Beyond Goffman

Approaches to Semiotics
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Beyond Goffman

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Edited by

Stephen Harold Riggins

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Introduction

Stephen Harold Riggins

Long before the untimely death of Erving Goffman in 1982 his early publications had achieved the status of classics in American sociology. Although he did not form a school in the proper sense of the word, his influence nonetheless quickly permeated many sectors of sociological and anthropological research. His books are still among the most frequently quoted publications in the social sciences. Goffman has also been fortunate in another respect: few other modern sociologists have attracted so many theorists of stature whose critical interpretations have kept their ideas fresh and alive (e.g., Collins 1986, 1988; Ditton 1980; Drew – Wootton 1988; MacCannell 1983; Rawls 1987; Schudson 1984).

Goffman seems to have understood (perhaps from modern art?) that in the long-run nothing succeeds quite like a style which combines a lucid surface and an inner core which resists unambiguous interpretation. His style obliges readers to be creators in their own right and fashion their personal version of his multi-layered theory. Several of his books are apparently simple enough that they are assigned as required reading for introductory sociology courses, but so complex at the level of their theoretical assumptions that scholars still puzzle over whether he should most accurately be defined as a deviant symbolic interactionist (Fontana 1980), a latter-day Durkheimian (Collins 1988), a structuralist (Gonos 1977), a post-modernist 'avant la lettre' (see Clough and Battershill, this volume), or a semiotician (McCannell 1983). This variety of interpretation bears witness to the originality and profoundity of his probing into the complexity of social processes.

This book is a collection of original articles which endeavors to expand the scope of the theoretical views and empirical research Erving Goffman contributed to the social sciences. Most chapters take a critical stand toward his ideas while still recognizing his fundamental contribution to the field. Hence, the title *Beyond Goffman*. From this critical and multi-disciplinary examination, Goffman emerges

as a provocative, protean figure, whose relevance to contemporary issues in the social sciences is more evident than ever. The book is divided into two parts. The first concentrates upon theory and explores Goffman's intellectual heritage (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, the notion of social situation, the relation between micro and macro levels of analysis) and also examines the way his work relates to contemporary theoretical movements (semiotics, post-modernism, deconstructionism, and feminism). The second part of the book probes the insights found in his diverse empirical studies and expands the domain of their applications.

The project of publishing this book originated at an international conference titled 'Institution, Communication and Social Interaction: The Legacy of Erving Goffman,' which was held in December 1987 at the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore, India. It brought together Western and Indian scholars, for whom Goffman's work had played a significant part in their own research, and who had confronted some of the seemingly intractable issues raised by his theoretical stands. Goffman had himself little interest in being an ethnographer of the developing world, but many of his insights into the self-society relation and symbolic communication should in principle apply everywhere (Giddens 1988:253, 273-74). Self-presentation and social interaction are problematic processes in all societies, although the social context in which they occur may be quite varied (see, e.g., Asante and Gudykunst 1989). Several of the contributors to this volume expand the scope of Goffman's ideas by applying them to India, which is more rural, more diverse, and perhaps more traditional than the 'Anglo-American society' with which Goffman felt most at home as a professional sociologist.

The personal relationships which the contributors to this volume have had with Goffman are diverse. Some were his colleague, neighbor, friend; one was a fellow graduate student at the University of Chicago; another took one of his introductory sociology classes. One contributor was afraid to enroll in his graduate courses because of his reputation for being so critical. It is also worth noting, since it was a sign of the times, that another contributor missed in the early 1970s his only chance to hear Goffman deliver a public lecture out of a mistaken belief that his ideas were narrow and dated.

The opening section of this book includes eight papers whose focus is more theoretical than empirical. The division is, of course, somewhat arbitrary since all of the other papers discuss theoretical

issues to a degree. This first part probes aspects of Goffman's theoretical significance either by investigating his intellectual roots or by developing some of its theoretical potential. In so doing, well known Goffmanian concepts are assessed, refined, and in some cases reframed in novel perspectives.

Goffman's debt to Durkheim is well documented in the secondary literature on his work. Why Durkheim exerted such influence on Goffman and on American sociology in general does require some explanation, however, because Durkheim's perspective seems so different from popular American values which one would assume to be part of the intellectual infrastructure of any major American social theory. This is the question raised by Dean MacCannell in the first paper of this volume. As he writes: 'How can a new discipline which is founded upon, and insists in no uncertain terms upon, the principle of social determinism, take root and flourish in a society which thinks of itself as based on the opposing principle of individual liberty?' In MacCannell's view the ideological similarity between Durkheim and American values begins to become apparent if one tries to rewrite some of Durkheim's most famous passages substituting 'ego' for 'society'. Thus, Durkheim can be seen as depicting society in a manner familiar to Americans as it fits their ideal of ultimate independence and power for the individual. Since Durkheim the prevailing theoretical perspectives in American sociology have also narcissistically identified the self with society, turning it into a giant unified ego. A belief in social determinism and individual freedom should seem incompatible. However, if society and the individual are assumed to have common interests, this can be avoided. In Goffman's formative years the popular view was that the individual was highly socialized and thus upheld the dominant values.

In many respects Goffman is the exception in American sociology. In his writings neither society nor the individual is thought to be a unified whole. MacCannell believes that Goffman was one of the first people to 'describe social life as it is lived as marked by ambiguity and uncertainty, fragmentation . . . and discontinuity . . . .' Goffman did this by combining dramatism and Durkheimian sociology. For Goffman, even the individual is a 'team' because it consists of a performer and an audience (although united in one person) and the unity of society is simply fictional. What holds society together is just a 'veneer of consensus'. MacCannell concludes his essay by defining sociology as a branch of semiotics. He argues, as do several contributors

to this volume, that symbolic interactionism and semiotics are complementary although integrating them requires a notion of social situation which is at odds with Goffman.

In the second chapter, Eric Schwimmer surveys some of the anthropologial literature on southern Asia and comes to the conclusion that its treatment of the interaction order is similar to Goffman's. Both insist on the autonomy of the interaction order; neither is willing to grant causal priority to interactions or to structures. Schwimmer describes sociologists and anthropologists as rival clans trying to establish a claim to a theory of micro-events. He writes:

> For let us recognize that the setting up of a concept such as the interaction order' is equivalent to what a chief (in, for instance, New Guinea) would do if he wished to set up his own family as a new lineage in the village. He would build his own patio, give feasts and claim his own emblem. More particularly, he would restructure the story of his ancestry, emphasizing some prestigious local lines and devaluing some more dubious foreign ones. It is because of this aspect of Goffman's operation that his handling of anthropology becomes interesting.

The term Goffman invented for the relation between the micro and macro level was 'loose coupling'. For Schwimmer, this is one of Goffman's most profound concepts and he explores how it is implied in the empirical details of Goffman's books *Gender Advertisements* and *Strategic Interaction*. These books illustrate loose coupling in the sense that a 'mythic text' is only loosely transformed into a 'performance text'. Behaviour is always something more and something other than what is theorized. Loose coupling also applies to the difference between Goffman the ethnographer and Goffman the theoretician. The ethnography appears to be organized around the idea of status differences while the theoretically more important concept seems to be the way social statuses are diffuse and overlapping. Schwimmer has interestingly structured his paper in the oral mode in order to illustrate how the circumstances of a paper's production influence its content, an idea which is inherent in Goffman's theory of the interaction order.

The notion of a social situation is central to Goffman's work. Joshua Meyrowitz assumes that although Goffman usually wrote about social situations as bounded by physical places, his analysis also shows that he was working with a less explicit concept of situations as 'information systems'. The advantage of this second definition is that it does not limit the theorist to the interaction of people who are literally face to face. It allows one to take into consideration the impact people

exert indirectly via electronic and broadcast media. 'Increasingly, our interpersonal interactions are interrupted by, or interwoven with, encounters with or through media. Such recontextualizing of behaviour also demands attention. In fact, it suggests that Goffman's analytically neat view of "naturally-bounded" face-to-face interactions is losing much of its experiential primacy'. Similar criticisms of situations as bounded social systems can be found in the chapters of this volume by Perinbanayagam, and Riggins.

