

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."<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

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## Chapter I

### PERFORMANCES

#### *Belief in the Part One is Playing*

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show "for the benefit of other people." It will be convenient to begin a consideration of performances by turning the question around and looking at the individual's own belief in the impression of reality that he attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself.

At one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality. When his audience is also convinced in this way about the show he puts on—and this seems to be the typical case—then for the moment at least, only the sociologist or the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the "realness" of what is presented.

At the other extreme, we find that the performer may not be taken in at all by his own routine. This possibility is understandable, since no one is in quite as good an observational position to see through the act as the person who puts it on. Coupled with this, the performer may be moved to guide the conviction of his audience only as a means to



other ends, having no ultimate concern in the conception that they have of him or of the situation. When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical, reserving the term "sincere" for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance. It should be understood that the cynic, with all his professional disinvolvement, may obtain unprofessional pleasures from his masquerade, experiencing a kind of gleeful spiritual aggression from the fact that he can toy at will with something his audience must take seriously.<sup>1</sup>

It is not assumed, of course, that all cynical performers are interested in deluding their audiences for purposes of what is called "self-interest" or private gain. A cynical individual may delude his audience for what he considers to be their own good, or for the good of the community, etc. For illustrations of this we need not appeal to sadly enlightened showmen such as Marcus Aurelius or Hsun Tzu. We know that in service occupations practitioners who may otherwise be sincere are sometimes forced to delude their customers because their customers show such a heartfelt demand for it. Doctors who are led into giving placebos, filling station attendants who resignedly check and recheck tire pressures for anxious women motorists, shoe clerks who sell a shoe that fits but tell the customer it is the size she wants to hear—these are cynical performers whose audiences will not allow them to be sincere. Similarly, it seems that sympathetic patients in mental wards will sometimes feign bizarre symptoms so that student nurses will not be subjected to a disappointingly sane performance.<sup>2</sup> So also,

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the real crime of the confidence man is not that he takes money from his victims but that he robs all of us of the belief that middle-class manners and appearance can be sustained only by middle class people. A disabused professional can be cynically hostile to the service relation his clients expect him to extend to them: the confidence man is in a position to hold the whole "legit" world in this contempt.

<sup>2</sup> See Taxel, *op. cit.*, p. 4. Harry Stack Sullivan has suggested that the tact of institutionalized performers can operate in the other direction, resulting in a kind of *noblesse-oblige* sanity.

when inferiors extend their most lavish reception for visiting superiors, the selfish desire to win favor may not be the chief motive; the inferior may be tactfully attempting to put the superior at ease by simulating the kind of world the superior is thought to take for granted.

I have suggested two extremes: an individual may be taken in by his own act or be cynical about it. These extremes are something a little more than just the ends of a continuum. Each provides the individual with a position which has its own particular securities and defenses, so there will be a tendency for those who have traveled close to one of these poles to complete the voyage. Starting with lack of inward belief in one's role, the individual may follow the natural movement described by Park:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role . . . It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our

See his "Socio-Psychiatric Research," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, X, pp. 987-88.

"A study of 'social recoveries' in one of our large mental hospitals some years ago taught me that patients were often released from care because they had learned not to manifest symptoms to the enviroing persons; in other words, had integrated enough of the personal environment to realize the prejudice opposed to their delusions. It seemed almost as if they grew wise enough to be tolerant of the imbecility surrounding them, having finally discovered that it was stupidity and not malice. They could then secure satisfaction from contact with others, while discharging a part of their cravings by psychotic means."

<sup>3</sup> Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), p. 249.

personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons.<sup>4</sup>

This may be illustrated from the community life of Shetland.<sup>5</sup> For the last four or five years the island's tourist hotel has been owned and operated by a married couple of crofter origins. From the beginning, the owners were forced to set aside their own conceptions as to how life ought to be led, displaying in the hotel a full round of middle-class services and amenities. Lately, however, it appears that the managers have become less cynical about the performance that they stage; they themselves are becoming middle class and more and more enamored of the selves their clients impute to them.

Another illustration may be found in the raw recruit who initially follows army etiquette in order to avoid physical punishment and eventually comes to follow the rules so that his organization will not be shamed and his officers and fellow soldiers will respect him.

As suggested, the cycle of disbelief-to-belief can be followed in the other direction, starting with conviction or insecure aspiration and ending in cynicism. Professions which the public holds in religious awe often allow their recruits to follow the cycle in this direction, and often recruits follow it in this direction not because of a slow realization that they are deluding their audience—for by ordinary social standards the claims they make may be quite valid—but because they can use this cynicism as a means of insulating their inner selves from contact with the audience. And we may even expect to find typical careers of faith, with the individual starting out with one kind of involvement in the performance he is required to give, then moving back and forth several times between sincerity and cynicism before completing all the phases and turning-points of self-belief for a person of his station. Thus, students of medical schools suggest that idealistically oriented beginners in

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Shetland Isle study.

medical school typically lay aside their holy aspirations for a period of time. During the first two years the students find that their interest in medicine must be dropped that they may give all their time to the task of learning how to get through examinations. During the next two years they are too busy learning about diseases to show much concern for the persons who are diseased. It is only after their medical schooling has ended that their original ideals about medical service may be reasserted.<sup>6</sup>

While we can expect to find natural movement back and forth between cynicism and sincerity, still we must not rule out the kind of transitional point that can be sustained on the strength of a little self-illusion. We find that the individual may attempt to induce the audience to judge him and the situation in a particular way, and he may seek this judgment as an ultimate end in itself, and yet he may not completely believe that he deserves the valuation of self which he asks for or that the impression of reality which he fosters is valid. Another mixture of cynicism and belief is suggested in Kroeber's discussion of shamanism:

Next, there is the old question of deception. Probably most shamans or medicine men, the world over, help along with sleight-of-hand in curing and especially in exhibitions of power. This sleight-of-hand is sometimes deliberate; in many cases awareness is perhaps not deeper than the foreconscious. The attitude, whether there has been repression or not, seems to be as toward a pious fraud. Field ethnographers seem quite generally convinced that even shamans who know that they add fraud nevertheless also believe in their powers, and especially in those of other shamans: they consult them when they themselves or their children are ill.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> H. S. Becker and Blanche Greer, "The Fate of Idealism in Medical School," *American Sociological Review*, 23, pp. 50-56.

<sup>7</sup> A. L. Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 311.



## Front

I have been using the term "performance" to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. It will be convenient to label as "front" that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance. For preliminary purposes, it will be convenient to distinguish and label what seem to be the standard parts of front.

First, there is the "setting," involving furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it. A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the setting follows along with the performers; we see this in the funeral cortège, the civic parade, and the dream-like processions that kings and queens are made of. In the main, these exceptions seem to offer some kind of extra protection for performers who are, or who have momentarily become, highly sacred. These worthies are to be distinguished, of course, from quite profane performers of the peddler class who move their place of work between performances, often being forced to do so. In the matter of having one fixed place for one's setting, a ruler may be too sacred, a peddler too profane.

In thinking about the scenic aspects of front, we tend to think of the living room in a particular house and the small number of performers who can thoroughly identify themselves with it. We have given insufficient attention to

assemblages of sign-equipment which large numbers of performers can call their own for short periods of time. It is characteristic of Western European countries, and no doubt a source of stability for them, that a large number of luxurious settings are available for hire to anyone of the right kind who can afford them. One illustration of this may be cited from a study of the higher civil servant in Britain:

The question how far the men who rise to the top in the Civil Service take on the "tone" or "color" of a class other than that to which they belong by birth is delicate and difficult. The only definite information bearing on the question is the figures relating to the membership of the great London clubs. More than three-quarters of our high administrative officials belong to one or more clubs of high status and considerable luxury, where the entrance fee might be twenty guineas or more, and the annual subscription from twelve to twenty guineas. These institutions are of the upper class (not even of the upper-middle) in their premises, their equipment, the style of living practiced there, their whole atmosphere. Though many of the members would not be described as wealthy, only a wealthy man would unaided provide for himself and his family space, food and drink, service, and other amenities of life to the same standard as he will find at the Union, the Travellers', or the Reform.<sup>1</sup>

Another example can be found in the recent development of the medical profession where we find that it is increasingly important for a doctor to have access to the elaborate scientific stage provided by large hospitals, so that fewer and fewer doctors are able to feel that their setting is a place that they can lock up at night.<sup>2</sup>

If we take the term "setting" to refer to the scenic parts of expressive equipment, one may take the term "personal

<sup>1</sup> H. E. Dale, *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> David Solomon, "Career Contingencies of Chicago Physicians" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1952), p. 74.

front" to refer to the other items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes. As part of personal front we may include: insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like. Some of these vehicles for conveying signs, such as racial characteristics, are relatively fixed and over a span of time do not vary for the individual from one situation to another. On the other hand, some of these sign vehicles are relatively mobile or transitory, such as facial expression, and can vary during a performance from one moment to the next.

It is sometimes convenient to divide the stimuli which make up personal front into "appearance" and "manner," according to the function performed by the information that these stimuli convey. "Appearance" may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses. These stimuli also tell us of the individual's temporary ritual state, that is, whether he is engaging in formal social activity, work, or informal recreation, whether or not he is celebrating a new phase in the season cycle or in his life-cycle. "Manner" may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation. Thus a haughty, aggressive manner may give the impression that the performer expects to be the one who will initiate the verbal interaction and direct its course. A meek, apologetic manner may give the impression that the performer expects to follow the lead of others, or at least that he can be led to do so.

We often expect, of course, a confirming consistency between appearance and manner; we expect that the differences in social statuses among the interactants will be expressed in some way by congruent differences in the indications that are made of an expected interaction role. This type of coherence of front may be illustrated by the following description of the procession of a mandarin through a Chinese city:

Coming closely behind . . . the luxurious chair of the mandarin, carried by eight bearers, fills the vacant space in the street. He is mayor of the town, and for all practical purposes the supreme power in it. He is an ideal-looking official, for he is large and massive in appearance, whilst he has that stern and uncompromising look that is supposed to be necessary in any magistrate who would hope to keep his subjects in order. He has a stern and forbidding aspect, as though he were on his way to the execution ground to have some criminal decapitated. This is the kind of air that the mandarins put on when they appear in public. In the course of many years' experience, I have never once seen any of them, from the highest to the lowest, with a smile on his face or a look of sympathy for the people whilst he was being carried officially through the streets.<sup>3</sup>

But, of course, appearance and manner may tend to contradict each other, as when a performer who appears to be of higher estate than his audience acts in a manner that is unexpectedly equalitarian, or intimate, or apologetic, or when a performer dressed in the garments of a high position presents himself to an individual of even higher status.

