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**THE PRESENTATION OF SELF
IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

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Chapter VI

THE ARTS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

In this chapter I would like to bring together what has been said or implied about the attributes that are required of a performer for the work of successfully staging a character. Brief reference will therefore be made to some of the techniques of impression management in which these attributes are expressed. In preparation it may be well to suggest, in some cases for the second time, some of the principal types of performance disruptions, for it is these disruptions which the techniques of impression management function to avoid.

In the beginning of this report, in considering the general characteristics of performances, it was suggested that the performer must act with expressive responsibility, since many minor, inadvertent acts happen to be well designed to convey impressions inappropriate at the time. These events were called "unmeant gestures." Ponsonby gives an illustration of how a director's attempt to avoid an unmeant gesture led to the occurrence of another.

One of the Attachés from the Legation was to carry the cushion on which the insignia were placed, and in order to prevent their falling off I stuck the pin at the back of the Star through the velvet cushion. The Attaché, however, was not content with this, but secured the end of the pin by the catch to make doubly sure. The result was that when Prince Alexander, having made a suitable speech, tried to get hold of the Star, he found it firmly fixed to the cushion and spent some time in getting it

loose. This rather spoilt the most impressive moment of the ceremony.¹

It should be added that the individual held responsible for contributing an unmeant gesture may chiefly discredit his own performance by this, a teammate's performance, or the performance being staged by his audience.

When an outsider accidentally enters a region in which a performance is being given, or when a member of the audience inadvertently enters the backstage, the intruder is likely to catch those present *flagrante delicto*. Through no one's intention, the persons present in the region may find that they have patently been witnessed in activity that is quite incompatible with the impression that they are, for wider social reasons, under obligation to maintain to the intruder. We deal here with what are sometimes called "inopportune intrusions."

The past life and current round of activity of a given performer typically contain at least a few facts which, if introduced during the performance, would discredit or at least weaken the claims about self that the performer was attempting to project as part of the definition of the situation. These facts may involve well-kept dark secrets or negatively-valued characteristics that everyone can see but no one refers to. When such facts are introduced, embarrassment is the usual result. These facts can, of course, be brought to one's attention by unmeant gestures or inopportune intrusions. However, they are more frequently introduced by intentional verbal statements or non-verbal acts whose full significance is not appreciated by the individual who contributes them to the interaction. Following common usage such disruptions of projections may be called "faux pas." Where a performer unthinkingly makes an intentional contribution which destroys his own team's image we may speak of "gaffes" or "boners." Where a performer jeopardizes the image of self projected by the other team, we may speak of "bricks" or of the performer having "put his foot

¹ Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

in it." Etiquette manuals provide classic warnings against such indiscretions:

If there is any one in the company whom you do not know, be careful how you let off any epigrams or pleasant little sarcasms. You might be very witty upon halts to a man whose father had been hanged. The first requisite for successful conversation is to know your company well.²

In meeting a friend whom you have not seen for some time, and of the state and history of whose family you have not been recently or particularly informed, you should avoid making enquiries or allusions in respect to particular individuals of his family, until you have possessed yourself of knowledge respecting them. Some may be dead; others may have misbehaved, separated themselves, or fallen under some distressing calamity.³

Unmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions, and faux pas are sources of embarrassment and dissonance which are typically unintended by the person who is responsible for making them and which would be avoided were the individual to know in advance the consequences of his activity. However there are situations, often called "scenes," in which an individual acts in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of consensus, and while he may not act simply in order to create such dissonance, he acts with the knowledge that this kind of dissonance is likely to result. The common-sense phrase, "creating a scene," is apt because, in effect, a new scene is created by such disruptions. The previous and expected interplay between the teams is suddenly forced aside and a new drama forcibly takes its place. Significantly, this new scene often involves a sudden reshuffling and reapportioning of the previous team members into two new teams.

Some scenes occur when teammates can no longer coun-

² *The Laws of Etiquette* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lee and Blanchard, 1836), p. 101.