Meyrowitz examines, unlike Goffman, the long-term changes in the boundaries of situations. He points out that new media create new social situations. For example, the informality which has become so characteristic of daily life since the 1960s is due to a merging of the informality of traditional backstage behaviour with the more conscious impression management of the frontstage. Drawing upon such media theorists as Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, he argues that the main reason for this change is the way electronic media, primarily television, integrate social situations and audiences previously segregated when reading was the major form of mass entertainment. Literacy segregates audiences because of differing levels of reading skills while television (like oral cultures) integrates them since it is more comprehensible to everyone. Dividing the backstage into two parts, Meyrowitz makes a very useful distinction between the forefront of the backstage (the less personal or less discrediting information) and the deep backstage (the more damaging information). Electronic media have made the forefront of the backstage more public.

Richard Lanigan writes about the influence of phenomenology on Goffman as it is reflected in the book *Frame Analysis*. Goffman's own discussion of phenomenology seems to show that he borrowed some of the methodology (bracketing, for example), but ignored much of the theory. Thus, Lanigan argues that while Goffman sought 'ideological guidance' in phenomenology, his work is inconsistent in this respect. 'Goffman is a methodological "phenomenologist," but at the price of being a-theoretical. . . . To adopt the theory of phenomenology would require a focus on the human conscious experience of the person'. On the contrary, Goffman presented himself in *Frame Analysis* as a structuralist but was still committed to recording 'the lived-world context of experience' that would be expected of a phenomenologist. Lanigan relates Goffman's work to that of Foucault because of their similar interests but finds in Foucault a more explicit use of semiotic phenomenology.

The tension between structuralism and phenomenology in Goffman is explored by Lanigan through an analysis of radio drama which focuses upon the topics of how the medium presents places, the movement from one place to another, and simultaneous events. People direct their attention while listening, not only in terms of the details within a broadcast, but they are also listening to the radio in the context of the general soundscape occurring within their own home. The radio is only one of many objects emitting noise. 'We understand in the way that we as persons desire to understand. We are choosing the context of our meaning as we live it.' Goffman was only partly aware of the multiple reality aspect of radio listening. He did not write about listening from the point of view of a personal lived reality, as if he were an audience of one, but speculated about a general audience reaction and even this was done from the vantage point of a naive realist. Lanigan concludes his essay by rewriting one of Goffman's most famous passages. To Lanigan it should read: 'I personally hold the person to be first in every way and any of society's current involvements to be second; this essay deals only with matters that are first'.

Hans Dua reviews the literature on miscommunication and communicative non-success, a topic highly relevant to Goffman but which was not systematically addressed in his work. If social actors are manipulative, or manage the impressions others form of them, or if they are players of ritual games, there is bound to be a certain level of miscommunication because such activities forbid complete truthfulness. At least five aspects are involved in the miscommunication which is inevitable under these circumstances. First, miscommunication may be due to problems in the speaker's formation and expression of his/her personal intentions. Speakers may have only partial awareness of their intentions or they may be unable to articulate them fully. Tact, also, does not encourage a full articulation of intentions. Secondly, the hearer may misinterpret or mishear statements. As Goffman pointed out, the hearer can be defined in several ways. The fact that it is not necessarily the person addressed but a bystander may result in some misperceptions. In addition, selectivity in listening may create confusion and there may also be some intentional misunderstanding.

Thirdly, problems are posed by failures in sustaining intersubjectivity. For communication to be successful, the speaker and hearer must share a mutual orientation toward each other's capacities and demands. They must be willing to fulfill their obligations as interactants. But

this is not always possible. Fourth, there may be discrepancies in shared knowledge and context. Exactly what is shared in terms of knowledge has been defined in a bewildering variety of ways, but shared knowledge is certainly both a constraint and a resource. Dua suggests that two levels of context be defined, one which includes the institutionalized framing of activities and another more narrow context consisting of the negotiated interaction which constantly changes. Fifth, the speaker or hearer may not abide by the commonly accepted conversational principles, such as 'be relevant', 'avoid obscurity', etc. Dua observes.

> In whatever way we characterize the phenomena of miscommunication it should be considered in the form of a continuum on the dimension of normality and abnormality. However, it is most difficult to draw a line between the normal and the abnormal with respect to each kind of miscommunication. Furthermore, we know very little about how different forms of miscommunication may be related to each other. . . .

Nirmala Srinivasan examines the concept of self in Goffman's writings, dealing with the theme of how Goffman implies both determinism and free will when he discusses the self. Some of his statements are based on the assumption that the self should be defined from the vantage point of the intentions of an individual agent. This is historically an important element in Goffman's early works because it came at a time when many American sociologists tended to assume a high level of determinism. But, on the other hand, Goffman himself seems to share this attitude when he concentrated upon the way the individual is a passive object who accommodates to structures.

Srinivasan writes that in India where Western-style individualism is no longer a remote possibility:

> . . . the common man is literally plagued by extreme fragmentation and mutilation of the core official identity and wears diverse masks depending on his/her immediate kith and kin. Organized militancy as a way of citizenship protest for distributive justice (has led) to greater and greater fragmentation of personal identities and the masking capabilities of individuals.

In the second part of her essay, she reviews the potential of Goffman's dramaturgical analysis for explaining various aspects of contemporary Indian society. One of her examples is from her research on the minority identity of Muslims and Christians in India; she discusses conflicts between what Goffman called the 'official self' and the

'performing self'. The quota system or the reservation policy in India resembles affirmative action programs in North America. These are policies meant to compensate for past discrimination and socio-economic disadvantages by reserving occupational positions and admission to institutions of higher education. However, in India as in North America, these policies have resulted in unintended tensions and the strengthening of class or caste identity. Her theme is not the successes or failures of the quotas but the way individuals and groups cope with the dynamics of novel social situations.

Goffman's writings might be seen as a very personal combination of intellectual sources only tangentially related to discussions of post-modernism. However, Charles Battershill presents Goffman as a precursor of post-modernism and argues that Goffman anticipated several of the ideas which are presently associated most with such scholars as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. Although Goffman did not write about the post-modern theme of capitalism evolving into an information society, he did nonetheless conceptualize the self as an effect of knowledge and placed great stress on the management of information in one's private life. Post-modern aesthetics have been explained as an effect of consumer capitalism (Buerger 1986). Here, also, there is an overlap since some of Goffman's critics have argued very convincingly that the significance he attached to impression management was a reflection of consumerism (Gouldner 1970).

Post-modern ideas are perhaps most obvious in Goffman's writings about total institutions. Both Goffman and Foucault questioned the humaneness of therapeutic institutions. To Goffman, knowledge developed at mental asylums did not serve the interests of patients; instead, the institution itself created deviant behaviour in the inmates and then used this to control them. Efficiency in handling people in institutionalized settings was also thought to conflict with and undermine therapeutic goals. Foucault and Goffman both examined the complex relation between rationality and irrationality and for neither was reason a neutral tool. Both preferred to explore more subtle forms of domination than class oppression. Both detected an implicit will to power in the development of psychiatric knowledge. Thus, Battershill concludes that 'the pervasiveness of such people-processing forced Goffman to equate totalitarianism, the total institution, and "free society". Except for the terminology and the research methods, Foucault's findings are similar regarding the "political anatomy" of the disciplinary society'. Since neither Foucault nor

Goffman was willing to state his theoretical position in any easily accessible manner (another quality of post-modernism), one of the results is that readers can be confused about the extent to which they saw themselves as part of the anti-psychiatry movement (Riggins 1988) or even to what extent they were social critics. While Manning does present Goffman in this volume as a social critic, as do many commentators (e.g., Gamson 1985); a few have stressed the messages of passivity and inaction which can be inferred from his publications (e.g., Richard 1986; Gonos 1980). The same can be said of Foucault.

Concentrating upon Goffman's textual strategies, Patricia Clough also relates Goffman to post-modernism. The aim of her paper is to uncover some of the tacit presuppositions in his writings. This includes explaining what he might have found appealing in the works of Jacques Derrida. Although Goffman is often referred to as an ethnographer, he did not produce the kind of narratives typical of classical positivistic ethnography but compiled much of his texts out of episodic quotations from mass-mediated discourses. His departure from the standard participant observation of symbolic interactionism has disturbed some critics. As Michel Richard (1986:322) amusingly asked: 'What kind of symbolic interactionist is he who does not interact with anybody?'

Clough believes that Goffman in his later works brought the sociological tradition of ethnography to a crisis of representation but stopped short of deconstructionism. The physical body and the natural world, a primary frame in Goffman's early works, are later replaced by an imagined body, which is a social construct. Truth is no longer grounded in the physical world of bodies and even primary frames are merely arbitrary ideas.

