but they too have their bounds within *bienseance*. There is a social respect necessary; you may start your own subject of conversation with modesty, taking great care, however, *de ne jamais parler de cordes dans la maison d'un pendu*. Your words, gestures, and attitudes, have a greater degree of latitude, though by no means an unbounded one. You may have your hands in your pockets, take snuff, sit, stand, or occasionally walk, as you like; but I believe you would not think it very *bienseant* to whistle, put your hat on, loosen your garters or your buckles, lie down upon a couch, or go to bed and welter in an easy chair. These are negligences and freedoms which one can only take when quite alone; they are injurious to superiors, shocking and offensive to equals, brutal and insulting to inferiors.²⁴

Kinsey's data on the extent of the nudity taboo between husband and wife, especially in the older generation of the American working class, documents the same point.²⁵ Modesty, of course, is not the sole force operating here. Thus, two female informants in Shetland Isle claimed they would always wear a nightgown to bed after their impending marriages—not because of mere modesty but because their figures departed too far from what they considered to be the modern urban ideal. They could point to one or two of their girl friends whom they claimed had no need for

²³ Archibald, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17.

²⁴ *Letters of Lord Chesterfield to His Son* (Everyman's ed.; New York: Dutton, 1929), p. 239.

²⁵ Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948), p. 366–67.

this delicacy; presumably a sudden loss of weight might diminish their own modesty too.

In saying that performers act in a relatively informal, familiar, relaxed way while backstage and are on their guard when giving a performance, it should not be assumed that the pleasant interpersonal things of life—courtesy, warmth, generosity, and pleasure in the company of others—are always reserved for those backstage and that suspiciousness, snobbishness, and a show of authority are reserved for front region activity. Often it seems that whatever enthusiasm and lively interest we have at our disposal we reserve for those before whom we are putting on a show and that the surest sign of backstage solidarity is to feel that it is safe to lapse into an asocial mood of sullen, silent irritability.

It is interesting to note that while each team will be in a position to appreciate the unsavory "unperformed" aspects of its own backstage behavior, it is not likely to be in a position to come to a similar conclusion about the teams with which it interacts. When pupils leave the schoolroom and go outside for a recess of familiarity and misconduct, they often fail to appreciate that their teachers have retired to a "common room" to swear and smoke in a similar recess of backstage behavior. We know, of course, that a team with only one member can take a very dark view of itself and that not a few psychotherapists find employment in alleviating this guilt, making their living by telling individuals the facts of other people's lives. Behind these realizations about oneself and illusions about others is one of the important dynamics and disappointments of social mobility, be it mobility upward, downward, or sideways. In attempting to escape from a two-faced world of front region and back region behavior, individuals may feel that in the new position they are attempting to acquire they will be the character projected by individuals in that position and not at the same time a performer. When they arrive, of course, they find their new situation has unanticipated similarities with their old one; both involve a presentation of front to

an audience and both involve the presenter in the grubby, gossipy business of staging a show.

It is sometimes thought that coarse familiarity is merely a cultural thing, a characteristic, say, of the working classes, and that those of high estate do not conduct themselves in this way. The point, of course, is that persons of high rank tend to operate in small teams and tend to spend much of their day engaged in spoken performances, whereas working-class men tend to be members of large teams and tend to spend much of their day backstage or in unspoken performances. Thus the higher one's place in the status pyramid, the smaller the number of persons with whom one can be familiar, the less time one spends backstage, and the more likely it is that one will be required to be polite as well as decorous. However, when the time and company are right, quite sacred performers will act, and be required to act, in a quite vulgar fashion. For numerical and strategic reasons, however, we are likely to learn that laborers use a backstage manner and unlikely to learn that lords use it too. An interesting limiting case of this situation is found in connection with heads of state, who have no teammates. Sometimes these individuals may make use of a set of cronies to whom they give a courtesy rank of teammate when moments of relaxing recreation are called for, this constituting an instance of the "side-kick" function previously considered. Court equerries often fill this office, as Ponsonby illustrates in his description of King Edward's visit in 1904 to the Danish Court:

Dinner consisted of several courses and many wines, and usually lasted one and a half hours. We then all filed out arm in arm to the drawing-room, where again the King of Denmark and all the Danish Royal Family circled round the room. At eight we retired to our rooms to smoke, but as the Danish suite accompanied us the conversation was limited to polite enquiries into the customs of the two countries. At nine we returned to the drawing-room where we played round games, generally Loo, without stakes.