³ *The Canons of Good Breeding*, p. 80.

tenance each other's inept performance and blurt out immediate public criticism of the very individuals with whom they ought to be in dramaturgical co-operation. Such misconduct is often devastating to the performance which the disputants ought to be presenting: one effect of the quarrel is to provide the audience with a backstage view, and another is to leave them with the feeling that something is surely suspicious about a performance when those who know it best do not agree. Another type of scene occurs when the audience decides it can no longer play the game of polite interaction, or that it no longer wants to do so, and so confronts the performers with facts or expressive acts which each team knows will be unacceptable. This is what happens when an individual screws up his social courage and decides to "have it out" with another or "really tell him off." Criminal trials have institutionalized this kind of open discord, as has the last chapter of murder mysteries, where an individual who has theretofore maintained a convincing pose of innocence is confronted in the presence of others with undeniable expressive evidence that his pose is only a pose. Another kind of scene occurs when the interaction between two persons becomes so loud, heated, or otherwise attention-getting, that nearby persons engaged in their own conversational interaction are forced to become witnesses or even to take sides and enter the fray. A final type of scene may be suggested. When a person acting as a one-man team commits himself in a serious way to a claim or request and leaves himself no way out should this be denied by the audience, he usually makes sure that his claim or request is the kind that is likely to be approved and granted by the audience. If his motivation is strong enough, however, an individual may find himself making a claim or an assumption which he knows the audience may well reject. He knowingly lowers his defenses in their presence, throwing himself, as we say, on their mercy. By such an act the individual makes a plea to the audience to treat themselves as part of his team or to allow him to treat himself as part of their team. This sort of thing is embarrassing enough, but when the unguarded request is refused to

the individual's face, he suffers what is called humiliation.

I have considered some major forms of performance disruption—unmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions, faux pas, and scenes. These disruptions, in everyday terms, are often called "incidents." When an incident occurs, the reality sponsored by the performers is threatened. The persons present are likely to react by becoming flustered, ill at ease, embarrassed, nervous, and the like. Quite literally, the participants may find themselves out of countenance. When these flusterings or symptoms of embarrassment become perceived, the reality that is supported by the performance is likely to be further jeopardized and weakened, for these signs of nervousness in most cases are an aspect of the individual who presents a character and not an aspect of the character he projects, thus forcing upon the audience an image of the man behind the mask.

In order to prevent the occurrence of incidents and the embarrassment consequent upon them, it will be necessary for all the participants in the interaction, as well as those who do not participate, to possess certain attributes and to express these attributes in practices employed for saving the show. These attributes and practices will be reviewed under three headings: the defensive measures used by performers to save their own show; the protective measures used by audience and outsiders to assist the performers in saving the performers' show; and, finally, the measures the performers must take in order to make it possible for the audience and outsiders to employ protective measures on the performers' behalf.

Defensive Attributes and Practices

1. DRAMATURGICAL LOYALTY. It is apparent that if a team is to sustain the line it has taken, the teammates must act as if they have accepted certain moral obligations. They must not betray the secrets of the team when between performances—whether from self-interest, principle, or lack of discretion. Thus, older members of a family must often exclude a child of the house from their gossip and self-

admissions, since one can never be sure to whom one's child will convey one's secrets. Hence it may only be when the child arrives at the age of discretion that the voices of his parents will cease to drop as he enters the room. Eighteenth-century writers on the servant problem cite a similar issue of disloyalty, but here in connection with persons who were old enough to know better:

This lack of devotion [of servants to masters] gave rise to a multitude of petty annoyances from which few employers were entirely immune. Not the least harassing of these was the propensity of servants to retail their masters' business. Defoe takes notice of this, admonishing female domestics to "Add to your other Virtues PIETY, which will teach you the Prudence of *Keeping Family-Secrets*; the Want of which is a great Complaint. . . ."¹

Voices are dropped at the approach of servants too, but in the early eighteenth century another practice was introduced as a means of keeping team secrets from servants:

The dumb-waiter was a tier table, which, prior to the dinner hour, was stocked with food, drink, and eating utensils by the servants, who then withdrew, leaving the guests to serve themselves.²

Upon the introduction of this dramaturgical device in England, Mary Hamilton reported:

"My cousin Charles Cathcart din'd with us at Lady Stormont's; we had dumb-waiters so our conversation was not under any restraint by ye Servants being in ye room."³

"At dinner we had ye comfortable *dumb-waiters*, so our conversation was not obliged to be disagreeably *guarded* by ye attendance of Servants."⁴

¹ Hecht, *op. cit.*, p. 81, quoting from Defoe's *The Maid-Servant's Modest Defense*.

² Hecht, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

So, too, members of the team must not exploit their presence in the front region in order to stage their own show, as do, for example, marriageable stenographers who sometimes encumber their office surroundings with a lush undergrowth of high fashion. Nor must they use their performance time as an occasion to denounce their team. They must be willing to accept minor parts with good grace and perform enthusiastically whenever, wherever, and for whomsoever the team as a whole chooses. And they must be taken in by their own performance to the degree that is necessary to prevent them from sounding hollow and false to the audience.