> . . . Goffman's writing strategy evokes and is dependent on the reader's precritical working of primary frames and at the site of the body. Goffman, then, can take the reader by surprise. Never being where the last example left the reader, Goffman out-frames the reader, again and again turning nature into culture and culture into a series of displays.

Goffman's style and subject matter have the effect of so engrossing readers that they are discouraged from reflecting about the validity of what he writes. This reaction to Goffman is also found in the concluding paper of this volume by Paul Bouissac. Clough applies feminist ideas about narratives to the representation of gender in advertising since Goffman remarked that viewers are likely to invent narratives for the still photographs in advertisements. She argues

that an understanding of narrative practices and discourse analysis is essential for an understanding of Goffman, especially his stylistic techniques of establishing his authority.

The second group of papers follows in the footsteps of Goffman in the sense that they are a tribute to the way he relished presenting himself in public, not as a social theorist but as a humble practitioner of empirical research. The papers attempt to exceed his work by assessing the insights found throughout his eclectic empirical research and by expanding its scope both within Western societies and beyond. This part of the volume is subdivided into two sets of chapters: one mostly concerned with institutionally staged activities and language, the other focusing on objects and events.

Peter Manning and Keith Hawkins use Goffman's concept of frame to help establish an analytical perspective for studying decision-making within the Anglo-American legal system. Framing events as 'legal' rather than 'political' and dramatizing and ritualizing this in court is part of a cognitive infrastructure that maintains authority. It is a screen or a boundary separating everyday events from legally relevant ones. The authors do not assume that this defining process is simply the discovery of truth since they stress relativity. Nor is it politically neutral: '. . . arbitrary framing of facts serves the purposes of the framers, and of the institution'. While a court case will have to be resolved in that a decision has to be made concerning guilt or awards of money, the adversarial nature of the law and the difference in the understanding of the law between lawyers and clients can result in a wide range of ideas concerning what is taking place, why things are being done as they are, etc. Thus, the law must be seen as something broader than a collection of rules and enforcement procedures:

> It also includes the cognitive and social underpinnings which are necessary, if not sufficient, to sustaining that differentiated social world. Understanding the experiential basis of the social organization of legal life is fundamental to naturalistic studies of decision-making because they link the phenomenological world, outlined in many of its facets by Goffman, and the formal legal world.

Manning and Hawkins methodically set forth the basic assumptions of frame analysis, redefining Goffman's concepts in the process. The authors discuss how the law stabilizes meaning (the very term 'frame' suggests stability), and the dynamic process taking place when legal subframes are assembled to establish a legal case. Some facts and

interpretations must be perceived as relevant to the case, that is 'framed in', while others must be ignored or 'framed out'. Exactly what falls in each category changes as the case is redefined, something that is a common occurrence. In the conclusion of the paper the authors direct their attention to the frames concerning legal controversies which are produced by the mass media and by the highest levels of government. Although media attention may highlight court cases and result in the public redefining events, it is not known with certainty what effect this has on actual decisions. In 'high politics' legal and political frames are mingled. This can have far-reaching consequences in terms of future definitions of what properly belongs within legal frames as opposed to political ones.

George Park applies the notion of lamination, the way frames exist within frames, to the comparative study of religion. This article and the preceding one represent a departure from Goffman in that the authors apply frame analysis to institutionally staged activities rather than Goffman's preferred ahistorical, non-institutional episodes. Park justifies the use of frame analysis in describing religion in this way: 'A religion . . . is never a single institution – surely never simply a church in the narrow sense – but a structure of frames, a plurality of socially constructed realities linked by containment'. Frame analysis gives one a vocabulary and a perspective for discussing how personal experiences are transformed into moral categories and religiously meaningful actions. Park categorizes the evolution of religion in terms of three supernatural frames: proto-religion, animism, and deism. The newer frames are not seen as replacing the older ones; instead, all three are assumed to co-exist, along with secularism, in many contemporary religious institutions. For example, the average church goer in North America may hope for miracle cures and may retain some belief in spirits and superstition, while still believing in the omnipotent god of Christianity. Furthermore, the average church goer tends to be committed basically to a 'lay frame', in which the primary reality is the physical commonsense world, and judges what religion has to offer (psychological security, meeting the right people, occupational success) from this perspective. Nonetheless, he or she still gives lip service to a 'religious frame' in which the primary reality is an unseen world. The inconsistencies of these beliefs are partially hidden by the lamination. Such frames can also be 'mutually contained' in the sense that they restrain each other and that it is not always clear which is the more basic perspective. In other words, who is the deceiver

and who is the victim can be ambiguous. 'There may be a genuine confusion of frames, or possibly just that case of *mutual containment* which had eluded Goffman's efficient clipping service. . . . Mutual containment is arguably the most important mechanism of religion in the developed world'.

Arlie Hochschild continues Goffman's examination of public discourse on gender. However, she examines this topic as it is documented in popular advice books for women rather than in advertising and looks at a whole spectrum of advice books from the conventional to the rebellious. She believes that when Goffman wrote about gender he deviated from some of his usual notions about the active self. He appears to assume a much more passive self in his book *Gender Advertisements* than in his other publications. For Goffman, the presentation of gender was simple and straight-forward; the models in the advertising photographs he studied intuitively knew how to behave. But gender is much more complicated now and there is no longer, if there ever was, one standard way of presenting oneself as male or female. Conflicts occur between the surface aspects of gender presentation and how men and women inwardly feel about their own 'performances'. She writes that Goffman does not 'suggest how the actor might feel estranged from a code. But actors in Goffman's other works often do face choices, feel doubt and become estranged. The rules of interaction are always unbudgeably there in Goffman's works as in life, but the actor continually *works* at deciding how to get around them, or counter with other rules'.

Hochschild assumes that women combine elements of two codes (the 'parlor-traditional' female and the 'egalitarian-modern' female). The exact gender strategy a woman adopts for mixing these codes is a product of her past and her expectations about the kinds of rewards she can realistically expect in the future. The recommendations of advice books cover both 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. The first applies to such recommendations as those concerning appearance and the frame (irony, cynicism, etc.) which should be placed around gender rules. The latter applies to what Hochschild calls the emotional 'work' or the personal feelings associated with enacting the rules. When advice books suggest how gender rules should be framed, they are also suggesting what relationship should exist between self and rule.

Goffman proposed abandoning the conventional dyadic model of talk which consists of two interacting conversationalists (the speaker and the listener), and the restriction of analysis to verbal statements.

His alternative included taking into consideration the influence of everyone within hearing range, such as bystanders and eavesdroppers; and developing greater sensitivity to the structural instability of group conversations when the roles of speaker, listener, addressee, non-ratified participant, etc. are constantly shifting. Although these ideas from *Forms of Talk* do not explicitly touch upon politics, some of the chapters in that book might be read as an extended commentary on politics because many ideas are applicable to studying power in conversations. This is the interpretation made by Juliet Flower-MacCannell in her paper: 'Implicit is a critique, that is, of the rules of access to participation: who is allowed to speak is, in the long run and in a democracy, the most political of all issues'. She applies Goffman's ideas to an obscure short story by Heinrich von Kleist titled 'The Marquise von O . . .' Through Goffman she interprets this story as being about ritual small talk and the micropolitics of the family and face-to-face interaction. What she appreciates about Goffman is his 'attention to *form* as the *form of a social relation or social tie* that is recognizable, if not by those participating in the "footing", then at least by the analyst or observer. A *formal social tie* is one that is discernible as a *ritual spacing*, which can be both masked by speech and its figures and yet also readable through them, by means of a structural reduction . . . .' Gender is one of these forms. Flower-MacCannell considers Kleist's gender politics to be more radical than Goffman's and regrets that while Goffman generally viewed the rituals of everyday life in terms of how one freely managed self-presentation, he tended to overlook the extent to which males determine gender rituals for women. 'It is the dark, compulsive side of ritual that Goffman has missed here, and he has in some sense consistently done so, in terms of one particular social relation, the sexual one'.