At ten we were mercifully released and allowed to go to our rooms. These evenings were a high trial to everyone, but the King behaved like an angel, playing whist, which was then quite out of date, for very low points. After a week of this, however, he determined to play bridge, but only after the King of Denmark had retired to bed. We went through the usual routine till ten o'clock, and then Prince Demidoff of the Russian Legation came to the King's rooms and played bridge with the King, Seymour Fortescue, and myself, for fairly high points. We continued thus till the end of the visit, and it was a pleasure to relax ourselves from the stiffness of the Danish Court.²⁶

A final point must be suggested about backstage relationships. When we say that persons who co-operate in presenting a performance may express familiarity with one another when not in the presence of the audience, it must be allowed that one can become so habituated to one's front region activity (and front region character) that it may be necessary to handle one's relaxation from it as a performance. One may feel obliged, when backstage, to act out of character in a familiar fashion and this can come to be more of a pose than the performance for which it was meant to provide a relaxation.

In this chapter I have spoken of the utility of control over backstage and of the dramaturgical trouble that arises when this control cannot be exerted. I would like now to consider the problem of controlling access to the front region, but in order to do so it will be necessary to extend a little the original frame of reference.

Two kinds of bounded regions have been considered: front regions where a particular performance is or may be in progress, and back regions where action occurs that is related to the performance but inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance. It would seem reasonable to add a third region, a residual one, namely, all places other than the two already identified. Such a region could

²⁶ Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

be called "the outside." The notion of an outside region that is neither front nor back with respect to a particular performance conforms to our common-sense notion of social establishments, for when we look at most buildings we find within them rooms that are regularly or temporarily used as back regions and front regions, and we find that the outer walls of the building cut both types of rooms off from the outside world. Those individuals who are on the outside of the establishment we may call "outsiders."

While the notion of outside is obvious, unless handled with care it can mislead and confuse us, for when we shift our consideration from the front or back region to the outside we tend also to shift our point of reference from one performance to another. Given a particular ongoing performance as a point of reference, those who are outside will be persons for whom the performers actually or potentially put on a show, but a show (as we shall see) different from, or all too similar to, the one in progress. When outsiders unexpectedly enter the front or the back region of a particular performance-in-progress, the consequence of their inopportune presence can often best be studied not in terms of its effects upon the performance-in-progress but rather in terms of its effects upon a different performance, namely, the one which the performers or the audience would ordinarily present before the outsiders at a time and place when the outsiders would be the anticipated audience.

Other kinds of conceptual care are also required. The wall that cuts the front and back regions off from the outside obviously has a function to play in the performance staged and presented in these regions, but the outside decorations of the building must in part be seen as an aspect of another show; and sometimes the latter contribution may be the more important one. Thus, of houses in an English village we learn:

The type of curtain material to be found on the windows of most village houses varied directly in proportion to the general visibility of each window. The "best" curtains were to be found where they could be most clearly seen,

and were far superior to those on windows which were hidden from the public. Furthermore, it was common for that kind of material which has a design printed on one side only to be used in such a way that the design faced outwards. This use of the most "fashionable" and most expensive material so that it can be seen to the best advantage is a typical device for gaining prestige.²⁷

In Chapter One of this report it was suggested that performers tend to give the impression, or tend not to contradict the impression, that the role they are playing at the time is their most important role and that the attributes claimed by or imputed to them are their most essential and characteristic attributes. When individuals witness a show that was not meant for them, they may, then, become disillusioned about this show as well as about the show that was meant for them. The performer, too, may become confused, as Kenneth Burke suggests:

We are all, in our compartmentalized responses, like the man who is a tyrant in his office and a weakling among his family, or like the musician who is assertive in his art and self-effacing in his personal relationships. Such dissociation becomes a difficulty when we attempt to unite these compartments (as, were the man who is a tyrant in his office and a weakling in his home suddenly to employ his wife or children, he would find his dissociative devices inadequate, and might become bewildered and tormented).²⁸

These problems can become especially acute when one of the individual's shows depends upon an elaborate stage setting. Hence the implied disillusionment in Herman Melville's discussion of how the captain of his ship did not "see" him whenever they met on board but was affable to him when, after Melville's period of service, they chanced to meet socially at a Washington party:

²⁷ W. M. Williams, *The Sociology of an English Village* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 112.

²⁸ Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1953), fn. p. 309.

And though, while on board the frigate, the commodore never in any manner personally addressed me—nor did I him—yet, at the Minister's social entertainment, we *there* became exceedingly chatty; nor did I fail to observe, among that crowd of foreign dignitaries and magnates from all parts of America, that my worthy friend did not appear so exalted as when leaning, in solitary state, against the brass railing of the Neversink's quarterdeck. Like many other gentlemen, he appeared to the best advantage, and was treated with the most deference in the bosom of his home, the frigate.²⁹

The answer to this problem is for the performer to segregate his audiences so that the individuals who witness him in one of his roles will not be the individuals who witness him in another of his roles. Thus some French Canadian priests do not want to lead so strict a life that they cannot go swimming at the beach with friends, but they tend to feel that it is best to swim with persons who are not their parishioners, since the familiarity required at the beach is incompatible with the distance and respect required in the parish. Front region control is one measure of audience segregation. Incapacity to maintain this control leaves the performer in a position of not knowing what character he will have to project from one moment to the next, making it difficult for him to effect a dramaturgical success in any one of them. It is not difficult to sympathize with the pharmacist who acts like a salesman or like a begrimed stockman to a customer who proves to have a prescription in her hand, while at the next moment he projects his dignified, disinterested, medical, professionally-spotless pose to someone who happens to want a three-cent stamp or a chocolate fudge sundae.³⁰

It should be clear that just as it is useful for the performer to exclude persons from the audience who see him in another and inconsistent presentation, so also is it useful for

²⁹ Herman Melville, *White Jacket* (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), p. 277.