In addition to the expected consistency between appearance and manner, we expect, of course, some coherence among setting, appearance, and manner.<sup>4</sup> Such coherence represents an ideal type that provides us with a means of stimulating our attention to and interest in exceptions. In this the student is assisted by the journalist, for exceptions to expected consistency among setting, appearance, and manner provide the piquancy and glamor of many careers and the salable appeal of many magazine articles. For example, a *New Yorker* profile on Roger Stevens (the real estate agent who engineered the sale of the Empire State Building) comments on the startling fact that Stevens has a

<sup>3</sup> J. Macgowan, *Sidelights on Chinese Life* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1908), p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kenneth Burke's comments on the "scene-act-agent ratio," *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945),



small house, a meager office, and no letterhead stationery.<sup>5</sup>

In order to explore more fully the relations among the several parts of social front, it will be convenient to consider here a significant characteristic of the information conveyed by front, namely, its abstractness and generality.

However specialized and unique a routine is, its social front, with certain exceptions will tend to claim facts that can be equally claimed and asserted of other, somewhat different routines. For example many service occupations offer their clients a performance that is illuminated with dramatic expressions of cleanliness, modernity, competence, and integrity. While in fact these abstract standards have a different significance in different occupational performances the observer is encouraged to stress the abstract similarities. For the observer this is a wonderful, though sometimes disastrous, convenience. Instead of having to maintain a different pattern of expectation and responsive treatment for each slightly different performer and performance he can place the situation in a broad category around which it is easy for him to mobilize his past experience and stereo-typical thinking. Observers then need only be familiar with a small and hence manageable vocabulary of fronts, and know how to respond to them, in order to orient themselves in a wide variety of situations. Thus in London the current tendency for chimney sweeps<sup>6</sup> and perfume clerks to wear white lab coats tends to provide the client with an understanding that the delicate tasks performed by these persons will be performed in what has become a standardized, clinical confidential manner.

There are grounds for believing that the tendency for a large number of different acts to be presented from behind a small number of fronts is a natural development in social organization. Radcliffe-Brown has suggested this in his claim that a "descriptive" kinship system which gives each person a unique place may work for very small communi-

<sup>5</sup> E. J. Kahn, Jr., "Closings and Openings," *The New Yorker*, February 13 and 20, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> See Mervyn Jones, "White as a Sweep," *The New Statesman and Nation*, December 6, 1952.

ties, but, as the number of persons becomes large, clan segmentation becomes necessary as a means of providing a less complicated system of identifications and treatments.<sup>7</sup> We see this tendency illustrated in factories, barracks, and other large social establishments. Those who organize these establishments find it impossible to provide a special cafeteria, special modes of payment, special vacation rights, and special sanitary facilities for every line and staff status category in the organization, and at the same time they feel that persons of dissimilar status ought not to be indiscriminately thrown together or classified together. As a compromise, the full range of diversity is cut at a few crucial points, and all those within a given bracket are allowed or obliged to maintain the same social front in certain situations.

In addition to the fact that different routines may employ the same front, it is to be noted that a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name. The front becomes a "collective representation" and a fact in its own right.

When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both.

Further, if the individual takes on a task that is not only new to him but also unestablished in the society, or if he attempts to change the light in which his task is viewed, he is likely to find that there are already several well-established fronts among which he must choose. Thus, when a task is given a new front we seldom find that the front it is given is itself new.

<sup>7</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Social Organization of Australian Tribes," *Oceania*, I, 440.

Since fronts tend to be selected, not created, we may expect trouble to arise when those who perform a given task are forced to select a suitable front for themselves from among several quite dissimilar ones. Thus, in military organizations, tasks are always developing which (it is felt) require too much authority and skill to be carried out behind the front maintained by one grade of personnel and too little authority and skill to be carried out behind the front maintained by the next grade in the hierarchy. Since there are relatively large jumps between grades, the task will come to "carry too much rank" or to carry too little.

An interesting illustration of the dilemma of selecting an appropriate front from several not quite fitting ones may be found today in American medical organizations with respect to the task of administering anesthesia.<sup>8</sup> In some hospitals anesthesia is still administered by nurses behind the front that nurses are allowed to have in hospitals regardless of the tasks they perform—a front involving ceremonial subordination to doctors and a relatively low rate of pay. In order to establish anesthesiology as a specialty for graduate medical doctors, interested practitioners have had to advocate strongly the idea that administering anesthesia is a sufficiently complex and vital task to justify giving to those who perform it the ceremonial and financial reward given to doctors. The difference between the front maintained by a nurse and the front maintained by a doctor is great; many things that are acceptable for nurses are *infra dignitatem* for doctors. Some medical people have felt that a nurse "under-ranked" for the task of administering anesthesia and that doctors "over-ranked"; were there an established status midway between nurse and doctor, an easier solution to the problem could perhaps be found.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See the thorough treatment of this problem in Dan C. Lortie, "Doctors without Patients: The Anesthesiologist, a New Medical Specialty" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1950). See also Mark Murphy's three-part Profile of Dr. Rovenstine, "Anesthesiologist," *The New Yorker*, October 25, November 1, and November 8, 1947.

<sup>9</sup> In some hospitals the intern and the medical student perform

Similarly, had the Canadian Army had a rank halfway between lieutenant and captain, two and a half pips instead of two or three, then Dental Corps captains, many of them of a low ethnic origin, could have been given a rank that would perhaps have been more suitable in the eyes of the Army than the captaincies they were actually given.

I do not mean here to stress the point of view of a formal organization or a society; the individual, as someone who possesses a limited range of sign-equipment, must also make unhappy choices. Thus, in the crofting community studied by the writer, hosts often marked the visit of a friend by offering him a shot of hard liquor, a glass of wine, some home-made brew, or a cup of tea. The higher the rank or temporary ceremonial status of the visitor, the more likely he was to receive an offering near the liquor end of the continuum. Now one problem associated with this range of sign-equipment was that some crofters could not afford to keep a bottle of hard liquor, so that wine tended to be the most indulgent gesture they could employ. But perhaps a more common difficulty was the fact that certain visitors, given their permanent and temporary status at the time, outranked one potable and under-ranked the next one in line. There was often a danger that the visitor would feel just a little affronted or, on the other hand, that the host's costly and limited sign-equipment would be misused. In our middle classes a similar situation arises when a hostess has to decide whether or not to use the good silver, or which would be the more appropriate to wear, her best afternoon dress or her plainest evening gown.

I have suggested that social front can be divided into traditional parts, such as setting, appearance, and manner, and that (since different routines may be presented from behind the same front) we may not find a perfect fit between the specific character of a performance and the general socialized guise in which it appears to us. These two

such tasks do not require a large amount of experience and practical training, for while this intermediate status of doctor-in-training is a permanent part of hospitals, all those who hold it



facts, taken together, lead one to appreciate that items in the social front of a particular routine are not only found in the social fronts of a whole range of routines but also that the whole range of routines in which one item of sign-equipment is found will differ from the range of routines in which another item in the same social front will be found. Thus, a lawyer may talk to a client in a social setting that he employs only for this purpose (or for a study), but the suitable clothes he wears on such occasions he will also employ, with equal suitability, at dinner with colleagues and at the theater with his wife. Similarly, the prints that hang on his wall and the carpet on his floor may be found in domestic social establishments. Of course, in highly ceremonial occasions, setting, manner, and appearance may all be unique and specific, used only for performances of a single type of routine, but such exclusive use of sign-equipment is the exception rather than the rule.

#### Dramatic Realization

While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure. For if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express *during the interaction* what he wishes to convey. In fact, the performer may be required not only to express his claimed capacities during the interaction but also to do so during a split second in the interaction. Thus, if a baseball umpire is to give the impression that he is sure of his judgment, he must forgo the moment of thought which might make him sure of his judgment; he must give an instantaneous decision so that the audience will be sure that he is sure of his judgment.<sup>1</sup>

It may be noted that in the case of some statuses dramatization presents no problem, since some of the acts which

<sup>1</sup> See Babe Pinelli, as told to Joe King, *Mr. Ump* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 75.

they are darting about doing some visible thing such as administering hypodermics.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the proprietor of a service establishment may find it difficult to dramatize what is actually being done for clients because the clients cannot "see" the overhead costs of the service rendered them. Undertakers must therefore charge a great deal for their highly visible product—a coffin that has been transformed into a casket—because many of the other costs of conducting a funeral are ones that cannot be readily dramatized.<sup>3</sup> Merchants, too, find that they must charge high prices for things that look intrinsically expensive in order to compensate the establishment for expensive things like insurance, slack periods, etc., that never appear before the customers' eyes.

The problem of dramatizing one's work involves more than merely making invisible costs visible. The work that must be done by those who fill certain statuses is often so poorly designed as an expression of a desired meaning, that if the incumbent would dramatize the character of his role, he must divert an appreciable amount of his energy to do so. And this activity diverted to communication will often require different attributes from the ones which are being dramatized. Thus to furnish a house so that it will express simple quiet dignity, the householder may have to race to auction sales, haggle with antique dealers, and doggedly canvass all the local shops for proper wallpaper and curtain materials. To give a radio talk that will sound genuinely informal, spontaneous, and relaxed, the speaker may have to design his script with painstaking care, testing one phrase after another, in order to follow the content, language, rhythm, and pace of everyday talk.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, a *Vogue*

<sup>2</sup> Edith Lentz, "A Comparison of Medical and Surgical Floors" (Mimeo: New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1954), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Material on the burial business used throughout this report is taken from Robert W. Habenstein, "The American Funeral Director" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1954). I owe much to Mr. Habenstein's analysis of a funeral as a performance.

<sup>4</sup> John Hilton, "Calculated Spontaneity," *Oxford Book of English Talk* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 399-404.

are instrumentally essential for the completion of the core task of the status are at the same time wonderfully adapted, from the point of view of communication, as means of vividly conveying the qualities and attributes claimed by the performer. The roles of prizefighters, surgeons, violinists, and policemen are cases in point. These activities allow for so much dramatic self-expression that exemplary practitioners—whether real or fictional—become famous and are given a special place in the commercially organized fantasies of the nation.

In many cases, however, dramatization of one's work does constitute a problem. An illustration of this may be cited from a hospital study where the medical nursing staff is shown to have a problem that the surgical nursing staff does not have:

The things which a nurse does for post-operative patients on the surgical floor are frequently of recognizable importance, even to patients who are strangers to hospital activities. For example, the patient sees his nurse changing bandages, swinging orthopedic frames into place, and can realize that these are purposeful activities. Even if she cannot be at his side, he can respect her purposeful activities.