Although very few instances of human interaction are devoid of verbalization, many aspects of social processes are focused on, or articulated by artifacts and actions. Robert Perinbanayagam's chapter 'How to do Self with Things' is one of the few recent papers by a symbolic interactionist which systematically examines how clothing, hair styles, and body ornaments convey messages about the self. Goffman made many passing comments on the topic but did not pursue it in any systematic way. Perinbanayagam suggests that a close analysis of objects brings into question the notion of the situated self which is such a prominent element of Goffman's perspective. Goffman proposed a version of the self in which memory, recollection and habit

are relatively unimportant compared to situational factors. In contrast, Perinbanayagam advocates a concept of a more permanent self, one which lacks the flexibility and autonomy generally seen as part of Goffman's symbolic interactionist heritage. Thus, Perinbanayagam defines the self, not as a changeable formula, but as a 'semiotically learned habit constructed by the mind over the years . . . .' Styles of clothing and hair have little intrinsic meaning. To become meaningful these signs about the self must be assembled like linguistic texts in that they are organized according to similar principles; objects are 'made to function metaphorically, metonymically, ironically and synecdochically'. In this sense things 'do words'. Hair, for example, can be cut and fashioned in many ways, and grows back so quickly that it can easily be used to convey many messages about the status of one's self, especially messages related to sexuality. This variety of messages is conceptualized in terms of such categories as 'self-fulness' and 'self-lessness'. Perinbanayagam applies these ideas to a variety of religious and ethnic groups in Indian civilization.

A categorization of domestic artifacts, based in part on the work of Goffman, is developed in my own paper. Isolated insights about material objects as mediators of interaction and relationships are found throughout the work of Goffman and symbolic interactionists.

> Even though Goffman specialized in studying what is commonly referred to as face-to-face interaction, he certainly realized that the term "face-to-face" is misleading. Personal interaction is never limited to the faces of the participants. Not only does interaction generally involve the whole body, but people are practically always perceived among objects and in various degrees of association with them. In that sense we are never alone.

Goffman tended to include objects and human actions within each of his categories of symbols, resulting in some insensitivity to the physical reality of material artifacts. In this paper, Goffman's categories of symbols are redefined and several dimensions of objects are added to develop a systematic approach. Goffman neglected several concepts essential to theorizing about the relationship between the self and objects found in domestic environments. These include: the display syntax of objects, terms that summarize the general character of a whole environment, and the way objects serve as comment elicitors. It is assumed that Goffman did not focus more explicitly on objects because this would have drawn his attention beyond the immediate present to the influence of people absent in intimate situations, to

the past, and to signs which are more than self-referential. This would have undermined his idea that encounters constituted a bounded system. For illustrative purposes the categorization is applied to an artist's living room.

Promode Misra traces everyday rituals related to the consumption of kwai among the Khasi, a matrilineal society in north-eastern India. Kwai is a mixture of betel nut, betel leaf and lime. The consumption of kwai is a time of relaxation, when people 'step out of ordinary time', gossip and exchange information. It can be prepared in a variety of ways, each of which is associated with certain rituals and statuses. Kwai is also in itself a communication device because it is typically a gift from the more powerful to the less powerful and thus helps to resolve structural incongruities in the extended family and between males and females. In the Khasi extended family property is inherited by the youngest daughter; however, authority passes from one of the mother's brothers to one of the sons of the youngest daughter. The degree of disadvantage felt by family members depends in part on whether a man marries an elder daughter, who is a non-heiress, or the youngest daughter, who is the heiress. In general, those placed at a disadvantage include: males in relation to females, the elder daughters in relation to the youngest daughter, and fathers in relation to brothers-in-law or maternal uncles. Thus, kwai generally circulates in the opposite direction. 'It is not that offering kwai resolves the structural incongruity in concrete terms, but sentimentally and symbolically it means a lot in the temporary suspension of the rules of the structure'. This article illustrates Goffman's remark in *Interaction Ritual* that ceremonial activities carry messages themselves rather than being simply 'concrete empirical actions'.

T.K. Oommen applies Goffman's ideas to everyday forms of political protest among the rural poor in India. He writes about a context very different from that of the fragmented self-presentation typical of anonymous impersonal settings usually associated with Goffman. In rural India personal identities are often assigned and permanent and there is a stable audience which already knows most of the discrediting information about everyone in the community. But impression management is, nonetheless, a part of everyday life and is a vital political resource in situations of social inequality. Recent research on social movements has shifted the study of protests in a Goffmanian direction, toward the study of unorganized individual protests seen in the context of daily encounters. Much of this kind

of protest must be very subtle to be effective and because of the poor's dependence on the wealthy, it rarely involves open rebellion. It may be nothing more outwardly disturbing than gossiping; absenteeism, especially at harvest time; pilferage; and adopting the lifestyle of upper castes. Still, it has important long-term consequences.

> Public deference shown by the poor to the rich is a device to extract and ensure a livelihood in the precarious conditions of the latter's existence. But this publicly expressed deference needs to be kept "false" lest one should get demeaned in one's own class. Therefore, the real challenge the poor face is how the deference should be presented as authentic to the rich and as false to the fellow poor.

The wealthy are to some extent dependent upon the poor (although the reverse is of course much greater). However, agricultural mechanisation because it reduces the need for workers also shifts the balance of power even more in favor of the wealthy.

In his book *Frame Analysis* Goffman devoted a chapter to what he termed the manufacture of negative experience, exploring through various dramatic genres the public presentation of incidents involving the loss of control, failure, or a breakdown in character. This is a very popular theme in public performances, especially in the circus where it appears in at least one act in practically every show. Paul Bouissac analyzes two circus acts, a clown act and a trapeze act, in which the staging of negative experiences is a prominent part of breaking the performance frame. Bouissac suggests that Goffman tended to take for granted the technical skills required to publicly stage performances of negative experience. Some of Goffman's interpretations may be incorrect because he did not focus on precisely contextualized performances, something which can only be done for the circus after one writes detailed ethnographic descriptions of acts and then analyzes them, taking into consideration both the immediate and the general social context in which they appear.

Bouissac discusses three types of negative experience (incidents, accidents, and failures) which are defined on the basis of how much disruption they introduce into a social situation and the effect this has in implementing plans. A clown act by George Carl is described in which Carl apparently breaks all of the rules of a good performance. Rather than calling this the breaking of a frame, Bouissac suggests that the more accurate term might be 'framing the frames' because Carl publicly illustrates the rules of good and bad performance.

> . . . "negative experiences" of the sort described by Goffman cannot be taken at face value when they are parts of larger "texts" in which they effectuate some semiotic operations; in other words, the negative experiences which Goffman described are not ends in themselves but means to other, more general ends.

Thus, the messages conveyed to the audience by a trapezist, who appears to lose muscular control momentarily, should not be separated from the fact that the performers appear in the guise of an ideal nuclear family who are space travelers. Bouissac is also concerned about developing an objective, third-person definition of a social situation. Taking Goffman to task for not setting forth such a definition, Bouissac draws upon ethology and semiotics in establishing the parameters of social situations.

This book is obviously not the last attempt at engaging in a critical and constructive dialogue with Erving Goffman's provocative work. The lively discussions which took place at the Mysore conference demonstrated Goffman's enduring power of eliciting intellectual debate beyond his lifetime. As is the case for this book, practically everybody took him to task for having blurred a distinction, skipped an issue, straddled conflicting theories and the like; no one was prepared to blindly accept his words as a dogma. But no one questioned his capacity to challenge and inspire whoever was engaged in the study of micro social processes.

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I. Probing the theory

The descent of the ego

Dean MacCannell

In his teaching and writing, Erving Goffman was not much given to effusive expressions of intellectual indebtedness to sociological classics, but once he referred to Durkheim as "God."[1] This seems a good place to begin.

First, it is helpful to position sociology. Social life is constituted in such a way as to require partial knowledge of ordering principles which regulate it. No social knowledge would lead to random arrangements accommodating differences in strength, intellect, and biological needs. Full knowledge would transform life into a double series of dead or empty social forms on the one hand, and strange and potentially dangerous experiments with new relationships on the other. The position of the field of sociology is compromised in much the same way as that of an ordinarily intelligent human being born into society – it must always be on the cutting edge of partial understanding. Modern institutions are organized simultaneously to support sociological knowledge and to restrict its development beyond the point of practical necessity. If sociology becomes too smart, its approach and insight are divided among other disciplines (history, psychology, political science, and new fields, women's studies, ethnic studies, community studies, etc.) so understanding does not accumulate in one place. In short, the working conditions of serious sociologists are never good.

Goffman's application of Durkheim

Emile Durkheim attempted to secure sociology against fragmentation by arguing for a unique domain, society, which he sought to show exists independent of other domains, and the individual, subject to its own internal laws.

> When I fulfil my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I execute my contracts, I perform duties that are defined externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom. Even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still objective, for I did not create them; I merely inherited them. . . . These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will (1964 1-2).