³⁰ See Weinlein, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-48.

the performer to exclude from the audience those before whom he performed in the past a show inconsistent with the current one. Persons who are strongly upward or downward mobile accomplish this in a grand manner by making sure to leave the place of their origins. And just as it is convenient to play one's different routines before different persons, so also is it convenient to separate the different audiences one has for the same routine, since that is the only way in which each audience can feel that while there may be other audiences for the same routine, none is getting so desirable a presentation of it. Here again front region control is important.

By proper scheduling of one's performances, it is possible not only to keep one's audiences separated from each other (by appearing before them in different front regions or sequentially in the same region) but also to allow a few moments in between performances so as to extricate oneself psychologically and physically from one personal front, while taking on another. Problems sometimes arise, however, in those social establishments where the same or different members of the team must handle different audiences at the same time. If the different audiences come within hearing distance of each other, it will be difficult to sustain the impression that each is receiving special and unique services. Thus, if a hostess wishes to give each of her guests a warm special greeting or farewell—a special performance, in fact—then she will have to arrange to do this in an anteroom that is separated from the room containing the other guests. Similarly, in cases where a firm of undertakers is required to conduct two services on the same day, it will be necessary to route the two audiences through the establishment in such a way that their paths will not cross, lest the feeling that the funeral home is a home away from home be destroyed. So, too, in furniture salesrooms, a clerk who is “switching” a customer from one suite of furniture to another of higher price must be careful to keep his audience out of earshot of another clerk who may be switching another customer from a still cheaper suite to the one from which the first clerk is trying to switch his customer, for at

such times the suite that one clerk is disparaging will be the suite that the other clerk is praising.³¹ Of course, if walls separate the two audiences, the performer can sustain the impressions he is fostering by darting rapidly from one region to another. This staging device, possible with two examining rooms, is increasingly popular among American dentists and doctors.

When audience segregation fails and an outsider happens upon a performance that was not meant for him, difficult problems in impression management arise. Two accommodative techniques for dealing with these problems may be mentioned. First, all those already in the audience may be suddenly accorded, and accept, temporary backstage status and collusively join the performer in abruptly shifting to an act that is a fitting one for the intruder to observe. Thus a husband and wife in the midst of their daily bickering, when suddenly faced with a guest of brief acquaintance, will put aside their intimate quarrels and play out between themselves a relationship that is almost as distant and friendly as the one played out for the sudden arrival. Relationships, as well as types of conversation, which cannot be shared among the three will be laid aside. In general, then, if the newcomer is to be treated in the manner to which he has become accustomed, the performer must switch rapidly from the performance he was giving to one that the newcomer will feel is proper. Rarely can this be done smoothly enough to preserve the newcomer's illusion that the show suddenly put on is the performer's natural show. And even if this is managed, the audience already present is likely to feel that what they had been taking for the performer's essential self was not so essential.

It has been suggested that an intrusion may be handled by having those present switch to a definition of the situation into which the intruder can be incorporated. A second way of handling the problem is to accord the intruder a clear-cut welcome as someone who should have been in the region all along. The same show, more or less, is thus carried

³¹ See Louise Conant, "The Borax House," *The American Mercury*, XVII, p. 172.

on, but it is made to include the newcomer. Thus when an individual pays an unexpected visit to his friends and finds them giving a party, he is usually welcomed loudly and coaxed into staying. If the welcome were not enthusiastically extended, his discovery that he has been excluded might discredit the front of friendliness and affection that obtains between the intruder and his hosts on other occasions.