Medical nursing is also highly skilled work. . . . The physician's diagnosis must rest upon careful observation of symptoms over time where the surgeon's are in larger part dependent on visible things. The lack of visibility creates problems on the medical. A patient will see his nurse stop at the next bed and chat for a moment or two with the patient there. He doesn't know that she is observing the shallowness of the breathing and color and tone of the skin. He thinks she is just visiting. So, alas, does his family who may thereupon decide that these nurses aren't very impressive. If the nurse spends more time at the next bed than at his own, the patient may feel slighted. . . . The nurses are "wasting time" unless

model, by her clothing, stance, and facial expression, is able expressively to portray a cultivated understanding of the book she poses in her hand; but those who trouble to express themselves so appropriately will have very little time left over for reading. As Sartre suggested: "The attentive pupil who wishes to *be* attentive, his eyes riveted on the teacher, his ears open wide, so exhausts himself in playing the attentive role that he ends up by no longer hearing anything."<sup>5</sup> And so individuals often find themselves with the dilemma of expression *versus* action. Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well. It may be said that some organizations resolve this dilemma by officially delegating the dramatic function to a specialist who will spend his time expressing the meaning of the task and spend no time actually doing it.

If we alter our frame of reference for a moment and turn from a particular performance to the individuals who present it, we can consider an interesting fact about the round of different routines which any group or class of individuals helps to perform. When a group or class is examined, one finds that the members of it tend to invest their egos primarily in certain routines, giving less stress to the other ones which they perform. Thus a professional man may be willing to take a very modest role in the street, in a shop, or in his home, but, in the social sphere which encompasses his display of professional competency, he will be much concerned to make an effective showing. In mobilizing his behavior to make a showing, he will be concerned not so much with the full round of the different routines he performs but only with the one from which his occupational reputation derives. It is upon this issue that some writers have chosen to distinguish groups with aristocratic habits (whatever their social status) from those of middle-class character. The aristocratic habit, it has been said, is one that mobilizes all the minor activities of life which fall out-

<sup>5</sup> Sartre on cit. p. 60.



side the serious specialities of other classes and injects into these activities an expression of character, power, and high rank.

By what important accomplishments is the young nobleman instructed to support the dignity of his rank, and to render himself worthy of that superiority over his fellow-citizens, to which the virtue of his ancestors had raised them: Is it by knowledge, by industry, by patience, by self-denial, or by virtue of any kind? As all his words, as all his motions are attended to, he learns a habitual regard to every circumstance of ordinary behavior, and studies to perform all those small duties with the most exact propriety. As he is conscious of how much he is observed, and how much mankind are disposed to favor all his inclinations, he acts, upon the most indifferent occasions, with that freedom and elevation which the thought of this naturally inspires. His air, his manner, his deportment, all mark that elegant, and graceful sense of his own superiority, which those who are born to inferior stations can hardly ever arrive at. These are the arts by which he proposes to make mankind more easily submit to his authority, and to govern their inclinations according to his own pleasure: and in this he is seldom disappointed. These arts, supported by rank and pre-eminence, are, upon ordinary occasions, sufficient to govern the world.<sup>6</sup>

If such virtuosi actually exist, they would provide a suitable group in which to study the techniques by which activity is transformed into a show.

#### Idealization

It was suggested earlier that a performance of a routine presents through its front some rather abstract claims upon the audience, claims that are likely to be presented to them during the performance of other routines. This constitutes

<sup>6</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Henry Bohn, 1853), p. 75.

the place where the party is given, or away from where the practitioner attends his client, is to stay away from where reality is being performed. The world, in truth, is a wedding.

One of the richest sources of data on the presentation of idealized performances is the literature on social mobility. In most societies there seems to be a major or general system of stratification, and in most stratified societies there is an idealization of the higher strata and some aspiration on the part of those in low places to move to higher ones. (One must be careful to appreciate that this involves not merely a desire for a prestigious place but also a desire for a place close to the sacred center of the common values of the society.) Commonly we find that upward mobility involves the presentation of proper performances and that efforts to move upward and efforts to keep from moving downward are expressed in terms of sacrifices made for the maintenance of front. Once the proper sign-equipment has been obtained and familiarity gained in the management of it, then this equipment can be used to embellish and illumine one's daily performances with a favorable social style.

Perhaps the most important piece of sign-equipment associated with social class consists of the status symbols through which material wealth is expressed. American society is similar to others in this regard but seems to have been singled out as an extreme example of wealth-oriented class structure—perhaps because in America the license to employ symbols of wealth and financial capacity to do so are so widely distributed. Indian society, on the other hand, has sometimes been cited not only as one in which mobility occurs in terms of caste groups, not individuals, but also as one in which performances tend to establish favorable claims regarding non-material values. A recent student of India, for example, has suggested the following:

The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in

one way in which a performance is "socialized," molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented. I want to consider here another important aspect of this socialization process—the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealized in several different ways.

The notion that a performance presents an idealized view of the situation is, of course, quite common. Cooley's view may be taken as an illustration:

If we never tried to seem a little better than we are, how could we improve or "train ourselves from the outside inward?" And the same impulse to show the world a better or idealized aspect of ourselves finds an organized expression in the various professions and classes, each of which has to some extent a cant or pose, which its members assume unconsciously, for the most part, but which has the effect of a conspiracy to work upon the credulity of the rest of the world. There is a cant not only of theology and of philanthropy, but also of law, medicine, teaching, even of science—perhaps especially of science, just now, since the more a particular kind of merit is recognized and admired, the more it is likely to be assumed by the unworthy.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole.

To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs, we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, as a ceremony—as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community. Furthermore, in so far as the expressive bias of performances comes to be accepted as reality, then that which is accepted at the moment as reality will have some of the characteristics of a celebration. To stay in one's room away from

<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner's, 1922), pp. 352–53.

the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teotalism, and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. . . .

The tendency of the lower castes to imitate the higher has been a powerful factor in the spread of Sanskrit ritual and customs, and in the achievement of a certain amount of cultural uniformity, not only throughout the caste scale but over the entire length and breadth of India.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, of course, there are many Hindu circles whose members are much concerned with injecting an expression of wealth, luxury, and class status into the performance of their daily round and who think too little of ascetic purity to bother affecting it. Correspondingly, there have always been influential groups in America whose members have felt that some aspect of every performance ought to play down the expression of sheer wealth in order to foster the impression that standards regarding birth, culture, or moral earnestness are the ones that prevail.

Perhaps because of the orientation upward found in major societies today, we tend to assume that the expressive stresses in a performance necessarily claim for the performer a higher class status than might otherwise be accorded him. For example, we are not surprised to learn the following details of past domestic performances in Scotland:

One thing is fairly certain: the average laird and his family lived far more frugally in the ordinary way than they did when they were entertaining visitors. They would rise to a great occasion and serve dishes reminiscent of the banquets of the medieval nobility; but, like those same nobles, between the festivities they would

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 30.



"keep secret house," as the saying used to be, and live on the plainest of fare. The secret was well guarded. Even Edward Burt, with all his knowledge of the Highlanders, found it very difficult to describe their everyday meals. All he could say definitely was that whenever they entertained an Englishman they provided far too much food; "and," he remarked, "it has often been said they will ransack all their tenants rather than we should think meanly of their housekeeping; but I have heard it from many whom they have employed . . . that, although they have been attended at dinner by five or six servants, yet, with all that state, they have often dined upon oatmeal varied several ways, pickled herring, or other such cheap and indifferent diet."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, however, many classes of persons have had many different reasons for exercising systematic modesty and for underplaying any expressions of wealth, capacity, spiritual strength, or self-respect.

The ignorant, shiftless, happy-go-lucky manner which Negroes in the Southern states sometimes felt obliged to affect during interaction with whites illustrates how a performance can play up ideal values which accord to the performer a lower position than he covertly accepts for himself. A modern version of this masquerade can be cited:

Where there is actual competition above the unskilled levels for jobs usually thought of as "white jobs" some Negroes will of their own choice accept symbols of lower status while performing work of higher rank. Thus a shipping clerk will take the title and pay of a messenger; a nurse will permit herself to be called a domestic; and a chiropodist will enter the homes of white persons by the back door at night.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Plant, *The Domestic Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1952), pp. 96-97.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper Bros., 1943), p. 273.

The same kind of negative idealization was common, of course, during the Depression in America, when a household's state of poverty was sometimes overcommunicated for the benefit of visiting welfare agents, demonstrating that wherever there is a means test there is likely to be a poverty show:

An investigator for the D.P.C. reported some interesting experiences in this connection. She is Italian but is light-skinned and fair-haired and decidedly un-Italian looking. Her main work has been the investigation of Italian families on the F.E.R.A. The fact that she did not look Italian has caused her to overhear conversations in Italian, indicating the attitude of the clients toward relief. For example, while sitting in the front room talking to the wife, the wife will call out to a child to come and see the investigator, but she will warn the child to put on his old shoes first. Or she will hear the mother or father tell someone in the back of the house to put away the wine or the food before the investigator comes into the house.<sup>7</sup>

A further instance may be quoted from a recent study of the junk business, in which data are provided on the kind of impression that practitioners feel it is opportune for them to foster.

. . . the junk peddler is vitally interested in keeping information as to the true financial value of "junk" from the general public. He wishes to perpetuate the myth that junk is valueless and that the individuals who deal in it are "down and out" and should be pitied.<sup>8</sup>

Such impressions have an idealized aspect, for if the performer is to be successful he must offer the kind of scene that realizes the observers' extreme stereotypes of hapless poverty.

<sup>7</sup> E. Wight Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 371.

<sup>8</sup> J. B. Ralph, "The Junk Business and the Junk Peddler" (unpublished M.A. Report, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1950), p. 26.

American college girls did, and no doubt do, play down their intelligence, skills, and determinativeness when in the presence of datable boys, thereby manifesting a profound psychic discipline in spite of their international reputation for flightiness.<sup>5</sup> These performers are reported to allow their boy friends to explain things to them tediously that they already know; they conceal proficiency in mathematics from their less able consorts; they lose ping-pong games just before the ending:

"One of the nicest techniques is to spell long words incorrectly once in a while. My boy friend seems to get a great kick out of it and writes back, 'Honey, you certainly don't know how to spell.'"<sup>6</sup>

Through all of this the natural superiority of the male is demonstrated, and the weaker role of the female affirmed.