Society constitutes itself. The specific form of this self-constituting act is the social norm: regulatory agreements, like spelling conventions, often arbitrary, among the members of society. Moreover, there is an empirical basis for the development of sociology as an independent discipline which engages in the description and classification of social norms and their concrete effects.

Durkheim's societal-level norms (e.g., marriage rules) generate visible organizational differences between groups. In a complex division of labor, such as characterizes modern societies, there are task and role specific norms. An important formal feature of Erving Goffman's sociology is its application of Durkheimian principles at the level of face-to-face interaction, a move already suggested in the writings of his teacher, Everett C. Hughes.[2] According to Goffman (1961b:87), 'a judge is supposed to be deliberate and sober; a pilot, in a cockpit, to be cool; a bookkeeper to be accurate and neat in doing his work.' When individuals among us live up to their socially prescribed role requirements, or utterly fail to do so, we think of them as having personalities which feature these characteristics or failings, personalities fully given by society.

Norms are violated, so the first logical sub-field of sociology is the study of deviance. Durkheim himself studied *Suicide*, and his approach remains influential to this day. Erving Goffman would eventually look at deviance from within and report on it in *Stigma*.

There are, in addition to task specific norms, place or situation rules which fall under the heading of decorum. Minor or seemingly harmless violations of rules of decorum, such as loudly singing along at a chamber music concert, can result in a person being classified as insane. Goffman made an important contribution, demonstrating the range of application of Durkheimian insight to behaviors previously ceded to psychoanalysis.[3] There are also norms associated with different statuses and ranks in society and organizations, and ritual forms which must be carefully adhered to in moments of passage or movement between

situations, statuses, and jobs. Here again, Goffman contributed analytical models, driving the sociological frame into the fine details of everyday life.[4]

The ego-form of society

Perhaps all Durkheim wanted was to secure a separate place for sociology at the Sorbonne, alongside psychology, biology, the law, etc., and he certainly succeeded. But there is also a fierceness in his founding gesture which is still producing effects. Durkheim *did* say that 'Society is a reality *sui generis*,' that society stands in relation to the individual as an inescapable force, external and coercive. In fact, Durkheim said many interesting things about society which modern day social scientists would prefer to forget:

> Society is a reality *sui generis*; it has its own peculiar characteristics, which are not found elsewhere and which are not met with again in the same form in all the rest of the universe. . . . There are two beings in (man): an individual being which has its foundation in the organism and the circle of whose activities is therefore strictly limited, and a social being which represents the highest reality in the social and moral order that we can know by observation – I mean society (1915:28-29).
>
> (S)ociety cannot make its influence felt unless it is in action, and it is not in action unless the individuals who compose it are assembled together and act in common. It is by common action that it takes consciousness of itself and realizes its position . . . (1915:465).
>
> (A) society is not made up merely of the mass of individuals who compose it, the ground which they occupy, the things which they use and the movements they perform, but above all is the idea which it forms of itself. . . . For a society to become conscious of itself and maintain at the necessary degree of intensity the sentiments which it thus attains, it must assemble and concentrate itself. . . . The list thus brought into being even enjoys so great an independence that it sometimes indulges in manifestations with no purpose or utility of any sort, for the mere pleasure of affirming itself (1915:470-471).

Durkheim's theory, its well-developed empirical arm, the focus on regulatory norms, his apparent acceptance of the general framework of positivism, his insistence on the independence and clear demarcation of the domain 'society', all this formidable intellectual apparatus simultaneously launched, with historically unprecedented force, academic sociology and a doctrine of social determinism. Formalistical-

ly, this is to be expected. What is unexpected is the acceptance of Durkheim's sociology in Anglo-American institutional circles. Goffman was not the only Anglo-American sociologist to be influenced by Durkheim. In fact, since he did not trumpet it, Goffman's debt to Durkheim goes mainly unnoticed. It is the institutional leaders of Anglo-American sociology who have openly embraced Durkheim's work: Parsons, Blau, Coleman, Lipset, Merton. How can a new discipline which is founded upon, and insists in no uncertain terms upon, the principle of social determinism, take root and flourish in a society which thinks of itself as based on the opposing principle of individual liberty?

The paradox resolves itself if we re-read all positivistic statements about 'society' as expressions of desire for the ultimate situation or condition of the individual, in an individualistic society. 'Society is a phenomenon in- and of-itself, independent, self-actuating, self-realizing, willful, and capable of coercion to achieve its aims.' Durkheim's society is a familiar figure, displaced, but immediately recognizable as the 'person' dreamed of in Western bourgeois individualism.

Durkheim's 'Society' has all the characteristics which after Freud (Sigmund but especially Anna) and Lacan we have come to associate with the Ego. Apparently, nothing is scarier, no terror of the forest worse, than the discovery, upon reflection, of the insubstantiality and disorganization of internal impressions, the utter weightlessness of the human self. The response to this is the erection of numerous defenses, the emptier the soul, the stronger the defense. Logic of all types, and especially symbolic logic, is perhaps the most developed form of self-defense of the ego, but there are other forms and figures including systems of religious belief. Over and against the insubstantiality of the self, the ego claims an identity for itself and forces others to honor that claim. While the ego is always inhibited by its origins in nothingness, it makes of itself the principle of willed, independent, decisive, forceful action. Recently, feminists have argued that ego is a male thing, but it would be better to say that some males are ego-things. Language would cut across the ego. Grammatically, the 'I' is subject, not object, but there is something pre-linguistic about the ego, so that even the distance on the self which language might otherwise provide is blocked by the ego already armed against this contingency. The domain of the ego is not merely consciousness, but also the body in its totality, and words can only build it up or tear

it down. Everything, even language itself, is reduced by the centralizing, unifying tendency toward ego self-exaltation, to be either for it or against it. Its only drive is to keep itself whole, and its greatest fear is dissolution or dismemberment. The ego, even in its most normal, peaceful state, is always just a little bit paranoid, just a little jealous, a little aggressive in its affairs. Its rages are what give ultimate meaning to paranoia, jealousy, and aggression. It is the One; there can be no Other. It protects itself by hardening its outer shell, but always furtively, knowing that the shell is proof positive of the soft interior. The ego cannot enter into real relationships with anything other than itself. It sustains itself with fantasies of its own superior dignity and power. Even when the ego knows that it must join with others for survival, or for cultural and biological reproduction, its every impulse in this direction is blocked by a sense of danger. It dreads its reproductive responsibilities because they always involve a risk of loss of its own unique integrity and independence. The aggressivity of the ego will always have an element of sexuality, aggression being its only means of sexual expression. And, correlatively, in its dealings with others, the ego always insists that it monopolize feelings, that the other may approach only on condition of absolute restraint of passion.

Durkheim's formulation is acceptable as the central sociological figure in a society predisposed to egoistic individualism, to the extent that it is an invitation to ego identification with ultimate power, independence and 'freedom'. It is usable as theory, in the place occupied by Anglo-American sociology, i.e., the form of partial self-knowledge in an individualistic society. To the extent that the individual is identified with the social, that the individual is a truly socialized character who can be counted upon to uphold social norms, such persons are legitimately aligned with the enormous power of the Social.[5] The linkage of social determinism and individual freedom is a contradiction or a paradox only if the opposition (society – individual) on which it is based is real.

If, in fact, we have a tautology, or only one term (ego) pretending to be two (individual and society), it is a tautology which is on the way to revealing itself as such. In Anglo-American sociology, both society and the individual are always represented as one form or another of a selfish ego which attempts to bend everything to its own will. Everywhere in Goffman's writings, without commenting directly on the matter, he leaves clues and hints that he is operating on the other side of this tautology, in full awareness of it. On the individual, for example, he remarked:

> this secular world is not so irreligious as we might think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself remains a deity of considerable importance. He walks with some dignity and is the recipient of many little offerings. He is jealous of the worship due him, yet, approached in the right spirit, he is ready to forgive those who have offended him (1967:95 opd, 1956).

This is Goffman's early intimation that he has witnessed the descent of the ego. These 'little gods' have egos, to be certain, but ones we can smile about.