Ordinarily, however, neither of these techniques seems to be very effective. Usually when intruders enter the front region, the performers tend to get ready to begin the performance they stage for the intruders at another time or place, and this sudden readiness to act in a particular way brings at least momentary confusion to the line of action the performers are already engaged in. The performers will find themselves temporarily torn between two possible realities, and until signals can be given and received members of the team may have no guide as to what line they are to follow. Embarrassment is almost certain to result. Under such circumstances it is understandable that the intruder may be accorded neither of the accommodative treatments mentioned but rather treated as if he were not there at all or quite unceremoniously asked to stay out.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

The Framework

A social establishment is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place. I have suggested that any social establishment may be studied profitably from the point of view of impression management. Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation. This will include the conception of own team and of audience and assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained by rules of politeness and decorum. We often find a division into back region, where the performance of a routine is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented. Access to these regions is controlled in order to prevent the audience from seeing backstage and to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them. Among members of the team we find that familiarity prevails, solidarity is likely to develop, and that secrets that could give the show away are shared and kept. A tacit agreement is maintained between performers and audience to act as if a given degree of opposition and of accord existed between them. Typically, but not always, agreement is stressed and opposition is underplayed. The resulting working consensus tends to be contradicted by the attitude toward the audience which the performers express in the absence of the audience and by carefully controlled communication out of character conveyed by the performers while the audience is present.

We find that discrepant roles develop: some of the individuals who are apparently teammates, or audience, or outsiders acquire information about the performance and relations to the team which are not apparent and which complicate the problem of putting on a show. Sometimes disruptions occur through unmeant gestures, faux pas, and scenes, thus discrediting or contradicting the definition of the situation that is being maintained. The mythology of the team will dwell upon these disruptive events. We find that performers, audience, and outsiders all utilize techniques for saving the show, whether by avoiding likely disruptions or by correcting for unavoided ones, or by making it possible for others to do so. To ensure that these techniques will be employed, the team will tend to select members who are loyal, disciplined, and circumspect, and to select an audience that is tactful.

These features and elements, then, comprise the framework I claim to be characteristic of much social interaction as it occurs in natural settings in our Anglo-American society. This framework is formal and abstract in the sense that it can be applied to any social establishment; it is not, however, merely a static classification. The framework bears upon dynamic issues created by the motivation to sustain a definition of the situation that has been projected before others.

The Analytical Context

This report has been chiefly concerned with social establishments as relatively closed systems. It has been assumed that the relation of one establishment to others is itself an intelligible area of study and ought to be treated analytically as part of a different order of fact—the order of institutional integration. It might be well here to try to place the perspective taken in this report in the context of other perspectives which seem to be the ones currently employed, implicitly or explicitly, in the study of social establishments as closed systems. Four such perspectives may be tentatively suggested.

An establishment may be viewed "technically," in terms of its efficiency and inefficiency as an intentionally organized system of activity for the achievement of predefined objectives. An establishment may be viewed "politically," in terms of the actions which each participant (or class of participants) can demand of other participants, the kinds of deprivations and indulgences which can be meted out in order to enforce these demands, and the kinds of social controls which guide this exercise of command and use of sanctions. An establishment may be viewed "structurally," in terms of the horizontal and vertical status divisions and the kinds of social relations which relate these several groupings to one another. Finally, an establishment may be viewed "culturally," in terms of the moral values which influence activity in the establishment—values pertaining to fashions, customs, and matters of taste, to politeness and decorum, to ultimate ends and normative restrictions on means, etc. It is to be noted that all the facts that can be discovered about an establishment are relevant to each of the four perspectives but that each perspective gives its own priority and order to these facts.

It seems to me that the dramaturgical approach may constitute a fifth perspective, to be added to the technical, political, structural, and cultural perspectives.¹ The dramaturgical perspective, like each of the other four, can be employed as the end-point of analysis, as a final way of ordering facts. This would lead us to describe the techniques of impression management employed in a given establishment, the principal problems of impression management in the establishment, and the identity and interrelationships of the several performance teams which operate in the establishment. But, as with the facts utilized in each of the other perspectives, the facts specifically pertaining to impression management also play a part in the matters that

¹ Compare the position taken by Oswald Hall in regard to possible perspectives for the study of closed systems in his "Methods and Techniques of Research in Human Relations" (April, 1952), reported in E. C. Hughes *et al.*, *Cases on Field Work* (forthcoming).

are a concern in all the other perspectives. It may be useful to illustrate this briefly.

The technical and dramaturgical perspectives intersect most clearly, perhaps, in regard to standards of work. Important for both perspectives is the fact that one set of individuals will be concerned with testing the unapparent characteristics and qualities of the work-accomplishments of another set of individuals, and this other set will be concerned with giving the impression that their work embodies these hidden attributes. The political and dramaturgical perspectives intersect clearly in regard to the capacities of one individual to direct the activity of another. For one thing, if an individual is to direct others, he will often find it useful to keep strategic secrets from them. Further, if one individual attempts to direct the activity of others by means of example, enlightenment, persuasion, exchange, manipulation, authority, threat, punishment, or coercion, it will be necessary, regardless of his power position, to convey effectively what he wants done, what he is prepared to do to get it done and what he will do if it is not done. Power of any kind must be clothed in effective means of displaying it, and will have different effects depending upon how it is dramatized. (Of course, the capacity to convey effectively a definition of the situation may be of little use if one is not in a position to give example, exchange, punishment, etc.) Thus the most objective form of naked power, i.e., physical coercion, is often neither objective nor naked but rather functions as a display for persuading the audience; it is often a means of communication, not merely a means of action. The structural and dramaturgical perspectives seem to intersect most clearly in regard to social distance. The image that one status grouping is able to maintain in the eyes of an audience of other status groupings will depend upon the performers' capacity to restrict communicative contact with the audience. The cultural and dramaturgical perspectives intersect most clearly in regard to the maintenance of moral standards. The cultural values of an establishment will determine in detail how the participants are to feel about many matters and at the same time establish

a framework of appearances that must be maintained, whether or not there is feeling behind the appearances.