Perhaps the key problem in maintaining the loyalty of team members (and apparently with members of other types of collectivities, too) is to prevent the performers from becoming so sympathetically attached to the audience that the performers disclose to them the consequences for them of the impression they are being given, or in other ways make the team as a whole pay for this attachment. In small communities in Britain, for example, the managers of stores will often be loyal to the establishment and will define the product being sold to a customer in glowing terms linked with false advice, but clerks can frequently be found who not only appear to take the role of the customer in giving buying-advice but actually do so. In Shetland Isle, for example, I heard a clerk say to a customer as the clerk was handing over a bottle of cherry pop: "I do not see how you can drink that stuff." No one present considered this to be surprising frankness, and similar comments could be heard every day in the shops on the island. So, too, filling station managers sometimes disapprove of tipping because it may lead attendants to give undue free service to the chosen few while other customers are left waiting.

One basic technique the team can employ to defend itself against such disloyalty is to develop high in-group solidarity within the team, while creating a backstage image of the audience which makes the audience sufficiently inhuman to allow the performers to cozen them with emotional and moral immunity. To the degree that teammates and their

colleagues form a complete social community which offers each performer a place and a source of moral support regardless of whether or not he is successful in maintaining his front before the audience, to that degree it would seem that performers can protect themselves from doubt and guilt and practice any kind of deception. Perhaps we are to understand the heartless artistry of the Thugs by reference to the religious beliefs and ritual practices into which their depredations were integrated, and perhaps we are to understand the successful callousness of con men by reference to their social solidarity in what they call the "illegit" world and their well-formulated denigrations of the legitimate world. Perhaps this notion allows us to understand in part why groups that are alienated from or not yet incorporated into the community are so able to enter the dirty-work trades and the kind of service occupations which involve routine cheating.

A second technique for counteracting the danger of affective ties between performers and audience is to change audiences periodically. Thus filling station managers used to be shifted periodically from one station to another to prevent the formation of strong personal ties with particular clients. It was found that when such ties were allowed to form, the manager sometimes placed the interests of a friend who needed credit before the interests of the social establishment.⁵ Bank managers and ministers have been routinely shifted for similar reasons, as have certain colonial administrators. Some female professionals provide another illustration, as the following reference to organized prostitution suggests:

The Syndicate handles that these days. The girls don't stay in one place long enough to really get on speaking terms with anybody. There's not so much chance of a girl falling in love with some guy—you know, and causing

⁵ Of course this betrayal is systematically faked in some commercial establishments where the customer is given a "special" cut price by a clerk who claims to be doing this in order to secure the buyer as a steady personal customer.

a squawk. Anyway, the hustler who's in Chicago this week is in St. Louis next, or moving around to half a dozen places in town before being sent somewhere else. And they never know where they're going until they're told.⁶

2. DRAMATURGICAL DISCIPLINE. It is crucial for the maintenance of the team's performance that each member of the team possess dramaturgical discipline and exercise it in presenting his own part. I refer to the fact that while the performer is ostensibly immersed and given over to the activity he is performing, and is apparently engrossed in his actions in a spontaneous, uncalculating way, he must none the less be affectively dissociated from his presentation in a way that leaves him free to cope with dramaturgical contingencies as they arise. He must offer a show of intellectual and emotional involvement in the activity he is presenting, but must keep himself from actually being carried away by his own show lest this destroy his involvement in the task of putting on a successful performance.

A performer who is disciplined, dramaturgically speaking, is someone who remembers his part and does not commit unmeant gestures or faux pas in performing it. He is someone with discretion; he does not give the show away by involuntarily disclosing its secrets. He is someone with "presence of mind" who can cover up on the spur of the moment for inappropriate behavior on the part of his teammates, while all the time maintaining the impression that he is merely playing his part. And if a disruption of the performance cannot be avoided or concealed, the disciplined performer will be prepared to offer a plausible reason for discounting the disruptive event, a joking manner to remove its importance, or deep apology and self-abasement to reinstate those held responsible for it. The disciplined performer is also someone with "self-control." He can suppress his emotional response to his private problems, to his teammates when they make mistakes, and to the audience when

⁶ Charles Hamilton, *Men of the Underworld* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p. 222.