Every other variant of sociology which has succeeded in establishing itself in Anglo-American society represents society or the individual, or both, as unified and capable in-and-of-itself of independent action. Talcott Parsons sought to construct a unified sociological theory by demonstrating organizational congruence and linkage between culture, society and the psyche. For a person who wants to live as a willful being in a powerful society, belief in the tightness of fit between mind, act and community is necessarily taken as a given. Socio-biology, briefly influential at Harvard in the years following the decline of Parsonian sociology, added genetic constitution and species survival to the orderly layering of positively interlinked systems. Sociological phenomenologists following Schutz, proceed from the assumption of a unification at the level of consciousness which they term 'inter-subjectivity'. Even Marx, whose writings are now more influential in England and America than they have ever been outside the Soviet Union, developed a unified theory of commodity production and social relations, although the implications of such a unification evidently distressed him:

> There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world, the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and with the human race [*Capital*, 1965:72].

And further on:

> In order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another, as persons whose will resides in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and part with his own, except by means of an act done by mutual consent [1965:84].

In sum, all of sociology, before and after Durkheim is marked absolutely by a primary narcissism, a drive to unify *Mind, Self, and Society*. The American pragmatist philosopher, George Herbert Mead, went farthest in developing a model in which group, individual, and social communication are incapable of independent existence, or inseparable from a singular unity.[6] Durkheim was only the first to make this principle of societal unity which contains the individual explicit in his discourse and to apply it in an intellectually rigorous fashion. I am about to argue that Goffman was first to go beyond Durkheim, an intellectual move that is made possible only by taking Durkheim absolutely seriously. Goffman's selves have egos, which make them distinct in sociological discourse and suggests that Goffman's sociology is operational beyond ego concerns. Silence on the ego in the larger Anglo-American sociological framework, even expressions of opposition to ego concepts, is the first line of defense of the ego by sociological half-knowledge. Goffman exposed ego-expressions in everyday social interactions and teased us about them, in much the same way that a gentle mother uses humor to loosen up her adolescent child's self-centeredness.

Beyond the ego-form

Historically, Goffman's sociology flourished at the moment when geo-political western self-centeredness cracked. His descriptions of the self, which were at once clear and true, but also strange somehow, appeared just when Europe and America first realized that they could not indefinitely conceive of themselves as absolute powers. His writings appeared at the exact moment when Freud's insight that the drive for unity is a death drive became terrible historical reality. We are still living in this era when there is no more important intellectual task than that of de-valorizing unity. For sociology, this means rewriting theory in such a way as to establish the realm of the social, or society, on an entirely different base, as in an unbreakable but radically heterogeneous relationship with something other. This is less of an empirical question than a matter of living intellectual history, having to do with the form of collective self-understanding determining the conditions of existence. Simply put, we might now try to learn to live with otherness other than as something which must be overcome

and incorporated as in *e pluribus unum*. We might now try to look upon otherness as something other than an invitation to dominance or submission. The test of the present is to determine whether or not human kind is sophisticated enough to learn to live in a 'society' in which the connection of self-to-self or self to society is not linear and deterministic, exhibiting the characteristics of a single system.[7]

It should be theoretically, and eventually practically, feasible to constitute human society and relationships as existing between principles, fully dependent on two or more orders which are not otherwise related, as, for example, language exists between, and is fully dependent upon, grammar and rhetoric which are otherwise unrelated. Such a conception requires a re-valuation of dis-unity. So long as society is conceived as a giant ego, 'dis-unity' can only convey a sense of dread and anxiety associated with threat of loss of an essential 'member', the term aptly used in the old social science paradigms to mean both an individual within a group, and the penis, or 'male member'. It is important not to reject the term 'disunity', which would only have the effect of burying its problematic deeper still. The term should be kept alive while a different value is urged upon it. To the extent that human affairs are socially situated and socially determined within the ego-form, there has never been such a thing as human interaction, i.e., discourse not predetermined to result in the dominance of one interactant over the other. Interaction, in what we might attempt to frame as a 'meaningful' sense of the term, requires that we are able to recognize the other as other, and it requires an understanding of interaction that operates outside the realm of cause and effect, outside of the ego. Goffman's understanding.

Goffman's solution

Goffman called the other perspective which he brought to sociology, 'dramatism', or the 'dramaturgical frame of reference', an idea which he borrowed from the maverick American literary critic, Kenneth Burke. It it not so much the originality of his adaptation of Burke, which gives Goffman's work its distinctive caste. The modification of Burke's concepts and their adaptation to an expanded sociological discourse, is careful and orderly (see below), certainly, but the radical move here is the introjection into the realm of the social of concern

for expression as something different from social organization, but equally important in everyday affairs. Suddenly we have not a layering of units or domains (e.g., self and society), but an intersection of heterogeneous principles and the first opportunity to describe social life as it is lived as marked by ambiguity and uncertainty, fragmentation, happy and sad accidents, discontinuity and resolution.

Goffman's theoretical resource for his development of 'dramaturgical sociology' is the 'Introduction' to Burke's giant *A Grammar of Motives and a Rhetoric of Motives*. The key to understanding this 'Introduction' is Burke's approach to human motivation. By 'motive' Burke never means inner or ego feelings of desire, fear, reason, which lead to decisive actions. Rather, motive is the organization of evidence which gives meaning to action: Burke's 'motive' is closely aligned to that which the police detective seeks or the actor and the playwright conveys. In the following passage, Burke makes clear that he specifically intended sociological application of his dramatism, and he counters the idea that human feelings emanate from an individual center to become motives for social action.

> Any reduction of *social* motives to terms of sheer 'nature' would now seem to me a major error. Naturalism has served as deceptively in the modern world as supernaturalism ever did in the past, to misrepresent motives that are intrinsic to the social order. In recent decades, this deception has been all the greater, since it borrows persuasiveness from the prestige of the natural sciences and their pragmatic sanction. For the whole story, we would add this extra co-ordinate, for which we have chosen the unwieldy name of the 'socio-anagogic'. The word is intended to sum up the ways in which things of the senses are secretly emblematic of motives in the social order, so that all visible, tangible entities become an enigma, and materials become pageantry (1962:xv).

Burke (1965:31) provides an illustration which he handles much as Goffman would. When a man hears footsteps behind him in an unlighted alley at night, and he walks ahead a little faster, the Motive is the footsteps in the dark. Any feelings of 'fear' or 'suspicion' experienced by the man are effects, the same as his hurrying forward. Only the drive to center everything on the ego causes us to bracket the situation and ascribe motivational status to the inner feeling.[8]

Five concepts form the base of interpretation of motives: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose. Burke (1962:xvii) writes:

> In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*.

Beyond this basic framework there are dramaturgical principles of coherence which assure normally meaningful appearances and expressions. For example, the principle of coherence binding *act* to *scene* suggests that ordinary, or normal, expressive behavior in church would differ from that at a baseball game: church-goers speak in hushed tones while the sports fan may be raucous. Dramatists manipulate the 'act-scene ratio' (i.e., script ball-park behavior into a church setting, or vice versa) to produce comic and other effects.

In the quote above, Burke states that the Agent is a person who performs the Act. At other points, however, he suggests that Objects may be agents, especially in industrial or technological scenes: the 'means of production', Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Agent can be further differentiated into human and non-human helpful co-agents who support the act and counter-agents who attempt to frustrate the act. Erving Goffman (1969) would eventually add Secret-agent by demonstrating that the acts of spies are essentially similar to those of persons in everyday life who are compelled to conceal certain kinds of information, while revealing others, in their dealings with others which may be routine, but none the less strategic even if they are habitual.

Burke uses the example of the human body to illustrate the ways in which the dramaturgical terms are keyed within different analytical frames. In aesthetics, the body is an extension of the Agent. A portrait photographer, writer, or an actor can treat a particular gesture or facial expression, not merely as reflecting a passing thought or feeling, but as conveying with unique force the total character of the represented person. The body is the Scene of the action in the medical model. In psychotherapy, the body functions as an Agency, a medium which, in its minor failings, reports on the mental states of its owner. In other words, Burke is suggesting that his dramatism serve a double function as tool for interpreting expression, and as a meta-language for sorting out the differences between competing frameworks:

> A perfectionist might seek to evolve terms free of ambiguity and inconsistency (as with the terministic ideals of symbolic logic and logical positivism). But we have a different purpose in view, one that probably retains traces of its comic origin. . . . (W)hat we want is not terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise [1962: xx].

Without parallel, the 'strategic spot at which ambiguities necessarily arise', the area of life that could not exist in an unambiguous mode is everyday face-to-face interaction.

Before proceeding to Goffman's use of Burke, it is important to note that Burke's dramatism is as rigorous in its own way as Durkheim's sociology. His dramatism is a closely held operation of principles which allow the production and conveyance of values and meanings, which sustain narrative lines, and focus and unfocus interpretations. He keeps this work within the domain of signifying materials. At no point does he yield causality to social forces, history, or to individual psychology.