Personality-Interaction-Society

In recent years there have been elaborate attempts to bring into one framework the concepts and findings derived from three different areas of inquiry: the individual personality, social interaction, and society. I would like to suggest here a simple addition to these inter-disciplinary attempts.

When an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part. When an event occurs which is expressively incompatible with this fostered impression, significant consequences are simultaneously felt in three levels of social reality, each of which involves a different point of reference and a different order of fact.

First, the social interaction, treated here as a dialogue between two teams, may come to an embarrassed and confused halt; the situation may cease to be defined, previous positions may become no longer tenable, and participants may find themselves without a charted course of action. The participants typically sense a false note in the situation and come to feel awkward, flustered, and, literally, out of countenance. In other words, the minute social system created and sustained by orderly social interaction becomes disorganized. These are the consequences that the disruption has from the point of view of social interaction.

Secondly, in addition to these disorganizing consequences for action at the moment, performance disruptions may have consequences of a more far-reaching kind. Audiences tend to accept the self projected by the individual performer during any current performance as a responsible representative of his colleague-grouping, of his team, and of his social establishment. Audiences also accept the individual's particular performance as evidence of his capacity to perform the routine and even as evidence of his capacity to perform

any routine. In a sense these larger social units—teams, establishments, etc.—become committed every time the individual performs his routine; with each performance the legitimacy of these units will tend to be tested anew and their permanent reputation put at stake. This kind of commitment is especially strong during some performances. Thus, when a surgeon and his nurse both turn from the operating table and the anesthetized patient accidentally rolls off the table to his death, not only is the operation disrupted in an embarrassing way, but the reputation of the doctor, as a doctor and as a man, and also the reputation of the hospital may be weakened. These are the consequences that disruptions may have from the point of view of social structure.

Finally, we often find that the individual may deeply involve his ego in his identification with a particular part, establishment, and group, and in his self-conception as someone who does not disrupt social interaction or let down the social units which depend upon that interaction. When a disruption occurs, then, we may find that the self-conceptions around which his personality has been built may become discredited. These are consequences that disruptions may have from the point of view of individual personality.

Performance disruptions, then, have consequences at three levels of abstraction: personality, interaction, and social structure: While the likelihood of disruption will vary widely from interaction to interaction, and while the social importance of likely disruptions will vary from interaction to interaction, still it seems that there is no interaction in which the participants do not take an appreciable chance of being slightly embarrassed or a slight chance of being deeply humiliated. Life may not be much of a gamble, but interaction is. Further, in so far as individuals make efforts to avoid disruptions or to correct for ones not avoided, these efforts, too, will have simultaneous consequences at the three levels. Here, then, we have one simple way of articulating three levels of abstraction and three perspectives from which social life has been studied.

Comparisons and Study

In this report, use has been made of illustrations from societies other than our Anglo-American one. In doing this I did not mean to imply that the framework presented here is culture-free or applicable in the same areas of social life in non-Western societies as in our own. We lead an indoor social life. We specialize in fixed settings, in keeping strangers out, and in giving the performer some privacy in which to prepare himself for the show. Once we begin a performance, we are inclined to finish it, and we are sensitive to jarring notes which may occur during it. If we are caught out in a misrepresentation we feel deeply humiliated. Given our general dramaturgical rules and inclinations for conducting action, we must not overlook areas of life in other societies in which other rules are apparently followed. Reports by Western travelers are filled with instances in which their dramaturgical sense was offended or surprised, and if we are to generalize to other cultures we must consider these instances as well as more favorable ones. We must be ready to see in China that while actions and décor may be wonderfully harmonious and coherent in a private tea-room, extremely elaborate meals may be served in extremely plain restaurants, and shops that look like hovels staffed with surly, familiar clerks may contain within their recesses, wrapped in old brown paper, wonderfully delicate bolts of silk.¹ And among a people said to be careful to save each other's face, we must be prepared to read that:

Fortunately the Chinese do not believe in the privacy of a home as we do. They do not mind having the whole details of their daily experience seen by everyone that cares to look. How they live, what they eat, and even the family jars that we try to hush up from the public are things that seem to be common property, and not to belong exclusively to this particular family who are most concerned.²

¹ Macgowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-79.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.