they induce untoward affection or hostility in him. And he can stop himself from laughing about matters which are defined as serious and stop himself from taking seriously matters defined as humorous. In other words, he can suppress his spontaneous feelings in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line, the expressive *status quo*, established by his team's performance, for a display of proscribed affect may not only lead to improper disclosures and offense to the working consensus but may also implicitly extend to the audience the status of team member. And the disciplined performer is someone with sufficient poise to move from private places of informality to public ones of varying degrees of formality, without allowing such changes to confuse him.⁷

Perhaps the focus of dramaturgical discipline is to be found in the management of one's face and voice. Here is the crucial test of one's ability as a performer. Actual affective response must be concealed and an appropriate affective response must be displayed. Teasing, it often seems, is an informal initiation device employed by a team to train and test the capacity of its new members to "take a joke," that is, to sustain a friendly manner while perhaps not feeling it. When an individual passes such a test of expression-control, whether he receives it from his new teammates in a spirit of jest or from an unexpected necessity of playing in a serious performance, he can thereafter venture forth as a player who can trust himself and be trusted by others. A very nice illustration of this is given in a forthcoming paper by Howard S. Becker on marijuana-smoking. Becker reports that the irregular user of the drug has a great fear of finding himself, while under the influence of the drug, in the immediate presence of parents or work associates who will expect an intimate undrugged performance from him. Apparently the irregular user does not become a confirmed regular user until he learns he can be "high" and yet carry off a performance before non-smokers without betraying himself. The same issue arises, perhaps in a less dramatic

⁷ For an example see Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

form, in ordinary family life, when a decision has to be reached as to the point in their training at which young members of the team can be taken to public and semipublic ceremonies, for only when the child is ready to keep control of his temper will he be a trustworthy participant on such occasions.

3. DRAMATURGICAL CIRCUMSPECTION. Loyalty and discipline, in the dramaturgical sense of these terms, are attributes required of teammates if the show they put on is to be sustained. In addition, it will be useful if the members of the team exercise foresight and design in determining in advance how best to stage a show. Prudence must be exercised. When there is little chance of being seen, opportunities for relaxation can be taken; when there is little chance of being put to a test, the cold facts can be presented in a glowing light and the performers can play their part for all it is worth, investing it with full dignity. If no care and honesty are exercised, then disruptions are likely to occur; if rigid care and honesty are exercised, then the performers are not likely to be understood "only too well" but they may be misunderstood, insufficiently understood, or greatly limited in what they can build out of the dramaturgical opportunities open to them. In other words, in the interests of the team performers will be required to exercise prudence and circumspection in staging the show. preparing in advance for likely contingencies and exploiting the opportunities that remain. The exercise or expression of dramaturgical circumspection takes well-known forms; some of these techniques for managing impressions will be considered here.

Obviously, one such technique is for the team to choose members who are loyal and disciplined, and a second one is for the team to acquire a clear idea as to how much loyalty and discipline it can rely on from the membership as a whole for the degree to which these attributes are possessed will markedly affect the likelihood of carrying off a performance and hence the safety of investing the performance with seriousness, weight, and dignity.

The circumspect performer will also attempt to select the

kind of audience that will give a minimum of trouble in terms of the show the performer wants to put on and the show he does not want to have to put on. Thus it is reported that teachers often favor neither lower-class pupils nor upper-class ones, because both groups may make it difficult to maintain in the classroom the kind of definition of the situation which affirms the professional teacher role.⁸ Teachers will transfer to middle-class schools for these dramaturgical reasons. So, too, it is reported that some nurses like to work in an operating room rather than on a ward because in the operating room measures are taken to ensure that the audience, whose members number only one, is soon oblivious to the weaknesses of the show, permitting the operating team to relax and devote itself to the technological requirements of actions as opposed to the dramaturgical ones.⁹ Once the audience is asleep it is even possible to bring in a "ghost surgeon" to perform the tasks that others who were there will later claim to have done.¹⁰ Similarly, given the fact that husband and wife are required to express marital solidarity by jointly showing regard for those whom they entertain, it is necessary to exclude from their guests those persons about whom they feel differently.¹¹ So also, if a man of influence and power is to make sure that he can take a friendly role in office interactions, then it will be useful for him to have a private elevator and protective circles of receptionists and secretaries so that no one can get in to see him whom he might have to treat in a heartless or snobbish fashion.

It will be apparent that an automatic way of ensuring that no member of the team or no member of the audience

⁸ Becker, "Social Class Variations . . ." *op. cit.*, pp. 461-62.