Similarly, I have been told by Shetlanders that their grandfathers used to refrain from improving the appearance of the cottage lest the laird take such improvements as a sign that increased rents could be extracted from them. This tradition has lingered just a little in connection with a show of poverty that is sometimes played out before the Shetland assistance officer. More important, there are male islanders today who have long since given up the subsistence farming and stringent pattern of endless work, few comforts, and a diet of fish and potatoes, traditionally the islander's lot. Yet these men frequently wear in public places the fleece-lined leather jerkin and high rubber boots that are notoriously symbolic of crofter status. They present themselves to the community as persons with no "side" who are loyal to the social status of their fellow islanders. It is a part they play with sincerity, warmth, the appropriate dialect, and a great command. Yet in the seclusion provided by their own kitchens this loyalty is relaxed, and they enjoy some of the middle-class modern comforts to which they have become accustomed.

<sup>5</sup> Mirra Komarovsky, "Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles," *American Journal of Sociology*, LII, pp. 186-88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

As further illustration of such idealized routines there are perhaps none with so much sociological charm as the performances maintained by street beggars. In Western society, however, since the turn of this century, the scenes that beggars stage seem to have declined in dramatic merit. Today we hear less of the "clean family dodge" in which a family appears in tattered but incredibly clean clothes, the faces of children glistening from a layer of soap that has been polished with a soft cloth. We no longer see the performances in which a half-naked man chokes over a dirty crust of bread that he is apparently too weak to swallow, or the scene in which a tattered man chases a sparrow from a piece of bread, wipes the morsel slowly on his coat sleeve, and, apparently oblivious to the audience that is now around him, attempts to eat it. Rare, too, has become the "ashamed beggar" who meekly implores with his eyes what his delicate sensibilities apparently prevent him from saying. Incidentally, the scenes presented by beggars have been variously called, in English, gifts, dodges, lays, rack-ets, lurks, pitches, and capers—providing us with terms well suited to describe performances that have greater legality and less art.<sup>9</sup>

If an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards. When this inappropriate conduct is itself satisfying in some way, as is often the case, then one commonly finds it indulged in secretly; in this way the performer is able to forgo his cake and eat it too. For example, in American society we find that eight-year-old children claim lack of interest in the television programs that are directed to five- and six-year-olds, but sometimes surreptitiously watch them.<sup>10</sup> We also find that middle-class housewives some-

<sup>9</sup> For details on beggars see Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (4 vols.; London: Griffin, Bohn), I (1861), pp. 415-17, and IV (1862), pp. 404-38.

<sup>10</sup> Unpublished research reports of Social Research, Inc., Chicago. I am grateful to Social Research, Inc., for permission to use these and other of their data in this report.



times employ—in a secret and surreptitious way—cheap substitutes for coffee, ice cream, or butter; in this way they can save money, or effort, or time, and still maintain an impression that the food they serve is of high quality.<sup>11</sup> The same women may leave *The Saturday Evening Post* on their living room end table but keep a copy of *True Romance* ("It's something the cleaning woman must have left around") concealed in their bedroom.<sup>12</sup> It has been suggested that the same sort of behavior, which we may refer to as "secret consumption" can be found among the Hindus.

They conform to all their customs, while they are seen, but they are not so scrupulous when in their retirement.<sup>13</sup>

I have been credibly informed that some Brahmins in small companies, have gone very secretly to the houses of Sudras whom they could depend on, to partake of meat and strong liquors, which they indulged in without scruple.<sup>14</sup>

The secret use of intoxicating drink is still less uncommon than that of interdicted food, because it is less difficult to conceal. Yet it is a thing unheard of to meet a Brahmin drunk in public.<sup>15</sup>

It may be added that recently the Kinsey reports have added new impetus to the study and analysis of secret consumption.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Unpublished research reports of Social Research, Inc.

<sup>12</sup> Reported by Professor W. L. Warner of the University of Chicago, in seminar, 1951.

<sup>13</sup> Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: M'Carey & Son, 1818), I, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> As Adam Smith suggested, *op. cit.*, p. 88, virtues as well as vices may be concealed:

"Vain men often give themselves airs of a fashionable profligacy, which, in their hearts, they do not approve of, and of which, perhaps, they are really not guilty. They desire to be

It is important to note that when an individual offers a performance he typically conceals something more than inappropriate pleasures and economies. Some of these matters for concealment may be suggested here.

First, in addition to secret pleasures and economies, the performer may be engaged in a profitable form of activity that is concealed from his audience and that is incompatible with the view of his activity which he hopes they will obtain. The model here is to be found with hilarious clarity in the cigar-store-bookie-joint, but something of the spirit of these establishments can be found in many places. A surprising number of workers seem to justify their jobs to themselves by the tools that can be stolen, or the food supplies that can be resold, or the traveling that can be enjoyed on company time, or the propaganda that can be distributed, or the contacts that can be made and properly influenced, etc.<sup>17</sup> In all such cases, place of work and official activity come to be a kind of shell which conceals the spirited life of the performer.

Secondly, we find that errors and mistakes are often corrected before the performance takes place, while telltale signs that errors have been made and corrected are themselves concealed. In this way an impression of infallibility, so important in many presentations, is maintained. There is a famous remark that doctors bury their mistakes. Another example is found in a recent dissertation on social interaction in three government offices, which suggests that officers disliked dictating reports to a stenographer because they liked to go back over their reports and correct the

praised for what they themselves do not think praiseworthy, and are ashamed of unfashionable virtues, which they sometimes practice in secret, and for which they have secretly some degree of real veneration."

<sup>17</sup> Two recent students of the social service worker suggest the term "outside racket" to refer to secret sources of income available to the Chicago Public Case Worker. See Earl Bogdanoff and Arnold Glass, *The Sociology of the Public Case Worker in an Urban Area* (unpublished Master's Report, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1953).

flaws before a stenographer, let alone a superior, saw the reports.<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, in those interactions where the individual presents a product to others, he will tend to show them only the end product, and they will be led into judging him on the basis of something that has been finished, polished, and packaged. In some cases, if very little effort was actually required to complete the object, this fact will be concealed. In other cases, it will be the long, tedious hours of lonely labor that will be hidden. For example, the urbane style affected in some scholarly books can be instructively compared with the feverish drudgery the author may have endured in order to complete the index on time, or with the squabbles he may have had with his publisher in order to increase the size of the first letter of his last name as it appears on the cover of his book.

A fourth discrepancy between appearances and over-all reality may be cited. We find that there are many performances which could not have been given had not tasks been done which were physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways; but these disturbing facts are seldom expressed during a performance. In Hughes's terms, we tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of "dirty work," whether we do this work in private or allocate it to a servant, to the impersonal market, to a legitimate specialist, or to an illegitimate one.

Closely connected with the notion of dirty work is a fifth discrepancy between appearance and actual activity. If the activity of an individual is to embody several ideal standards, and if a good showing is to be made, it is likely then that some of these standards will be sustained in public by the private sacrifice of some of the others. Often, of course, the performer will sacrifice those standards whose loss can be concealed and will make this sacrifice in order to maintain standards whose inadequate application cannot be concealed. Thus, during times of rationing, if a *restaurateur*, grocer, or butcher is to maintain his customary

<sup>18</sup> Blau, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

show of variety, and affirm his customers' image of him, then concealable sources of illegal supply may be his solution. So, too, if a service is judged on the basis of speed and quality, quality is likely to fall before speed because poor quality can be concealed but not slow service. Similarly, if attendants in a mental ward are to maintain order and at the same time not hit patients, and if this combination of standards is difficult to maintain, then the unruly patient may be "necked" with a wet towel and choked into submission in a way that leaves no visible evidence of mistreatment.<sup>19</sup> Absence of mistreatment can be faked, not order:

Those rules, regulations, and orders which are most easily enforced are those which leave tangible evidence of having been either obeyed or disobeyed, such as rules pertaining to the cleaning of the ward, locking doors, the use of intoxicating liquors while on duty, the use of restraints, etc.<sup>20</sup>

Here it would be incorrect to be too cynical. Often we find that if the principal ideal aims of an organization are to be achieved, then it will be necessary at times to by-pass momentarily other ideals of the organization, while maintaining the impression that these other ideals are still in force. In such cases, a sacrifice is made not for the most visible ideal but rather for the most legitimately important one. An illustration is provided in a paper on naval bureaucracy:

This characteristic [group-imposed secrecy] is not entirely attributable, by any means, to the fear of the members that unsavory elements will be brought to light. While this fear always plays some role in keeping off the record the "inside picture" of any bureaucracy, it is to one of the features of the informal structure itself

<sup>19</sup> Robert H. Willoughby, "The Attendant in the State Mental Hospital" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1953), p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.



that more importance must be assigned. For the informal structure serves the very significant role of providing a *channel of circumvention* of the formally prescribed rules and methods of procedure. No organization feels that it can afford to publicize those methods (by which certain problems are solved, it is important to note) which are antithetical to the officially sanctioned and, in this case, strongly sanctioned methods dear to the traditions of the group.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, we find performers often foster the impression that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the role, and that it was not necessary for them to suffer any indignities, insults, and humiliations, or make any tacitly understood "deals," in order to acquire the role. (While this general impression of sacred compatability between the man and his job is perhaps most commonly fostered by members of the higher professions, a similar element is found in many of the lesser ones.) Reinforcing these ideal impressions there is a kind of "rhetoric of training," whereby labor unions, universities, trade associations, and other licensing bodies require practitioners to absorb a mystical range and period of training, in part to maintain a monopoly, but in part to foster the impression that the licensed practitioner is someone who has been reconstituted by his learning experience and is now set apart from other men. Thus, one student suggests about pharmacists that they feel that the four-year university course required for license is "good for the profession" but that some admit that a few months' training is all that is really needed.<sup>22</sup> It may be added that the American Army during World War II innocently treated trades such as pharmacy and watch-repairing in a purely instrumental way and trained efficient practitioners in five or six weeks to the horror of established

<sup>21</sup> Charles Hunt Page, "Bureaucracy's Other Face," *Social Forces*, XXV, p. 90.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Weinlein, "Pharmacy as a Profession in Wisconsin" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1943), p. 89.

announce stiff entrance qualifications and examinations, but may in fact reject very few applicants. For example, a mental hospital may require prospective attendants to submit to a Rorschach examination and a long interview, but hire all comers.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly enough, when the significance of unofficial qualifications becomes a scandal or political issue, then a few individuals who are obtrusively lacking in the informal qualifications may be admitted with fanfare and given a highly visible role as evidence of fair play. An impression of legitimacy is thus created.<sup>25</sup>

I have suggested that a performer tends to conceal or underplay those activities, facts, and motives which are incompatible with an idealized version of himself and his products. In addition, a performer often engenders in his audience the belief that he is related to them in a more ideal way than is always the case. Two general illustrations may be cited.