And we must be prepared to see that in societies with settled inequalitarian status systems and strong religious orientations, individuals are sometimes less earnest about the whole civic drama than we are, and will cross social barriers with brief gestures that give more recognition to the man behind the mask than we might find permissible.

Furthermore, we must be very cautious in any effort to characterize our own society as a whole with respect to dramaturgical practices. For example, in current management-labor relations, we know that a team may enter joint consultation meetings with the opposition with the knowledge that it may be necessary to give the appearance of stalking out of the meeting in a huff. Diplomatic teams are sometimes required to stage a similar show. In other words, while teams in our society are usually obliged to suppress their rage behind a working consensus, there are times when teams are obliged to suppress the appearance of sober opposition behind a demonstration of outraged feelings. Similarly, there are occasions when individuals, whether they wish to or not, will feel obliged to destroy an interaction in order to save their honor and their face. It would be more prudent, then, to begin with smaller units, with social establishments or classes of establishments, or with particular statuses, and document comparisons and changes in a modest way by means of the case-history method. For example, we have the following kind of information about the shows that businessmen are legally allowed to put on:

The last half-century has seen a marked change in the attitude of the courts toward the question of justifiable reliance. Earlier decisions, under the influence of the prevalent doctrine of "caveat emptor," laid great stress upon the plaintiff's "duty" to protect himself and distrust his antagonist, and held that he was not entitled to rely even upon positive assertions of fact made by one with whom he was dealing at arm's length. It was assumed that anyone may be expected to overreach another in a bargain if he can, and that only a fool will expect common

honesty. Therefore the plaintiff must make a reasonable investigation, and form his own judgment. The recognition of a new standard of business ethics, demanding that statements of fact be at least honestly and carefully made, and in many cases that they be warranted to be true, has led to an almost complete shift in this point of view.

It is now held that assertions of fact as to the quantity or quality of land or goods sold, the financial status of the corporations, and similar matters inducing commercial transactions, may justifiably be relied on without investigation, not only where such investigation would be burdensome and difficult, as where land which is sold lies at a distance, but likewise where the falsity of the representation might be discovered with little effort by means easily at hand.³

And while frankness may be increasing in business relations, we have some evidence that marriage counselors are increasingly agreed that an individual ought not to feel obliged to tell his or her spouse about previous "affairs," as this might only lead to needless strain. Other examples may be cited. We know, for example, that up to about 1830 pubs in Britain provided a backstage setting for workmen, little distinguishable from their own kitchens, and that after that date the gin palace suddenly burst upon the scene to provide much the same clientele with a fancier front region than they could dream of.⁴ We have records of the social history of particular American towns, telling us of the recent decline in the elaborateness of domestic and avocational fronts of the local upper classes. In contrast, some material is available which describes the recent increase in elaborateness of the setting that union organizations employ,⁵ and the increasing tendency to "stock" the setting with academically-trained experts who provide an aura of

³ Prosser, *op. cit.*, pp. 749-50.

⁴ M. Gorham and H. Dunnett, *Inside the Pub* (London: The Architectural Press, 1950), pp. 23-24.

⁵ See, for example, Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

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thought and respectability.⁶ We can trace changes in the plant layout of specific industrial and commercial organizations and show an increase in front, both as regards the exterior of the head-office building and as regards the conference rooms, main halls, and waiting rooms of these buildings. We can trace in a particularcrofting community how the barn for animals, once backstage to the kitchen and accessible by a small door next the stove, has lately been removed a distance from the house, and how the house itself, once set down in an unprotected way in the midst of garden, croft equipment, garbage, and grazing stock, is becoming, in a sense, public-relations oriented, with a front yard fenced off and kept somewhat clean, presenting a dressed-up side to the community while debris is strewn at random in the unfenced back regions. And as the connected byre disappears, and the scullery itself starts to become less frequent, we can observe the up-grading of domestic establishments, wherein the kitchen, which once possessed its own back regions, is now coming to be the least presentable region of the house while at the same time becoming more and more presentable. We can also trace that peculiar social movement which led some factories, ships, restaurants, and households to clean up their backstages to such an extent that, like monks, Communists, or German aldermen, their guards are always up and there is no place where their front is down, while at the same time members of the audience become sufficiently entranced with the society's id to explore the places that had been cleaned up for them. Paid attendance at symphony orchestra rehearsals is only one of the latest examples. We can observe what Everett Hughes calls collective mobility, through which the occupants of a status attempt to alter the bundle of tasks performed by them so that no act will be required which is expressively inconsistent with the image of self that these incumbents are attempting to establish for themselves. And

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⁶ See Wilensky, *op. cit.*, chap. iv, for a discussion of the "window-dressing" function of staff experts. For reference to the business counterpart of this movement see Riesman, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-39.