⁹ Unpublished research report by Edith Lentz. It may be noted that the policy sometimes followed of piping music by earphones to the patient who is undergoing an operation without a general anesthetic is a means of effectively removing him from the talk of the operating team.

¹⁰ Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

¹¹ This point has been developed in a short story by Mary McCarthy, "A Friend of the Family," reprinted in Mary McCarthy, *Cast a Cold Eye* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950).

acts improperly is to limit the size of both teams as much as possible. Other things being equal, the fewer the members, the less possibility of mistakes, "difficulties," and treacheries. Thus salesmen like to sell to unaccompanied customers, since it is generally thought that two persons in the audience are much more difficult to "sell" than one. So, too, in some schools there is an informal rule that no teacher is to enter the room of another teacher while the other is holding a class; apparently the assumption is that it will be likely the new performer will do something that the waiting eyes of the student audience will see as inconsistent with the impression fostered by their own teacher.¹² However, there are at least two reasons why this device of limiting the number of persons present has limitations itself. First, some performances cannot be presented without the technical assistance of a sizable number of teammates. Thus, although an army general staff appreciates that the more officers there are who know the plans for the next phase of action, the more likelihood that someone will act in such a way as to disclose strategic secrets, the staff will still have to let enough men in on the secret to plan and arrange the event. Secondly, it appears that individuals, as pieces of expressive equipment, are more effective in some ways than non-human parts of the setting. If, then, an individual is to be given a place of great dramatic prominence, it may be necessary to employ a sizable court-following to achieve an effective impression of adulation around him.

I have suggested that by keeping close to the facts it may be possible for a performer to safeguard his show, but this may prevent him from staging a very elaborate one. If an elaborate show is to be safely staged it may be more useful to remove oneself from the facts rather than stick to them. It is feasible for an official of a religion to conduct a solemn, awesome presentation, because there is no recognized way by which these claims can be discredited. Similarly, the professional takes the stand that the service he performs is not to be judged by the results it achieves but by the degree

¹² Becker, "The Teacher in the Authority System of the Public School," *op. cit.*, p. 139.

to which available occupational skills have been proficiently applied; and, of course, the professional claims that only the colleague group can make a judgment of this kind. It is therefore possible for the professional to commit himself fully to his presentation, with all his weight and dignity, knowing that only a very foolish mistake will be capable of destroying the impression created. Thus the effort of tradesmen to obtain a professional mandate can be understood as an effort to gain control over the reality they present to their customers; and in turn we can see that such control makes it unnecessary to be prudently humble in the airs one assumes in performing one's trade.

There would appear to be a relation between the amount of modesty employed and the temporal length of a performance. If the audience is to see only a brief performance, then the likelihood of an embarrassing occurrence will be relatively small, and it will be relatively safe for the performer, especially in anonymous circumstances, to maintain a front that is rather false.¹³ In American society there is what is called a "telephone voice," a cultivated form of speech not employed in face-to-face talk because of the danger in doing so. In Britain, in the kinds of contact between strangers that are guaranteed to be very brief—the kinds involving "please," "thank you," "excuse me," and "may I speak to"—one hears many more public-school accents than there are public-school people. So also, in Anglo-American society, the majority of domestic establishments do not possess sufficient staging equipment to maintain a show of polite hospitality for guests who stay more than a few hours; only in the upper-middle and upper classes do we find the institution of the weekend guest, for it is only here that performers feel they have enough sign-equipment

¹³ In brief anonymous service relations, servers become skilled at detecting what they see as affectation. However, since their own position is made clear by their service role they cannot easily return affectation with affectation. At the same time, customers who are what they claim to be often sense that the server may not appreciate this. The customer may then feel ashamed because he feels as he would feel were he as false as he appears to be.

to bring off a lengthy show. Thus, on Shetland Isle, some crofters felt they could sustain a middle-class show for the duration of a tea, in some cases a meal, and in one or two cases even a weekend; but many islanders felt it only safe to perform for middle-class audiences on the front porch, or, better still, in the community hall, where the efforts and responsibilities of the show could be shared by many teammates.

The performer who is to be dramaturgically prudent will have to adapt his performance to the information conditions under which it must be staged. Aging prostitutes in nineteenth-century London who restricted their place of work to dark parks in order that their faces would not weaken their audience appeal were practicing a strategy that was even older than their profession.¹⁴ In addition to reckoning with what can be seen, the performer will also have to take into consideration the information the audience already possesses about him. The more information the audience has about the performer, the less likely it is that anything they learn during the interaction will radically influence them. On the other hand, where no prior information is possessed, it may be expected that the information gleaned during the interaction will be relatively crucial. Hence, on the whole, we may expect individuals to relax the strict maintenance of front when they are with those they have known for a long time, and to tighten their front when among persons who are new to them. With those whom one does not know, careful performances are required.

