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**THE PRESENTATION OF SELF
IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

Erving Goffman



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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.⁷

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.⁸

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.

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

⁸ J. B. Ralph, "The Junk Business and the Junk Peddler" (unpublished M.A. Report, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1950), p. 26.

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, grifts, dodges, lays, rackets, lurks, pitches, and capers—providing us with terms well suited to describe performances that have greater legality and less art.⁹

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.¹⁰ We also find that middle-class housewives some-

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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

¹¹ Unpublished research reports of Social Research, Inc.

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

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

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.”

¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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

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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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

¹⁹ Robert H. Willoughby, "The Attendant in the State Mental Hospital" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1953), p. 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁸ Blau, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

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.²¹

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.²² 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

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

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

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.²³

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

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

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.²⁴

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.²⁵

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

²⁴ Willoughby, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

²⁵ 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.

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

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.²⁷ 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

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

²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ 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

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.³⁰

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-

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

²⁹ Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

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

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

the performance; unforeseen contingencies may cause improper timing of the performer's arrival or departure or may cause embarrassing lulls to occur during the interaction.¹

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.²

¹ 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.

² 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.³

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. . . .⁴

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.⁵

³ Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵ Habenstein, *op. cit.*

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.⁶

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-

⁶ Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

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."⁷ 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

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

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.⁸

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

⁸ 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.⁹

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

⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 533.

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 un-serious, 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

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*

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.¹ 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 name² or one's nose.³

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

¹ See, for example, "Tintair," *Fortune*, November 1951, p. 102.

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

³ 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.⁴

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.⁵ 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-

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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, 1928), p. 85.

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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸

. . . 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.⁹

⁶ Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

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

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 733.

⁹ *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.¹⁰ 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, indulgencies in "bad" or expensive habits, personal aspirations and worries, actions of children, true opinions held about relatives or mutual friends, etc.¹¹ 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

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ 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 servants¹² and of American baseball umpires¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

¹² Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹³ Pinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁴ 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.

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

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 aerials 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 aerials 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.

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.¹

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.²

¹ Cooley, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

² Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

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.³

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.⁴

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

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

⁴ 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.⁵ 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

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

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,"¹ 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

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

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 subject² or commit a "compulsive" crime³ 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.⁴ 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

² 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.

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

⁴ 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,⁵ 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";⁶ 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

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

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

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

what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a café. There is nothing there to surprise us. The game is a kind of marking out and investigation. The child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it; the waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to *realize* it. This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. Their condition is wholly one of ceremony. The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavor to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer, just as the soldier at attention makes himself into a soldier-thing with a direct regard which does not see at all, which is not longer meant to see, since it is the rule and not the interest of the moment which determines the point he must fix his eyes on (the sight "fixed at ten paces"). There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.⁷

⁷ Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 59.