we can observe a parallel process, which might be called "role enterprise," within a particular social establishment, whereby a particular member attempts not so much to move into a higher position already established as to create a new position for himself, a position involving duties which suitably express attributes that are congenial to him. We can examine the process of specialization, whereby many performers come to make brief communal use of very elaborate social settings, being content to sleep alone in a cubicle of no pretension. We can follow the diffusion of crucial fronts—such as the laboratory complex of glass, stainless steel, rubber gloves, white tile, and lab coat—which allow an increasing number of persons connected with unseemly tasks a way of self-purification. Starting with the tendency in highly authoritarian organizations for one team to be required to spend its time infusing a rigorously ordered cleanliness in the setting the other team will perform in, we can trace, in establishments such as hospitals, air force bases, and large households, a current decline in the hypertrophic strictness of such settings. And finally, we can follow the rise and diffusion of the jazz and "West Coast" cultural patterns, in which terms such as bit, goof, scene, drag, dig, are given currency, allowing individuals to maintain something of a professional stage performer's relation to the technical aspects of daily performances.

*The Role of Expression Is Conveying
Impressions of Self*

Perhaps a moral note can be permitted at the end. In this report the expressive component of social life has been treated as a source of impressions given to or taken by others. Impression, in turn, has been treated as a source of information about unapparent facts and as a means by which the recipients can guide their response to the informant without having to wait for the full consequences of the informant's actions to be felt. Expression, then, has been treated in terms of the communicative role it plays during social interaction and not, for example, in terms of consum-

matory or tension-release function it might have for the expresser.¹

Underlying all social interaction there seems to be a fundamental dialectic. When one individual enters the presence of others, he will want to discover the facts of the situation. Were he to possess this information, he could know, and make allowances for, what will come to happen and he could give the others present as much of their due as is consistent with his enlightened self-interest. To uncover fully the factual nature of the situation, it would be necessary for the individual to know all the relevant social data about the others. It would also be necessary for the individual to know the actual outcome or end product of the activity of the others during the interaction, as well as their innermost feelings concerning him. Full information of this order is rarely available; in its absence, the individual tends to employ substitutes—cues, tests, hints, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc.—as predictive devices. In short, since the reality that the individual is concerned with is unperceivable at the moment, appearances must be relied upon in its stead. And, paradoxically, the more the individual is concerned with the reality that is not available to perception, the more must he concentrate his attention on appearances.

The individual tends to treat the others present on the basis of the impression they give now about the past and the future. It is here that communicative acts are translated into moral ones. The impressions that the others give tend to be treated as claims and promises they have implicitly made, and claims and promises tend to have a moral character. In his mind the individual says: "I am using these impressions of you as a way of checking up on you and your activity, and you ought not to lead me astray." The peculiar thing about this is that the individual tends to take

¹ A recent treatment of this kind may be found in Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales, and Edward A. Shils, *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953), Chap. II, "The Theory of Symbolism in Relation to Action."

this stand even though he expects the others to be unconscious of many of their expressive behaviors and even though he may expect to exploit the others on the basis of the information he gleans about them. Since the sources of impression used by the observing individual involve a multitude of standards pertaining to politeness and decorum, pertaining both to social intercourse and task-performance, we can appreciate afresh how daily life is enmeshed in moral lines of discrimination.

Let us shift now to the point of view of the others. If they are to be gentlemanly, and play the individual's game, they will give little conscious heed to the fact that impressions are being formed about them but rather act without guile or contrivance, enabling the individual to receive valid impressions about them and their efforts. And if they happen to give thought to the fact that they are being observed, they will not allow this to influence them unduly, content in the belief that the individual will obtain a correct impression and give them their due because of it. Should they be concerned with influencing the treatment that the individual gives them, and this is properly to be expected, then a gentlemanly means will be available to them. They need only guide their action in the present so that its future consequences will be the kind that would lead a just individual to treat them now in a way they want to be treated; once this is done, they have only to rely on the perceptiveness and justness of the individual who observes them.

Sometimes those who are observed do, of course, employ these proper means of influencing the way in which the observer treats them. But there is another way, a shorter and more efficient way, in which the observed can influence the observer. Instead of allowing an impression of their activity to arise as an incidental by-product of their activity, they can reorient their frame of reference and devote their efforts to the creation of desired impressions. Instead of attempting to achieve certain ends by acceptable means, they can attempt to achieve the impression that they are achieving certain ends by acceptable means. It is always

possible to manipulate the impression the observer uses as a substitute for reality because a sign for the presence of a thing, not being that thing, can be employed in the absence of it. The observer's need to rely on representations of things itself creates the possibility of misrepresentation.