Another condition associated with communication may be cited. The circumspect performer will have to consider the audience's access to information sources external to the interaction. For example, members of the Thug tribe of India are said to have given the following performances during the early nineteenth century:

As a general rule they pretended to be merchants or soldiers, traveling without weapons in order to disarm sus-

¹⁴ Mayhew, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 90.

picion, which gave them an excellent excuse for seeking permission to accompany travelers, for there was nothing to excite alarm in their appearance. Most Thugs were mild looking and peculiarly courteous, for this camouflage formed part of their stock-in-trade, and well-armed travelers felt no fear in allowing these knights of the road to join them. This first step successfully accomplished, the Thugs gradually won the confidence of their intended victims by a demeanor of humility and gratitude, and feigned interest in their affairs until familiar with details of their homes, whether they were likely to be missed if murdered, and if they knew anyone in the vicinity. Sometimes they traveled long distances together before a suitable opportunity for treachery occurred; a case is on record where a gang journeyed with a family of eleven persons for twenty days, covering 200 miles, before they succeeded in murdering the whole party without detection.¹⁵

Thugs could give these performances in spite of the fact that their audiences were constantly on the watch for such performers (and quickly put to death those identified as Thugs) partly because of the informational conditions of travel; once a party set out for a distant destination, there was no way for them to check the identities claimed by those whom they encountered, and if anything befell the party on the way it would be months before they would be considered overdue, by which time the Thugs who had performed for and then upon them would be out of reach. But in their native villages, the members of the tribe, being known, fixed, and accountable for their sins, behaved in an exemplary fashion. Similarly, circumspect Americans who would ordinarily never chance a misrepresentation of their social status may take such a chance while staying for a short time at a summer resort.

If sources of information external to the interaction constitute one contingency the circumspect performer must take into consideration, sources of information internal to

¹⁵ Sleeman, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

the interaction constitute another. Thus the circumspect performer will adjust his presentation according to the character of the props and tasks out of which he must build his performance. For example, clothing merchants in the United States are required to be relatively circumspect in making exaggerated claims, because customers can test by sight and touch what is shown to them; but furniture salesmen need not be so careful, because few members of the audience can judge what lies behind the front of varnish and veneer that is presented to them.¹⁶ In Shetland Hotel, the staff had great freedom in regard to what was put in soups and puddings, because soups and puddings tend to conceal what is contained in them. Soups, especially, were easy to stage; they tended to be additive—the remains of one, plus everything lying around, served as the beginnings of another. With meats, the true character of which could be more easily seen less leeway was possible; in fact here the standards of the staff were stiffer than those of mainland guests, since what smelt “high” to natives could smell “well hung” to outsiders. So, also, there is a tradition on the island which allows aging crofters to retire from the arduous duties of adult life by feigning illness, there being little conception otherwise of a person becoming too old to work. Island doctors—although the current one was not cooperative in this regard—are supposed to recognize the fact that no one can be sure whether or not illness lies hidden within the human body, and are expected tactfully to restrict their unequivocal diagnoses to externally visible complaints. Similarly, if a housewife is concerned with showing that she maintains cleanliness standards she is likely to focus her attention upon the glass surfaces in her living room, for glass shows dirt all too clearly: she will give less attention to the darker and less revealing rug which may well have been chosen in the belief that “dark colors do not show the dirt.” So, too, an artist need take little care with the décor of his studio—in fact, the artist’s studio has become stereotyped as a place where those who work backstage do

¹⁶ Conant, *op. cit.*, p. 169, makes this point.

not care who sees them or the conditions in which they are seen—partly because the full value of the artist’s product can, or ought to be, immediately available to the senses; portrait painters, on the other hand, must promise to make the sittings satisfactory and tend to use relatively prepossessing rich-looking studios as a kind of guarantee for the promises they make. Similarly, we find that confidence men must employ elaborate and meticulous personal fronts and often engineer meticulous social settings, not so much because they lie for a living but because, in order to get away with a lie of that dimension, one must deal with persons who have been and are going to be strangers, and one has to terminate the dealings as quickly as possible. Legitimate businessmen who would promote an honest venture under these circumstances would have to be just as meticulous in expressing themselves, for it is under just such circumstances that potential investors scrutinize the character of those who would sell to them. In short, since a con merchant must swindle his clients under those circumstances where clients appreciate that a confidence game could be employed the con man must carefully forestall the immediate impression that he might be what in fact he is, just as the legitimate merchant, under the same circumstances, would have to forestall carefully the immediate impression that he might be what he is not.