Goffman's *Presentation*

In 1959, Goffman published his first book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, loosely based on his 1953 Chicago Ph.D. dissertation on communication conduct in the Shetland Isles. The book proffers a perspective for dealing with social life that occurs in modern institutional and domestic settings. Methodologically, it does not much depart from the Chicago school of sociological ethnography, excepting perhaps the quality of the work.[9] Conceptually, however, Goffman's explicit combination of dramatism and Durkheimian sociology represents a move that is still unassimilated in Anglo-American sociology. He claims to put the dramaturgical before the sociological (although he will later claim to dismantle the stage apparatus, leaving only the sociological):

> 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 problems 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 (1959:15).

But this emphasis on expressive matters is motivated by an original assessment that society is a fictional unity, albeit a necessary fiction, so necessary that its fictional status cannot be admitted:

> (H)armony 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 (1959:9).

Goffman's handling of the expressive aspects of everyday life, that which produces the fiction of a social consensus, is carefully derived from Burke's pentad of dramaturgical terms. The Scene of the action in Goffman's study is what he calls a region in a social establishment that is 'bounded to some degree by barriers to perception' [1959: 105]. Region is further subdivided by Goffman into front and back with different accessibility rules and requirements for decorum. Goffman notes, for example, that it is the back regions of social establishments (family rooms, executive wash rooms, store rooms, etc.) where co-workers and other intimates may gather to relax or to prepare for their performances out front. Back regions are the settings for covering mistakes, practical joking, cursing, unbuttoning, etc. Moreover, the loosening of standards in back regions is not merely an expression of human nature, it is a social requirement: anyone who is always on guard, even in a back region, is automatically suspect as a loyal team player.

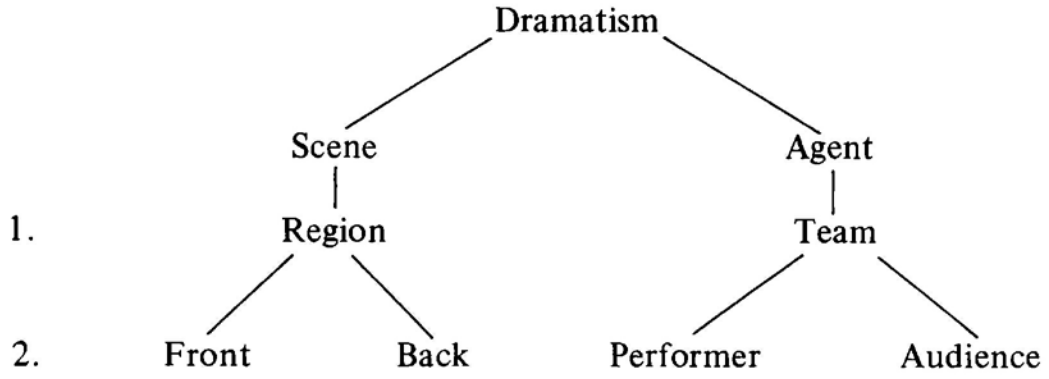
Agencies are defined by Goffman as the collection of devices that facilitate the effective staging of commercial and domestic acts. These would include such mundane items as the sign taped to the cash register telling the clerk to smile at the customer, or the peep holes in front doors which permit the person who answers the door to have the right facial expression for the person who rings the bell, even before the door is opened. On a larger scale, agencies facilitating social appearances include such things as the otherwise pointless meandering of suburban residential streets intended to produce the impression that this is something other than a neighborhood that might have been laid out on a repetitious geometric grid.

Goffman re-defines Burke's term Agent into team, preferring to deal with the problem of one person 'teams' rather than the problem

of the immanence of the ego within the text that always accompanies the use of a term ('agent', e.g.) which can be read as representing the individual. Goffman further subdivides his term team into performer and audience, and drives this division into the heart of the ego. There are multi-person teams, one person teams, and finally the hyper-socialized person who is able to be on two sides at once while maintaining the fiction of personal integrity:

> a performer can be taken in by his own act, convinced at the moment that the impression of reality which he fosters is the one and only reality. In such cases, the performer comes to be his own audience; he comes to be performer and observer of the same show. Presumably he intracepts or incorporates the standards he attempts to maintain in the presence of others so that his conscience requires him to act in a socially proper way. It will have been necessary for the individual in his performing capacity to conceal from himself in his audience capacity the discreditable facts that he has had to learn about the performance; in everyday terms, there will be things he knows, or has known, that he will not be able to tell himself. This intricate maneuver of self-delusion constantly occurs . . . (1959:80-81).

It should be noted that Goffman makes only one direct reference to Burke as he sets up his revised version of dramatism.[10] But this does not undermine the connection which I am seeking to demonstrate here. The main difference between Goffman and Burke is that Goffman has radicalized Burke's dramatism in its own terms. He has changed Burke's Act into performance, a more precisely dramaturgical term. The move from Agent to the more sociological sounding team, is immediately seized upon for refinement into the opposition performer-audience, which, at once, makes it more precise and re-inscribes it into dramatism. Goffman's redefinition of Scene into region and subdivision of region into front and back (stage) is an analogous set of definitional moves. Goffman's reworking of Burke's terms is not so precise as to be susceptible to description by a transformation rule, but almost. Such a rule might be written as follows: Step 1. Operationalize the Burkian term for use in sociology. Step 2. Divide the operational term into a dialectically opposed pair of new dramaturgical concepts. For example:



Sociology separates conduct into moral division: normal-abnormal, conformist-deviant, functional-dysfunctional. Dramatism provides a second code, operating on the same material in terms of expressivity, an analytic of the quality of appearances and performances. Not only are the two orders not reducible one to the other, the absence of a common base is the only possible foundation for a society that is not perfectly pre-programmed to reproduce the ego form. Some socially deviant acts are, in fact, abnormal appearing. The conservative aesthetics of violence in contemporary mass entertainment provide examples. Other deviant acts are carefully scripted to appear normal. To pass a bad check, the passer must successfully imbed the act in a normal-seeming routine. The behavior is socially deviant but expressively conformist. The other possibility is for a socially normal act to be expressively incongruous as when several individuals crawling around on their hands and knees in the middle of a busy street intersection may feel the need to explain to passersby that they are looking for a lost contact lens. When a person is called upon to give an excuse for a minor social infraction, he or she will soon discover that moral adherence to the truth may lead to flawed expression. It is better to say 'My car broke down,' than 'I forgot our appointment,' even, or especially, when the latter is the truth.

Excuses

	Good	Bad
True		
False		

It was Goffman's great contribution to our understanding of social life to show that it can be lived at the intersection of social and dramatic codes which may or may not have anything to do with each other:

Expressive Code

Social Code	Normal appearances	Abnormal appearances
Normal behavior		
Abnormal behavior		

Except for Goffman's work (can we continue to call it sociology?), the intersection of expressive and social codes is unexplored territory. One can see at first glance, that it is also a gap between cause and effect and a territory that cannot be entered by the ego form, whether this is the Durkheimian-societal, or psychoanalytic-individual variants. It is a gap between cause and effect because the same 'facts' simultaneously inhabit both frames which are at least orthogonal, if not absolutely heterogeneous to one another. There may be positive linkages (cause-effect) in either the social or in the expressive frames, but not between the two.[11] Facts cannot reside in this gap, nor can egos. This is the domain of signs. The sign which expresses 'something

to someone' is the only passport through this uncharted space and, of course, the ego is dumb when it comes to semiotics. It can only ask defensively, 'What is semiotics?', but never stay for an answer.

There are numerous uses of the sign concept and semiotic principles in sociology before Goffman, including Durkheim's (1965:264) prophetic statement, 'Social life, in all its aspects and in every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism.' But there is no real need for semiotics or the sign concept in a unified system of social relations, except as a mask for the fact that no interaction properly so-called is actually taking place. 'Symbolic Interaction' may suggest that something along these lines is occurring, when all that is actually happening is reproduction of the ego-form, here called the 'individual' and there called 'society'. But if we follow Goffman into the gap between expression and social forms, between cause and effect, into a space where we have to leave our egos behind and discover otherness without the crutch of determinism, sociology becomes a branch of semiotics.

As necessary as this move may be from geo-political and ecological standpoints, to reduce the level of violence against nature and other peoples, we cannot expect to follow Goffman into paradise.