There are many sets of persons who feel they could not stay in business, whatever their business, if they limited themselves to the gentlemanly means of influencing the individual who observes them. At some point or other in the round of their activity they feel it is necessary to band together and directly manipulate the impression that they give. The observed become a performing team and the observers become the audience. Actions which appear to be done on objects become gestures addressed to the audience. The round of activity becomes dramatized.

We come now to the basic dialectic. In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. Because these standards are so numerous and so pervasive, the individuals who are performers dwell more than we might think in a moral world. But, *qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized. Our activity, then, is largely concerned with moral matters, but as performers we do not have a moral concern with them. As performers we are merchants of morality. Our day is given over to intimate contact with the goods we display and our minds are filled with intimate understandings of them; but it may well be that the more attention we give to these goods, then the more distant we feel from them and from those who are believing enough to buy them. To use a different imagery, the very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light, of being a socialized character, forces one to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage.

Staging and the Self

The general notion that we make a presentation of ourselves to others is hardly novel; what ought to be stressed in conclusion is that the very structure of the self can be seen in terms of how we arrange for such performances in our Anglo-American society.

In this report, the individual was divided by implication into two basic parts: he was viewed as a *performer*, a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance; he was viewed as a *character*, a figure, typically a fine one, whose spirit, strength, and other sterling qualities the performance was designed to evoke. The attributes of a performer and the attributes of a character are of a different order, quite basically so, yet both sets have their meaning in terms of the show that must go on.

First, character. In our society the character one performs and one's self are somewhat equated, and this self-as-character is usually seen as something housed within the body of its possessor, especially the upper parts thereof, being a nodule, somehow, in the psychobiology of personality. I suggest that this view is an implied part of what we are all trying to present, but provides, just because of this, a bad analysis of the presentation. In this report the performed self was seen as some kind of image, usually creditable, which the individual on stage and in character effectively attempts to induce others to hold in regard to him. While this image is entertained *concerning* the individual, so that a self is imputed to him, this self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses. A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamen-

tal fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.

In analyzing the self then we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments. There will be a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and a front region with its fixed props. There will be a team of persons whose activity on stage in conjunction with available props will constitute the scene from which the performed character's self will emerge, and another team, the audience, whose interpretive activity will be necessary for this emergence. The self is a product of all of these arrangements, and in all of its parts bears the marks of this genesis.

The whole machinery of self-production is cumbersome, of course, and sometimes breaks down, exposing its separate components: back region control; team collusion; audience tact; and so forth. But, well oiled, impressions will flow from it fast enough to put us in the grips of one of our types of reality—the performance will come off and the firm self accorded each performed character will appear to emanate intrinsically from its performer.

Let us turn now from the individual as character performed to the individual as performer. He has a capacity to learn, this being exercised in the task of training for a part. He is given to having fantasies and dreams, some that pleasurably unfold a triumphant performance, others full of anxiety and dread that nervously deal with vital discrediting in a public front region. He often manifests a gregarious desire for teammates and audiences, a tactful considerateness for their concerns; and he has a capacity for deeply felt shame, leading him to minimize the chances he takes of exposure.

These attributes of the individual *qua* performer are not

merely a depicted effect of particular performances; they are psychobiological in nature, and yet they seem to arise out of intimate interaction with the contingencies of staging performances.

And now a final comment. In developing the conceptual framework employed in this report, some language of the stage was used. I spoke of performers and audiences; of routines and parts; of performances coming off or falling flat; of cues, stage settings and backstage; of dramaturgical needs, dramaturgical skills, and dramaturgical strategies. Now it should be admitted that this attempt to press a mere analogy so far was in part a rhetoric and a maneuver.

The claim that all the world's a stage is sufficiently commonplace for readers to be familiar with its limitations and tolerant of its presentation, knowing that at any time they will easily be able to demonstrate to themselves that it is not to be taken too seriously. An action staged in a theater is a relatively contrived illusion and an admitted one; unlike ordinary life, nothing real or actual can happen to the performed characters—although at another level of course something real and actual can happen to the reputation of performers *qua* professionals whose everyday job is to put on theatrical performances.

And so here the language and mask of the stage will be dropped. Scaffolds, after all, are to build other things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down. This report is not concerned with aspects of theater that creep into everyday life. It is concerned with the structure of social encounters—the structure of those entities in social life that come into being whenever persons enter one another's immediate physical presence. The key factor in this structure is the maintenance of a single definition of the situation, this definition having to be expressed, and this expression sustained in the face of a multitude of potential disruptions.

A character staged in a theater is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences as does the thoroughly contrived character performed by a confidence man; but the *successful* staging of either of these

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types of false figures involves use of *real* techniques—the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations. Those ~~who conduct face-to-face-inter-~~action on a theater's stage must meet the key requirement of real situations; they must expressively sustain a definition of the situation: but this they do in circumstances that have facilitated their developing an apt terminology for the interactional tasks that all of us share.