First, individuals often foster the impression that the routine they are presently performing is their only routine or at least their most essential one. As previously suggested, the audience, in their turn, often assume that the character projected before them is all there is to the individual who acts out the projection for them. As suggested in the well-known quotation from William James:

... we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. Many a youth who is demure enough before his parents and teachers, swears and swaggers like a pirate among his "tough" young friends. We do not show ourselves to our children as to our club companions, to our customers

<sup>24</sup> Willoughby, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, William Kornhauser, "The Negro Union Official: A Study of Sponsorship and Control," *American Journal of Sociology*, LVII, pp. 443-52, and Scott Greer, "Situational Pressures and Functional Role of Ethnic Labor Leaders," *Social Forces*, XXXII, pp. 41-45.

members of these callings. And so we find that clergymen give the impression that they entered the church because of a call of felt vocation, in America tending to conceal their interest in moving up socially, in Britain tending to conceal their interest in not moving too far down. And again, clergymen tend to give the impression that they have chosen their current congregation because of what they can offer it spiritually and not, as may in fact be the case, because the elders offered a good house or full payment of moving expenses. Similarly, medical schools in America tend to recruit their students partly on the basis of ethnic origins, and certainly patients consider this factor in choosing their doctors; but in the actual interaction between doctor and patient the impression is allowed to develop that the doctor is a doctor purely because of special aptitudes and special training. Similarly, executives often project an air of competency and general grasp of the situation, blinding themselves and others to the fact that they hold their jobs partly because they look like executives, not because they can work like executives:

Few executives realize how critically important their physical appearance may be to an employer. Placement expert Ann Hoff observes that employers now seem to be looking for an ideal "Hollywood type." One company rejected a candidate because he had "teeth that were too square" and others have been disqualified because their ears stuck out, or they drank and smoked too heavily during an interview. Racial and religious requirements also are often frankly stipulated by employers.<sup>23</sup>

Performers may even attempt to give the impression that their present poise and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period. In all of this the performer may receive tacit assistance from the establishment in which he is to perform. Thus, many schools and institutions

<sup>23</sup> Perrin Stryker, "How Executives Get Jobs," *Fortune*, August 1953, p. 182.

as to the laborers we employ, to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends.<sup>26</sup>

As both effect and enabling cause of this kind of commitment to the part one is currently performing, we find that "audience segregation" occurs; by audience segregation the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting. Audience segregation as a device for protecting fostered impressions will be considered later. Here I would like only to note that even if performers attempted to break down this segregation, and the illusion that is fostered by it, audiences would often prevent such action. The audience can see a great saving of time and emotional energy in the right to treat the performer at occupational face value, as if the performer were all and only what his uniform claimed him to be.<sup>27</sup> Urban life would become unbearably sticky for some if every contact between two individuals entailed a sharing of personal trials, worries, and secrets. Thus if a man wants to be served a restful dinner, he may seek the service of a waitress rather than a wife.

Secondly, performers tend to foster the impression that their current performance of their routine and their relationship to their current audience have something special and unique about them. The routine character of the performance is obscured (the performer himself is typically unaware of just how routinized his performance really is) and the spontaneous aspects of the situation are stressed. The medical performer provides an obvious example. As one writer suggests:

... he must simulate a memory. The patient, conscious of the unique importance of the events occurring within him, remembers everything and, in his delight in telling the doctor about it, suffers from "complete recall." The

<sup>26</sup> William James, *The Philosophy of William James* (Modern Library ed.; New York: Random House, n. d.), pp. 128-29.

<sup>27</sup> I am grateful to Warren Peterson for this and other suggestions.



patient can't believe that the doctor doesn't remember too, and his pride is deeply wounded if the latter allows him to perceive that he doesn't carry in the forefront of his mind precisely what kind of tablets he prescribed on his last visit, how many of them to be taken and when.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, as a current study of Chicago doctors suggests, a general practitioner presents a specialist to a patient as the best choice on technical grounds, but in fact the specialist may have been chosen partly because of collegial ties with the referring doctor, or because of a split-fee arrangement, or because of some other clearly defined *quid pro quo* between the two medical men.<sup>29</sup> In our commercial life this characteristic of performances has been exploited and maligned under the rubric "personalized service"; in other areas of life we make jokes about "the bedside manner" or "the glad hand." (We often neglect to mention that as performers in the role of client we tactfully uphold this personalizing effect by attempting to give the impression that we have not "shopped" for the service and would not consider obtaining it elsewhere.) Perhaps it is our guilt that has directed our attention to these areas of crass "pseudo-gemeinschaft," for there is hardly a performance, in whatever area of life, which does not rely on the personal touch to exaggerate the uniqueness of the transactions between performer and audience. For example, we feel a slight disappointment when we hear a close friend, whose spontaneous gestures of warmth we felt were our own preserve, talk intimately with another of his friends (especially one whom we do not know). An explicit statement of this theme is given in a nineteenth-century American guide to manners:

If you have paid a compliment to one man, or have used toward him any expression of particular civility, you should not show the same conduct to any other person in his presence. For example, if a gentleman comes to

<sup>28</sup> C. E. M. Joad, "On Doctors," *The New Statesman and Nation*, March 7, 1953, pp. 255-56.

<sup>29</sup> Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

tradicts the one fostered by the performer that the audience cannot help but be startled from a proper degree of involvement in the interaction, even though the audience may realize that in the last analysis the discordant event is really meaningless and ought to be completely overlooked. The crucial point is not that the fleeting definition of the situation caused by an unmeant gesture is itself so blameworthy but rather merely that it is *different* from the definition officially projected. This difference forces an acutely embarrassing wedge between the official projection and reality, for it is part of the official projection that it is the only possible one under the circumstances. Perhaps, then, we should not analyze performances in terms of mechanical standards, by which a large gain can offset a small loss, or a large weight a smaller one. Artistic imagery would be more accurate, for it prepares us for the fact that a single note off key can disrupt the tone of an entire performance.

In our society, some unmeant gestures occur in such a wide variety of performances and convey impressions that are in general so incompatible with the ones being fostered that these inopportune events have acquired collective symbolic status. Three rough groupings of these events may be mentioned. First, a performer may accidentally convey incapacity, impropriety, or disrespect by momentarily losing muscular control of himself. He may trip, stumble, fall; he may belch, yawn, make a slip of the tongue, scratch himself, or be flatulent; he may accidentally impinge upon the body of another participant. Secondly, the performer may act in such a way as to give the impression that he is too much or too little concerned with the interaction. He may stutter, forget his lines, appear nervous, or guilty, or self-conscious; he may give way to inappropriate outbursts of laughter, anger, or other kinds of affect which momentarily incapacitate him as an interactant; he may show too much serious involvement and interest, or too little. Thirdly, the performer may allow his presentation to suffer from inadequate dramaturgical direction. The setting may not have been put in order, or may have become readied for the wrong performance, or may become deranged during

your house and you tell him with warmth and interest that you "are glad to see him," he will be pleased with the attention, and will probably thank you; but if he hears you say the same thing to twenty other people, he will not only perceive that your courtesy was worth nothing, but he will feel some resentment at having been imposed on.<sup>30</sup>

### Maintenance of Expressive Control

It has been suggested that the performer can rely upon his audience to accept minor cues as a sign of something important about his performance. This convenient fact has an inconvenient implication. By virtue of the same sign-accepting tendency, the audience may misunderstand the meaning that a cue was designed to convey, or may read an embarrassing meaning into gestures or events that were accidental, inadvertent, or incidental and not meant by the performer to carry any meaning whatsoever.

In response to these communication contingencies, performers commonly attempt to exert a kind of synecdochic responsibility, making sure that as many as possible of the minor events in the performance, however instrumentally inconsequential these events may be, will occur in such a way as to convey either no impression or an impression that is compatible and consistent with the over-all definition of the situation that is being fostered. When the audience is known to be secretly skeptical of the reality that is being impressed upon them, we have been ready to appreciate their tendency to pounce on trifling flaws as a sign that the whole show is false; but as students of social life we have been less ready to appreciate that even sympathetic audiences can be momentarily disturbed, shocked, and weakened in their faith by the discovery of a picayune discrepancy in the impressions presented to them. Some of these minor accidents and "unmeant gestures" happen to be so aptly designed to give an impression that con-

<sup>30</sup> *The Canons of Good Breeding: or the Handbook of the Man of Fashion* (Philadelphia: Lee and Blanchard, 1839), p. 87.

the performance; unforeseen contingencies may cause improper timing of the performer's arrival or departure or may cause embarrassing hulls to occur during the interaction.<sup>1</sup>

Performances differ, of course, in the degree of item-by-item expressive care required of them. In the case of some cultures foreign to us, we are ready to see a high degree of expressive coherence. Granet, for example, suggests this of filial performances in China:

Their fine toilet is in itself a homage. Their good deportment will be accounted an offering of respect. In the presence of parents, gravity is requisite: one must therefore be careful not to belch, to sneeze, to cough, to yawn, to blow one's nose nor to spit. Every expectoration would run the risk of soiling the paternal sanctity. It would be a crime to show the lining of one's garments. To show the father that one is treating him as a chief, one ought always to stand in his presence, the eyes right, the body upright upon the two legs, never daring to lean upon any object, nor to bend, nor to stand on one foot. It is thus that with the low and humble voice which becomes a follower, one comes night and morning to pay homage. After which, one waits for orders.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One way of handling inadvertent disruptions is for the interactants to laugh at them as a sign that the expressive implications of the disruptions have been understood but not taken seriously. Assuming this, Bergson's essay on laughter can be taken as a description of the ways in which we expect the performer to adhere to human capacities for movement, of the tendency for the audience to impute these capacities to the performer from the start of the interaction, and of the ways in which this effective projection is disrupted when the performer moves in a non-human fashion. Similarly, Freud's essays on wit and the psychopathology of everyday life can be taken, at one level, as a description of the ways in which we expect performers to have achieved certain standards of tact, modesty, and virtue, and as a description of ways in which these effective projections can be discredited by slips that are hilarious to the layman but symptomatic to analysts.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization*, trans. Innes and Brailsford (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), p. 328.