It is apparent that care will be great in situations where important consequences for the performer will occur as a result of his conduct. The job interview is a clear example. Often the interviewer will have to make decisions of far-reaching importance for the interviewee on the sole basis of information gained from the applicant’s interview-performance. The interviewee is likely to feel, and with some justice that his every action will be taken as highly symbolical, and he will therefore give much preparation and thought to his performance. We expect at such times that the interviewee will pay much attention to his appearance and manner, not merely to create a favorable impression, but also to be on the safe side and forestall any unfavorable impression that might be unwittingly conveyed.

Another example may be suggested: those who work in the field of radio broadcasting and, especially, television keenly appreciate that the momentary impression they give will have an effect on the view a massive audience takes of them, and it is in this part of the communication industry that great care is taken to give the right impression and great anxiety is felt that the impression given might not be right. The strength of this concern is seen in the indignities that high-placed performers are willing to suffer in order to come off well: congressmen allow themselves to be made up and to be told what to wear; professional boxers abase themselves by giving a display, in the manner of wrestlers, instead of a bout.¹⁷

Circumspection on the part of performers will also be expressed in the way they handle relaxation of appearances. When a team is physically distant from its inspectorial audience and a surprise visit is unlikely, then great relaxation becomes feasible. Thus we read that small American Navy installations on Pacific islands during the last war could be run quite informally, whereas a readjustment in the direction of spit and polish was required when the outfit moved to places that members of the audience were more likely to frequent.¹⁸ When inspectors have easy access to the place where a team carries on its work, then the amount of relaxation possible for the team will depend on the efficiency and reliability of its warning system. It is to be noted that thoroughgoing relaxation requires not only a warning system but also an appreciable time lapse between warning and visit, for the team will be able to relax only to the degree that can be corrected during such a time lapse. Thus, when a schoolteacher leaves her classroom for a moment, her charges can relax into slovenly postures and whispered conversations, for these transgressions can be corrected in the few seconds' warning the pupils will have that the teacher is about to re-enter; but it is unlikely that it will

be feasible for the pupils to sneak a smoke, for the smell of smoke cannot be got rid of quickly. Interestingly enough, pupils, like other performers, will "test the limits," gleefully moving far enough away from their seats so that when the warning comes they will have to dash madly back to their proper places so as not to be caught off base. Here, of course, the character of the terrain can become important. In Shetland Isle, for example, there were no trees to block one's view and little concentration of dwelling units. Neighbors had a right to drop in upon each other whenever happening to be close by, but it was usually possible to see them coming for a good few minutes before actual arrival. Ever-present croft dogs would usually accentuate this visible warning by, as it were, barking the visitor in. Extensive relaxation was therefore possible because there were always minutes of grace to put the scene in order. Of course, with such a warning, knocking on the door no longer served one of its main functions, and fellow crofters did not extend this courtesy to one another, although some made a practice of scraping their feet a little in entering as an extra, final warning. Apartment hotels, the front door of which opens only when a resident presses a button from the inside, provide a similar guarantee of ample warning and allow a similar depth of relaxation.

I would like to mention one more way in which dramaturgical circumspection is exercised. When teams come into each other's immediate presence, a host of minor events may occur that are accidentally suitable for conveying a general impression that is inconsistent with the fostered one. This expressive treacherousness is a basic characteristic of face-to-face interaction. One way of dealing with this problem is, as previously suggested, to select teammates who are disciplined and will not perform their parts in a clumsy, gauche, or self-conscious fashion. Another method is to prepare in advance for all possible expressive contingencies. One application of this strategy is to settle on a complete agenda before the event, designating who is to do what and who is to do what after that. In this way confusions and

¹⁷ See John Lardner's weekly column in *Newsweek*, February 22, 1954, p. 59.