Ego and sign

Imagine a person, a face in the crowd, someone walking down the street or engrossed in labor. There is still the possibility of a purely social, non-ideological person, a factual person, doing and thinking positivistically. But alongside of this material, de-signified being, there now exists a second possibility: namely, that person is transformed into a sign. Now he or she means something to someone. A muscle bulges, a curve appears, the outline of the mouth is seen through the veil. The person becomes for the other a living representation of power, beauty, or modesty. When such souls embrace they may believe they are cleaving to beauty or power itself. And alongside of this second possibility grows a third, still more radically free form: the person can serve as a vehicle for signs. This is the door through which Goffman passed. Beyond it, the person no longer retains the small patrimony of ontological status derived from being an ideological product, now one is a messenger, a carrier. The person is transformed

from ideological product to ideological instrument, possessing nothing but the capability of moving minds.

There are lines of practical action, tools, consumer goods, persons and natural objects all written upon in the sense of both written on and written about, and thereby transformed into objects of desire and revulsion, i.e., made to signify or made significant. This is the most salient characteristic of the modern world, but by no means restricted to it. Durkheim's primitive Australians 'wrote' upon their churinga boards, transforming them into sacred objects, achieving the same effects although in a limited way. Every human being, action and object in the modern world is eventually pressed into compulsory service as ideological instruments, each damaged ego dutifully carrying its sign, of protest, of status, of the zodiac, without real possibility of cause or effect, and for the most part not having the slightest notion why? This is the form of post-structural alienation which bears no resemblance whatever to the alienation of the ego.

Conclusion

I have argued here for a semiotic sociology in the place of positivistic sociology, and I have also tried to suggest some reasons why such a sociology is resisted. Positivism restricted itself to the study of only the materiality, not the significance of social facts. Within positivism, signification is relegated to the status of a beautiful or otherwise distorted (i.e., incorrect) reflection of underlying social reality, either a useless or dangerous supplement to reality. In either case, the sign is something to be opposed. It should go without saying that positivism still poses questions and provides answers which are useful in the administration and governance of complex societies.

The theoretical error in the positivistic opposition to semiotics is as follows: The sign-character of the representation of a person, group, community, natural object, etc., cannot arise entirely from the material base of that which it signifies. Nor can the signification be ultimately controlled by an ego, whether this is an individual or all of society. The sign always occurs between its referential object and something or someone other, and its meaning is always a product of both the material, referential base and the other which gains the faculty of intelligence by being an other in a sign exchange. Thus

we may have, e.g. (1) a material here-and-now woman, (2) a woman who, by virtue of her physical and other make-up, can be called 'feminine', or 'masculine', i.e., given significance, and (3) this representation which has found a host body can reflect male ideals of 'femininity' as much as any observable characteristics of the woman that might figure in positivistic accounts of femininity. It is precisely the inevitable operation of these male ideals, or other ideological forms, that are suppressed by positivism. In the same way, our understanding of rural community life as decent, intimate, and slow-paced is as much an urban projection as an accurate reflection of rural existence. There can be no such thing as a pure representation of the meaning of the facts, the positivistic ideal of 'data', in a differentiated society. Only an ego can transform a sign into a fact.

The sign can never be a simple ideological product of a singular consciousness. The sign represents something to someone; it does not represent consciousness to itself. This is not to say there will always be disagreement on the meaning of signs. Goffman's 'veneer of consensus' is often thick, resembling armor. In the case of a 'feminine' woman, the value of a gesture may be agreed upon by the (re)presenting woman and both her male and female admirers. Even her detractors may admit that it worked to produce certain expressive effects. On the other hand, the gesture may be a distortion for one but not for others. A dewy gaze can be interpreted as an expression of overwhelming feeling or a crude manipulation. Garish make-up suggests the possibility of distortion all around. Every sign that is located in the gap between the social and expressive codes occupies the territory of several truths which it may bring into perfect correspondence according to the ideals of scientific concept formation. Or, it may subordinate one truth to another, or reveal the multiplication and opposition of truths.

Human beings are perfectly adapted to society and to expression, perfectly adapted to convey truths and equally perfectly adapted to falsification. Science cannot resolve this, at least science as we now know it. It has lived for too long on the side of 'truth' to be able to understand life as it is actually lived. Religion won't help. Socio-historical matters have advanced to the point that even the rather supple moral formulations of Christianity no longer provide answers. The church does not know what to do when good and bad and true and false fall out of alignment. No moral leader will counsel that we must tell a petty truth ('I forgot your birthday') when we know it will break a loved one's heart, but where do we draw the line?

And democracy won't help. A pitchman president who is thought by some to be better than perfect, while others, basing their opinion on the same set of 'facts', revile him as the epitome of evil, is emblematic. There can be no democratic solution to this kind of meta-contradiction as when a majority says, in effect, 'the truth must lay somewhere between these two extremes.' There is absolutely nothing between these two extremes. We desire to continue to bind our political images to the rules of logical consistency which governed the unified conscience of scientists, Christians and primitives. But as a carrier of ideological signs, the image of the 'leader' can only exist between consciousnesses. To the extent that we demand consistency from these images, our leaders will continue to be seen as perfectly perfect and perfectly evil. Absolute contradiction is the realization of the full potential of a political instrument. The democratic principle has already been transformed into the myth of representativeness, into universalistic or universalish representation by the Presidents of Modernity.

Modernity is uglier than it need be because the social sciences and the humanities have been slow to express what they already know. Human kind is better adapted to be instruments of meaning than products of meaning. Signs exist between consciousnesses and the world, and are material and objective, and at the same time ideological. Or, as Saussure said, they are composed of an objective sound or gesture or other image, which is bound to an idea or concept. The only thing which stands in the way of dismantling the ego-form of violent interpersonal and international relations is half-knowledge of the sign and its operations. The working out of modern systems of belief and values is not impossible. It is occurring all the time in practical everyday exchanges of ideological materials, the use of body shape, nuclear weapons, perfume, landscaping, etc., as well as words in communication. At no point does this concatenation of socio-cultural (or societal-expressive) meanings disappear into the psyche or consciousness, never to return to the material world. It is always before us and between us. The Marxists, who have wanted to go further than anyone else in deciphering these arrangements, and who should be thanked for their perseverance, have not been able to make much progress so long as they cling to the idea of the separation of 'super-structure' from 'base'. The sign, conceived as an ideological product embodied in material things between consciousnesses, may help us to understand class relations not merely in their theoretically ideal

oppositions, but also in terms of the mechanism by which they maintain their form and the form of their historical relations with other classes and groups.

Notes

1. In a graduate seminar at the University of Pennsylvania in 1969, when pressed by a student on a theoretical point, Goffman asserted 'Society is a phenomenon '*sui generis*,' as God used to say.' The same phrase appears somewhere in the writing: 'Society is a phenomenon *sui generis* as He used to say.'
2. See, e.g., 'Institutional Office and the Person' in his *Sociological Eye* (1971: 132 ff.).
3. 'Mental Symptoms and the Public Order', pp. 137-148 in his *Interaction Ritual* (1967); 'The Insanity of Place', pp. 335-390 in *Relations in Public* (1971) and *Asylums* (1961).
4. The theme of ritual in face-to-face interaction recurs throughout the work from the first to the last published pieces. See, e.g., 'On the Nature of Deference and Demeanor', first published in 1956 and reprinted by Goffman in his *Interaction Ritual* (1967).
5. Calling it 'egomimesis', Juliet Flower-MacCannell has traced the problematic of identification with 'unified society' from Lacan and Goffman to Durkheim back to Rousseau. See her book *The Regime of the Brother*, forthcoming, Routledge.
6. For a sympathetic and detailed account of Mead's influence on sociology, see R.S. Perinbanayagam, *Signifying Acts* (1985).
7. This was the openly stated dream of 1950s sociology and lingers as a fond memory of the field.
8. This example is treated in detail in D. MacCannell (1976).
9. Goffman is acknowledged by both his followers and detractors alike to be the best ethnographic observer of modern social life.
10. On page 25 of *The Presentation of Self*, 'Cf. Kenneth Burke's comments on the 'scene-act-agent ratio', *A Grammar of Motives* . . . .' There are several other notes to Burke in Goffman's chapter on 'Discrepant Roles', which have nothing to do with the general framework.
11. There are, of course, strong historical reasons to bet that at least 1000 scientist man years will be spent 'proving' this statement 'wrong'.