We are also ready to see that in scenes in our own culture involving high personages in symbolically important actions, consistency, too, will be demanded. Sir Frederick Ponsonby, late Equerry at the British Court, writes:

When I attended a "Court" I was always struck by the incongruous music the band played, and determined to do what I could to have this remedied. The majority of the Household, being quite unmusical, clamored for popular airs. . . . I argued that these popular airs robbed the ceremony of all dignity. A presentation at Court was often a great event in a lady's life, but if she went past the King and Queen to the tune of "His nose was redder than it was," the whole impression was spoilt. I maintained that minuets and old-fashioned airs, operatic music with a "mysterious" touch, were what was wanted.<sup>3</sup>

I also took up the question of the music played by the band of the guard of honor at investitures and wrote to the Senior Bandmaster, Captain Rogan, on the subject. What I disliked was seeing eminent men being knighted while comic songs were being played by the band outside; also when the Home Secretary was reading out impressively some particularly heroic deed which had been performed by a man who was to receive the Albert Medal, the band outside played a two-step, which robbed the whole ceremony of any dignity. I suggested operatic music of a dramatic nature being played, and he entirely agreed. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, at middle-class American funerals, a hearse driver, decorously dressed in black and tactfully located at the outskirts of the cemetery during the service, may be allowed to smoke, but he is likely to shock and anger the bereaved if he happens to flick his cigarette stub into a bush, letting it describe an elegant arc, instead of respectfully dropping it at his feet.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Habenstein, *op. cit.*

wife's approach changes his work into a performance, or why a television repairman is advised by his public relations counsels that the screws he fails to put back into the set should be kept alongside his own so that the unreplaced parts will not give an improper impression. In other words, we must be prepared to see that the impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps.

The expressive coherence that is required in performances points out a crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves. As human beings we are presumably creatures of variable impulse with moods and energies that change from one moment to the next. As characters put on for an audience, however, we must not be subject to ups and downs. As Durkheim suggested, we do not allow our higher social activity "to follow in the trail of our bodily states, as our sensations and our general bodily consciousness do."<sup>7</sup> A certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogeneous performance at every appointed time. As Santayana suggests, the socialization process not only transfigures, it fixes:

But whether the visage we assume be a joyful or a sad one, in adopting and emphasizing it we define our sovereign temper. Henceforth, so long as we continue under the spell of this self-knowledge, we do not merely live but act; we compose and play our chosen character, we wear the buskin of deliberation, we defend and idealize our passions, we encourage ourselves eloquently to be what we are, devoted or scornful or careless or austere; we soliloquize (before an imaginary audience) and we wrap ourselves gracefully in the mantle of our inalienable part. So draped, we solicit applause and expect to die amid a universal hush. We profess to live up to the fine sentiments we have uttered, as we try to believe in the religion we profess. The greater our difficulties the

<sup>7</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926), p. 272.

In addition to our appreciation of the consistency required on sacred occasions, we readily appreciate that during secular conflicts, especially high-level conflicts, each protagonist will have to watch his own conduct carefully lest he give the opposition a vulnerable point at which to direct criticism. Thus, Dale, in discussing the work contingencies of higher civil servants, suggests:

An even closer scrutiny [than that accorded to statements] is applied to drafts of official letters: for an incorrect statement or an unhappy phrase in a letter of which the substance is perfectly harmless and the subject unimportant may cover the Department with confusion if it happens to be seized on by one of the many persons to whom the most trivial mistake of a Government Department is a dainty dish to set before the public. Three or four years of this discipline during the still receptive years from twenty-four to twenty-eight suffuse the mind and character permanently with a passion for precise facts and close inferences, and with a grim distrust of vague generalities.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of our willingness to appreciate the expressive requirements of these several kinds of situations, we tend to see these situations as special cases; we tend to blind ourselves to the fact that everyday secular performances in our own Anglo-American society must often pass a strict test of aptness, fitness, propriety, and decorum. Perhaps this blindness is partly due to the fact that as performers we are often more conscious of the standards which we might have applied to our activity but have not than of the standards we unthinkingly apply. In any case, as students we must be ready to examine the dissonance created by a misspelled word, or by a slip that is not quite concealed by a skirt; and we must be ready to appreciate why a near-sighted plumber, to protect the impression of rough strength that is *de rigueur* in his profession, feels it necessary to sweep his spectacles into his pocket when the house-

<sup>6</sup> Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

greater our zeal. Under our published principles and plighted language we must assiduously hide all the inequalities of our moods and conduct, and this without hypocrisy, since our deliberate character is more truly ourself than is the flux of our involuntary dreams. The portrait we paint in this way and exhibit as our true person may well be in the grand manner, with column and curtain and distant landscape and finger pointing to the terrestrial globe or to the Yorick-skull of philosophy; but if this style is native to us and our art is vital, the more it transmutes its model the deeper and truer art it will be. The severe bust of an archaic sculpture, scarcely humanizing the block, will express a spirit far more justly than the man's dull morning looks or casual grimaces. Everyone who is sure of his mind, or proud of his office, or anxious about his duty assumes a tragic mask. He deposes it to be himself and transfers to it almost all his vanity. While still alive and subject, like all existing things, to the undermining flux of his own substance, he has crystallized his soul into an idea, and more in pride than in sorrow he has offered up his life on the altar of the Muses. Self-knowledge, like any art or science, renders its subject-matter in a new medium, the medium of ideas, in which it loses its old dimensions and its old place. Our animal habits are transmuted by conscience into loyalties and duties, and we become "persons" or masks.<sup>8</sup>

Through social discipline, then, a mask of manner can be held in place from within. But, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests, we are helped in keeping this pose by clamps that are tightened directly on the body, some hidden, some showing:

Even if each woman dresses in conformity with her status, a game is still being played: artifice, like art, belongs to the realm of the imaginary. It is not only that girdle, brassiere, hair-dye, make-up disguise body and face; but that the least sophisticated of women, once

<sup>8</sup> Santayana, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-34.



she is "dressed," does not present *herself* to observation; she is, like the picture or the statue, or the actor on the stage, an agent through whom is suggested someone not there—that is, the character she represents, but is not. It is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect as the hero of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendor.<sup>9</sup>

#### Misrepresentation

It was suggested earlier that an audience is able to orient itself in a situation by accepting performed cues on faith, treating these signs as evidence of something greater than or different from the sign-vehicles themselves. If this tendency of the audience to accept signs places the performer in a position to be misunderstood and makes it necessary for him to exercise expressive care regarding everything he does when before the audience, so also this sign-accepting tendency puts the audience in a position to be duped and misled, for there are few signs that cannot be used to attest to the presence of something that is not really there. And it is plain that many performers have ample capacity and motive to misrepresent the facts; only shame, guilt, or fear prevent them from doing so.

As members of an audience it is natural for us to feel that the impression the performer seeks to give may be true or false, genuine or spurious, valid or "phony." So common is this doubt that, as suggested, we often give special attention to features of the performance that cannot be readily manipulated, thus enabling ourselves to judge the reliability of the more misrepresentable cues in the performance. (Scientific police work and projective testing are extreme examples of the application of this tendency.) And if we grudgingly allow certain symbols of status to establish a performer's right to a given treatment, we are always ready

<sup>9</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley

to be an inexcusable crime against communication to impersonate someone of sacred status, such as a doctor or a priest, we are often less concerned when someone impersonates a member of a disesteemed, non-crucial, profane status, such as that of a hobo or unskilled worker. When a disclosure shows that we have been participating with a performer who has a higher status than he led us to believe, there is good Christian precedent for our reacting with wonderment and chagrin rather than with hostility. Mythology and our popular magazines, in fact, are full of romantic stories in which the villain and the hero both make fraudulent claims that are discredited in the last chapter, the villain proving not to have a high status, the hero proving not to have a low one.

Further, while we may take a harsh view of performers such as confidence men who knowingly misrepresent every fact about their lives, we may have some sympathy for those who have but one fatal flaw and who attempt to conceal the fact that they are, for example, ex-convicts, deflowered, epileptic, or racially impure, instead of admitting their fault and making an honorable attempt to live it down. Also, we distinguish between impersonation of a specific, concrete individual, which we usually feel is quite inexcusable, and impersonation of category membership, which we may feel less strongly about. So, too, we often feel differently about those who misrepresent themselves to forward what they feel are the just claims of a collectivity, or those who misrepresent themselves accidentally or for a lark, than about those who misrepresent themselves for private psychological or material gain.

Finally, since there are senses in which the concept of "a status" is not clear-cut, so there are senses in which the concept of impersonation is not clear either. For example, there are many statuses in which membership obviously is not subject to formal ratification. Claims to be a law graduate can be established as valid or invalid, but claims to be a friend, a true believer, or a music-lover can be confirmed or disconfirmed only more or less. Where standards of competence are not objective, and where *bona fide*

to pounce on chinks in his symbolic armor in order to discredit his pretensions.

When we think of those who present a false front or "only" a front, of those who dissemble, deceive, and defraud, we think of a discrepancy between fostered appearances and reality. We also think of the precarious position in which these performers place themselves, for at any moment in their performance an event may occur to catch them out and baldly contradict what they have openly avowed, bringing them immediate humiliation and sometimes permanent loss of reputation. We often feel that it is just these terrible eventualities, which arise from being caught out *flagrante delicto* in a patent act of misrepresentation, that an honest performer is able to avoid. This common-sense view has limited analytical utility.

Sometimes when we ask whether a fostered impression is true or false we really mean to ask whether or not the performer is authorized to give the performance in question, and are not primarily concerned with the actual performance itself. When we discover that someone with whom we have dealings is an impostor and out-and-out fraud, we are discovering that he did not have the right to play the part he played, that he was not an accredited incumbent of the relevant status. We assume that the impostor's performance, in addition to the fact that it misrepresents him, will be at fault in other ways, but often his masquerade is discovered before we can detect any other difference between the false performance and the legitimate one which it simulates. Paradoxically, the more closely the impostor's performance approximates to the real thing, the more intensely we may be threatened, for a competent performance by someone who proves to be an impostor may weaken in our minds the moral connection between legitimate authorization to play a part and the capacity to play it. (Skilled mimics, who admit all along that their intentions are unserious, seem to provide one way in which we can "work through" some of these anxieties.)

The social definition of impersonation, however, is not itself a very consistent thing. For example, while it is felt

practitioners are not collectively organized to protect their mandate, an individual may style himself an expert and be penalized by nothing stronger than sniggers.

All of these sources of confusion are instructively illustrated in the variable attitude we have toward the handling of age and sexual status. It is a culpable thing for a fifteen-year-old boy who drives a car or drinks in a tavern to represent himself as being eighteen, but there are many social contexts in which it would be improper for a woman not to misrepresent herself as being more youthful and sexually attractive than is really the case. When we say a particular woman is not really as well-formed as she appears to be and that the same woman is not really a physician although she appears to be, we are using different conceptions of the term "really." Further, modifications of one's personal front that are considered misrepresentative one year may be considered merely decorative a few years later, and this dissensus may be found at any one time between one subgroup in our society and others. For example, very recently the concealment of gray hair by dyeing has come to be considered acceptable, although there still are sectors of the populace which consider this to be impermissible.<sup>1</sup> It is felt to be all right for immigrants to impersonate native Americans in dress and in patterns of decorum but it is still a doubtful matter to Americanize one's name<sup>2</sup> or one's nose.<sup>3</sup>

Let us try another approach to the understanding of misrepresentation. An "open," "flat," or barefaced lie may be defined as one for which there can be unquestionable evidence that the teller knew he lied and willfully did so. A claim to have been at a particular place at a particular time, when this was not the case, is an example. (Some

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, "Tintair," *Fortune*, November 1951, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, H. L. Mencken, *The American Language* (4th ed.; New York: Knopf, 1936), pp. 474-525.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, "Plastic Surgery," *Ebony*, May 1949, and F. C. Macgregor and B. Schaffner, "Screening Patients for Nasal Plastic Operations: Some Sociological and Psychiatric Considerations," *Psychosomatic Medicine*, XII, pp. 277-91.



kinds of impersonation, but not all, involve such lies, and many such lies do not involve impersonation.) Those caught out in the act of telling barefaced lies not only lose face during the interaction but may have their face destroyed, for it is felt by many audiences that if an individual can once bring himself to tell such a lie, he ought never again to be fully trusted. However, there are many "white lies," told by doctors, potential guests, and others, presumably to save the feelings of the audience that is lied to, and these kinds of untruths are not thought to be horrendous. (Such lies, meant to protect others rather than to defend the self, will be considered again later.) Further, in everyday life it is usually possible for the performer to create intentionally almost any kind of false impression without putting himself in the indefensible position of having told a clear-cut lie. Communication techniques such as innuendo, strategic ambiguity, and crucial omissions allow the misinformers to profit from lies without, technically, telling any. The mass media have their own version of this and demonstrate that by judicious camera angles and editing, a trickle of response to a celebrity can be transformed into a wild stream.<sup>4</sup>

Formal recognition has been given to the shadings between lies and truths and to the embarrassing difficulties caused by this continuum. Organizations such as real estate boards develop explicit codes specifying the degree to which doubtful impressions can be given by overstatement, understatement, and omissions.<sup>5</sup> The Civil Service in Britain apparently operates on a similar understanding:

The rule here (as regards "statements which are intended or are likely to become public") is simple. Noth-

<sup>4</sup> A good illustration of this is given in a study of MacArthur's arrival at Chicago during the 1952 Republican National Convention. See K. and G. Lang, "The Unique Perspective of Television and its Effect: A Pilot Study," *American Sociological Review*, XVIII, pp. 3-12.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, E. C. Hughes, "Study of a Secular Institution: The Chicago Real Estate Board" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago,

ing may be said which is not true: but it is as unnecessary as it is sometimes undesirable, even in the public interest, to say everything relevant which is true; and the facts given may be arranged in any convenient order. It is wonderful what can be done within these limits by a skillful draftsman. It might be said, cynically, but with some measure of truth, that the perfect reply to an embarrassing question in the House of Commons is one that is brief, appears to answer the question completely, if challenged can be proved to be accurate in every word, gives no opening for awkward "supplementaries," and discloses really nothing.<sup>6</sup>

The law crosscuts many ordinary social niceties by introducing ones of its own. In American law, intent, negligence, and strict liability are distinguished; misrepresentation is held to be an intentional act, but one that can arise through word or deed, ambiguous statement or misleading literal truth, non-disclosure, or prevention of discovery.<sup>7</sup> Culpable non-disclosure is held to vary, depending on the area of life, there being one standard for the advertising business and another standard for professional counselors. Further, the law tends to hold that:

A representation made with an honest belief in its truth may still be negligent, because of lack of reasonable care in ascertaining the facts, or in the manner of expression, or absence of the skill and competence required by a particular business or profession.<sup>8</sup>

. . . the fact that the defendant was disinterested, that he had the best of motives, and that he thought he was doing the plaintiff a kindness, will not absolve him from liability so long as he did in fact intend to mislead.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> See William L. Prosser, *Handbook of the Law of Torts* (Hornbook Series; St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1941), pp. 701-76.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 733.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 728.

When we turn from outright impersonations and barefaced lies to other types of misrepresentation, the common-sense distinction between true and false impressions becomes even less tenable. Charlatan professional activity of one decade sometimes becomes an acceptable legitimate occupation in the next.<sup>10</sup> We find that activities which are thought to be legitimate by some audiences in our society are thought to be rackets by others.

More important, we find that there is hardly a legitimate everyday vocation or relationship whose performers do not engage in concealed practices which are incompatible with fostered impressions. Although particular performances, and even particular parts or routines, may place a performer in a position of having nothing to hide, somewhere in the full round of his activities there will be something he cannot treat openly. The larger the number of matters and the larger the number of acting parts which fall within the domain of the role or relationship, the more likelihood, it would seem, for points of secrecy to exist. Thus in well-adjusted marriages, we expect that each partner may keep from the other secrets having to do with financial matters, past experiences, current flirtations indulgences in "bad" or expensive habits, personal aspirations and worries, actions of children, true opinions held about relatives or mutual friends, etc.<sup>11</sup> With such strategically located points of reticence, it is possible to maintain a desirable *status quo* in the relationship without having to carry out rigidly the implications of this arrangement in all areas of life.

Perhaps most important of all, we must note that a false impression maintained by an individual in any one of his routines may be a threat to the whole relationship or role of which the routine is only one part, for a discreditable disclosure in one area of an individual's activity will throw

<sup>10</sup> See Harold D. McDowell, *Osteopathy: A Study of a Semi-orthodox Healing Agency and the Recruitment of its Clientele* (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1951).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, David Dressler, "What Don't They Tell Each Other," *This Week*, September 13, 1953.

doubt on the many areas of activity in which he may have nothing to conceal. Similarly, if the individual has only one thing to conceal during a performance, and even if the likelihood of disclosure occurs only at a particular turn or phase in the performance, the performer's anxiety may well extend to the whole performance.

In previous sections of this chapter some general characteristics of performance were suggested: activity oriented towards work-tasks tends to be converted into activity oriented towards communication; the front behind which the routine is presented is also likely to be suitable for other, somewhat different routines and so is likely not to fit completely any particular routine; sufficient self-control is exerted so as to maintain a working consensus; an idealized impression is offered by accentuating certain facts and concealing others; expressive coherence is maintained by the performer taking more care to guard against minor disharmonies than the stated purpose of the performance might lead the audience to think was warranted. All of these general characteristics of performances can be seen as interaction constraints which play upon the individual and transform his activities into performances. Instead of merely doing his task and giving vent to his feelings, he will express the doing of his task and acceptably convey his feelings. In general, then, the representation of an activity will vary in some degree from the activity itself and therefore inevitably misrepresent it. And since the individual will be required to rely on signs in order to construct a representation of his activity, the image he constructs, however faithful to the facts, will be subject to all the disruptions that impressions are subject to.

While we could retain the common-sense notion that fostered appearances can be discredited by a discrepant reality, there is often no reason for claiming that the facts discrepant with the fostered impression are any more the real reality than is the fostered reality they embarrass. A cynical view of everyday performances can be as one-sided as the one that is sponsored by the performer. For many sociological issues it may not even be necessary to decide



which is the more real, the fostered impression or the one the performer attempts to prevent the audience from receiving. The crucial sociological consideration, for this report at least, is merely that impressions fostered in everyday performances are subject to disruption. We will want to know what kind of impression of reality can shatter the fostered impression of reality, and what reality really is can be left to other students. We will want to ask, "What are the ways in which a given impression can be discredited?" and this is not quite the same as asking, "What are the ways in which the given impression is false?"

We come back, then, to a realization that while the performance offered by impostors and liars is quite flagrantly false and differs in this respect from ordinary performances, both are similar in the care their performers must exert in order to maintain the impression that is fostered. Thus, for example, we know that the formal code of British civil servants<sup>12</sup> and of American baseball umpires<sup>13</sup> obliges them not only to desist from making improper "deals" but also to desist from innocent action which might possibly give the (wrong) impression that they are making deals. Whether an honest performer wishes to convey the truth or whether a dishonest performer wishes to convey a falsehood, both must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered, and take care lest the audience impute unintended meanings.<sup>14</sup> Because of these shared dramatic contingencies, we can profitably study performances that are quite false in order to learn about ones that are quite honest.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 103

<sup>13</sup> Pinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> One exception to this similarity should be mentioned, albeit one that brings little credit to honest performers. As previously suggested, ordinary legitimate performances tend to overstress the degree to which a particular playing of a routine is unique. Quite false performances, on the other hand, may accentuate a sense of routinization in order to allay suspicion.

<sup>15</sup> There is a further reason for giving attention to performances and fronts that are flagrantly false. When we find that

surround itself with forms and artificial mystery, whose object is to prevent familiar contact and so give the imagination a chance to idealize. . . . The discipline of armies and navies, for instance, very distinctly recognizes the necessity of those forms which separate superior from inferior, and so help to establish an unscrutinized ascendancy in the former. In the same way manners, as Professor Ross remarks in his work on Social Control, are largely used by men of the world as a means of self-concealment, and this self-concealment serves, among other purposes, that of preserving a sort of ascendancy over the unsophisticated.<sup>1</sup>

Ponsonby, in giving advice to the King of Norway, gives voice to the same theory:

One night King Haakon told me of his difficulties in face of the republican leanings of the opposition and how careful in consequence he had to be in all he did and said. He intended, he said, to go as much as possible among the people and thought it would be popular if, instead of going in a motor car, he and Queen Maud were to use the tramways.

I told him frankly that I thought this would be a great mistake as familiarity bred contempt. As a naval officer he would know that the captain of a ship never had his meals with the other officers but remained quite aloof. This was, of course, to stop any familiarity with them. I told him that he must get up on a pedestal and remain there. He could then step off occasionally and no harm would be done. The people didn't want a King with whom they could hob-nob but something nebulous like the Delphic oracle. The Monarchy was really the creation of each individual's brain. Every man liked to think what he would do, if he was King. People invested the Monarch with every conceivable virtue and talent. They were bound therefore to be disappointed if they saw him going about like an ordinary man in the street.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cooley, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

### Mystification

I have suggested ways in which the performance of an individual accentuates certain matters and conceals others. If we see perception as a form of contact and communion, then control over what is perceived is control over contact that is made, and the limitation and regulation of what is shown is a limitation and regulation of contact. There is a relation here between informational terms and ritual ones. Failure to regulate the information acquired by the audience involves possible disruption of the projected definition of the situation; failure to regulate contact involves possible ritual contamination of the performer.

It is a widely held notion that restrictions placed upon contact, the maintenance of social distance, provide a way in which awe can be generated and sustained in the audience—a way, as Kenneth Burke has said, in which the audience can be held in a state of mystification in regard to the performer. Cooley's statement may serve as an illustration:

How far it is possible for a man to work upon others through a false idea of himself depends upon a variety of circumstances. As already pointed out, the man himself may be a mere incident with no definite relation to the idea of him, the latter being a separate product of the imagination. This can hardly be except where there is no immediate contact between leader and follower, and partly explains why authority, especially if it covers intrinsic personal weakness, has always a tendency to

fake television aerals are sold to persons who do not have sets, and packages of exotic travel labels to persons who have never left home and wire-wheel hub-cap attachments to motorists with ordinary cars, we have clear-cut evidence of the impressive function of presumably instrumental objects. When we study the real thing, i.e., persons with real aerals and real sets, etc., it may be difficult in many cases to demonstrate conclusively the impressive function of what can be claimed as a spontaneous or instrumental act.

The logical extreme implied in this kind of theory, whether it is in fact correct or not, is to prohibit the audience from looking at the performer at all, and at times when celestial qualities and powers have been claimed by a performer, this logical conclusion seems to have been put into effect.

Of course, in the matter of keeping social distance, the audience itself will often co-operate by acting in a respectful fashion, in awed regard for the sacred integrity imputed to the performer. As Simmel suggests:

To act upon the second of these decisions corresponds to the feeling (which also operates elsewhere) that an ideal sphere lies around every human being. Although differing in size in various directions and differing according to the person with whom one entertains relations, this sphere cannot be penetrated, unless the personality value of the individual is thereby destroyed. A sphere of this sort is placed around man by his "honor." Language very poignantly designates an insult to one's honor as "coming too close": the radius of this sphere marks, as it were, the distance whose trespassing by another person insults one's honor.<sup>3</sup>

Durkheim makes a similar point:

The human personality is a sacred thing; one does not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others.<sup>4</sup>

It must be made quite clear, in contradiction to the implications of Cooley's remarks, that awe and distance are felt toward performers of equal and inferior status as well as (albeit not as much) toward performers of superordinate status.

Whatever their function for the audience, these inhibitions of the audience allow the performer some elbow room in building up an impression of his own choice and allow

<sup>3</sup> *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, trans. D. F. Pocock (London: Cohen & West, 1953), p. 37.



him to function, for his own good or the audience's, as a protection or a threat that close inspection would destroy.

I would like, finally, to add that the matters which the audience leave alone because of their awe of the performer are likely to be the matters about which he would feel shame were a disclosure to occur. As Riezler has suggested, we have, then, a basic social coin, with awe on one side and shame on the other.<sup>5</sup> The audience senses secret mysteries and powers behind the performance, and the performer senses that his chief secrets are petty ones. As countless folk tales and initiation rites show, often the real secret behind the mystery is that there really is no mystery; the real problem is to prevent the audience from learning this too.

### *Reality and Contrivance*

In our own Anglo-American culture there seems to be two common-sense models according to which we formulate our conceptions of behavior: the real, sincere, or honest performance; and the false one that thorough fabricators assemble for us, whether meant to be taken unseriously, as in the work of stage actors, or seriously, as in the work of confidence men. We tend to see real performances as something not purposely put together at all, being an unintentional product of the individual's unself-conscious response to the facts in his situation. And contrived performances we tend to see as something painstakingly pasted together, one false item on another, since there is no reality to which the items of behavior could be a direct response. It will be necessary to see now that these dichotomous conceptions are by way of being the ideology of honest performers, providing strength to the show they put on, but a poor analysis of it.

First, let it be said that there are many individuals who sincerely believe that the definition of the situation they habitually project is the real reality. In this report I do not

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Riezler, "Comment on the Social Psychology of Shame," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLVIII, p. 462 ff.

this is so because ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. Scripts even in the hands of unpracticed players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify.

The recent use of "psychodrama" as a therapeutic technique illustrates a further point in this regard. In these psychiatrically staged scenes patients not only act out parts with some effectiveness, but employ no script in doing so. Their own past is available to them in a form which allows them to stage a recapitulation of it. Apparently a part once played honestly and in earnest leaves the performer in a position to contrive a showing of it later. Further, the parts that significant others played to him in the past also seem to be available, allowing him to switch from being the person that he was to being the persons that others were for him. This capacity to switch enacted roles when obliged to do so could have been predicted; everyone apparently can do it. For in learning to perform our parts in real life we guide our own productions by not too consciously maintaining an incipient familiarity with the routine of those to whom we will address ourselves. And when we come to be able properly to manage a real routine we are able to do this in part because of "anticipatory socialization,"<sup>1</sup> having already been schooled in the reality that is just coming to be real for us.

When the individual does move into a new position in society and obtains a new part to perform, he is not likely to be told in full detail how to conduct himself, nor will the facts of his new situation press sufficiently on him from the start to determine his conduct without his further giving thought to it. Ordinarily he will be given only a few cues, hints, and stage directions, and it will be assumed that he already has in his repertoire a large number of bits and

<sup>1</sup> See R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe: The Free Press, revised and enlarged edition, 1957), p. 265 ff.

mean to question their proportion in the population but rather the structural relation of their sincerity to the performances they offer. If a performance is to come off, the witnesses by and large must be able to believe that the performers are sincere. This is the structural place of sincerity in the drama of events. Performers may be sincere—or be insincere but sincerely convinced of their own sincerity—but this kind of affection for one's part is not necessary for its convincing performance. There are not many French cooks who are really Russian spies, and perhaps there are not many women who play the part of wife to one man and mistress to another but these duplicities do occur, often being sustained successfully for long periods of time. This suggests that while persons usually are what they appear to be, such appearances could still have been managed. There is, then, a statistical relation between appearances and reality, not an intrinsic or necessary one. In fact, given the unanticipated threats that play upon a performance, and given the need (later to be discussed) to maintain solidarity with one's fellow performers and some distance from the witnesses, we find that a rigid incapacity to depart from one's inward view of reality may at times endanger one's performance. Some performances are carried off successfully with complete dishonesty, others with complete honesty; but for performances in general neither of these extremes is essential and neither, perhaps, is dramaturgically advisable.

The implication here is that an honest, sincere, serious performance is less firmly connected with the solid world than one might first assume. And this implication will be strengthened if we look again at the distance usually placed between quite honest performances and quite contrived ones. In this connection take, for example, the remarkable phenomenon of stage acting. It does take deep skill, long training, and psychological capacity to become a good stage actor. But this fact should not blind us to another one: that almost anyone can quickly learn a script well enough to give a charitable audience some sense of realism in what is being contrived before them. And it seems

pieces of performances that will be required in the new setting. The individual will already have a fair idea of what modesty, deference, or righteous indignation looks like, and can make a pass at playing these bits when necessary. He may even be able to play out the part of a hypnotic subject<sup>2</sup> or commit a "compulsive" crime<sup>3</sup> on the basis of models for these activities that he is already familiar with.

A theatrical performance or a staged confidence game requires a thorough scripting of the spoken content of the routine; but the vast part involving "expression given off" is often determined by meager stage directions. It is expected that the performer of illusions will already know a good deal about how to manage his voice, his face, and his body, although he—as well as any person who directs him—may find it difficult indeed to provide a detailed verbal statement of this kind of knowledge. And in this, of course, we approach the situation of the straightforward man in the street. Socialization may not so much involve a learning of the many specific details of a single concrete part—often there could not be enough time or energy for this. What does seem to be required of the individual is that he learn enough pieces of expression to be able to "fill in" and manage, more or less, any part that he is likely to be given. The legitimate performances of everyday life are not "acted" or "put on" in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do, and does this solely because of the effect it is likely to have. The expressions it is felt he is giving off will be especially "inaccessible" to him.<sup>4</sup> But as in the case of less legitimate performers, the incapacity of the ordinary individual to formulate in advance the movements of his eyes and body does not mean

<sup>2</sup> This view of hypnosis is neatly presented by T. R. Sarbin, "Contributions to Role-Taking Theory. I: Hypnotic Behavior," *Psychological Review*, 57, pp. 255-70.

<sup>3</sup> See D. R. Cressey, "The Differential Association Theory and Compulsive Crimes," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, 45, pp. 29-40.

<sup>4</sup> This concept derives from T. R. Sarbin, "Role Theory," in Gardner Lindzey, *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954), Vol. 1, pp. 235-36.



that he will not express himself through these devices in a way that is dramatized and pre-formed in his repertoire of actions. In short, we all act better than we know how.

When we watch a television wrestler gouge, foul, and snarl at his opponent we are quite ready to see that, in spite of the dust, he is, and knows he is, merely playing at being the "heavy," and that in another match he may be given the other role, that of clean-cut wrestler, and perform this with equal verve and proficiency. We seem less ready to see, however, that while such details as the number and character of the falls may be fixed beforehand, the details of the expressions and movements used do not come from a script but from command of an idiom, a command that is exercised from moment to moment with little calculation or forethought.

In reading of persons in the West Indies who become the "horse" or the one possessed of a voodoo spirit,<sup>5</sup> it is enlightening to learn that the person possessed will be able to provide a correct portrayal of the god that has entered him because of "the knowledge and memories accumulated in a life spent visiting congregations of the cult";<sup>6</sup> that the person possessed will be in just the right social relation to those who are watching; that possession occurs at just the right moment in the ceremonial undertakings, the possessed one carrying out his ritual obligations to the point of participating in a kind of skit with persons possessed at the time with other spirits. But in learning this, it is important to see that this contextual structuring of the horse's role still allows participants in the cult to believe that possession is a real thing and that persons are possessed at random by gods whom they cannot select.

And when we observe a young American middle-class girl playing dumb for the benefit of her boy friend, we are ready to point to items of guile and contrivance in her behavior. But like herself and her boy friend, we accept as an unperformed fact that this performer is a young

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Alfred Métraux, "Dramatic Elements in Ritual Possession," *Diogenes*, 11, pp. 18-36.

American middle-class girl. But surely here we neglect the greater part of the performance. It is commonplace to say that different social groupings express in different ways such attributes as age, sex, territory, and class status, and that in each case these bare attributes are elaborated by means of a distinctive complex cultural configuration of proper ways of conducting oneself. To *be* a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto. The unthinking ease with which performers consistently carry off such standard-maintaining routines does not deny that a performance has occurred, merely that the participants have been aware of it.

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized. Sartre, here, provides a good illustration:

Let us consider this waiter in the café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tightrope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But