¹⁸ Page, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

hulls can be avoided and hence the impressions that such hitches in the proceedings might convey to the audience can be avoided too. (There is of course a danger here. A completely scripted performance, as found in a staged play, is very effective providing no untoward event breaks the planned sequence of statements and acts; for once this sequence is disrupted, the performers may not be able to find their way back to the cue that will enable them to pick up where the planned sequence had been disrupted. Scripted performers, then, can get themselves into a worse position than is possible for those who perform a less organized show.) Another application of this programming technique is to accept the fact that picayune events (such as who is to enter a room first or who is to sit next to the hostess, etc.) will be taken as expressions of regard and to apportion these favors consciously on the basis of principles of judgment to which no one present will take offense, such as age, gross seniority in rank, sex, temporary ceremonial status, etc. Thus in an important sense protocol is not so much a device for expressing valuations during interaction as a device for "grounding" potentially disruptive expressions in a way that will be acceptable (and uneventful) to all present. A third application is to rehearse the whole routine so that the performers can become practiced in their parts and so that contingencies that were not predicted will occur under circumstances in which they can be safely attended to. A fourth is to outline beforehand for the audience the line of response they are to take to the performance. When this kind of briefing occurs, of course, it becomes difficult to distinguish between performers and audience. This type of collusion is especially found where the performer is of highly sacred status and cannot trust himself to the spontaneous tact of the audience. For example, in Britain, women who are to be presented at court (whom we may think of as an audience for the royal performers) are carefully schooled beforehand as to what to wear, what kind of limousine to arrive in, how to curtsy, and what to say.

Protective Practices

I have suggested three attributes that team members must have if their team is to perform in safety: loyalty, discipline, and circumspection. Each of these capacities is expressed in many standard defensive techniques through which a set of performers can save their own show. Some of these techniques of impression management were reviewed. Others, such as the practice of controlling access to back regions and front regions, were discussed in earlier chapters. In this section I want to stress the fact that most of these defensive techniques of impression management have a counterpart in the tactful tendency of the audience and outsiders to act in a protective way in order to help the performers save their own show. Since the dependence of the performers on the tact of the audience and outsiders tends to be underestimated, I shall bring together here some of the several protective techniques that are commonly employed although, analytically speaking, each protective practice might better be considered in conjunction with the corresponding defensive practice.

First, it should be understood that access to the back and front regions of a performance is controlled not only by the performers but by others. Individuals voluntarily stay away from regions into which they have not been invited. (This kind of tact in regard to place is analagous to "discretion," which has already been described as tact in regard to facts.) And when outsiders find they are about to enter such a region, they often give those already present some warning, in the form of a message, or a knock, or a cough, so that the intrusion can be put off if necessary or the setting hurriedly put in order and proper expressions fixed on the faces of those present.¹ This kind of tact can become nicely

¹ Maids are often trained to enter a room without knocking, or to knock and go right in, presumably on the theory that they are non-persons before whom any pretense or interaction readiness on the part of those in the room need not be maintained.

elaborated. Thus, in presenting oneself to a stranger by means of a letter of introduction, it is thought proper to convey the letter to the addressee before actually coming into his immediate presence; the addressee then has time to decide what kind of greeting the individual is to receive, and time to assemble the expressive manner appropriate to such a greeting.²

We often find that when interaction must proceed in the presence of outsiders, outsiders tactfully act in an uninterested, uninvolved, unperceiving fashion, so that if physical isolation is not obtained by walls or distance, effective isolation can at least be obtained by convention. Thus when two sets of persons find themselves in neighboring booths in a restaurant, it is expected that neither group will avail itself of the opportunities that actually exist for overhearing the other.

Etiquette regarding tactful inattention, and the effective privacy it provides, varies, of course, from one society and subculture to another. In middle-class Anglo-American society, when in a public place, one is supposed to keep one's nose out of other people's activity and go about one's own business. It is only when a woman drops a package, or when a fellow motorist gets stalled in the middle of the road, or when a baby left alone in a carriage begins to scream, that middle-class people feel it is all right to break down momentarily the walls which effectively insulate them. In Shetland Isle different rules obtained. If any man happened to find himself in the presence of others who were engaged in a task, it was expected that he would lend a hand, especially if the task was relatively brief and relatively strenuous. Such casual mutual aid was taken as a matter of course and was an expression of nothing closer than fellow-islander status.

Once the audience has been admitted to a performance, the necessity of being tactful does not cease. We find that there is an elaborate etiquette by which individuals guide

Friendly housewives will enter each other's kitchens with similar license, as an expression of having nothing to hide from each other.

² *Esquire Etiquette, op. cit., p. 73.*

themselves in their capacity as members of the audience. This involves: the giving of a proper amount of attention and interest; a willingness to hold in check one's own performance so as not to introduce too many contradictions, interruptions, or demands for attention; the inhibition of all acts or statements that might create a faux pas; the desire, above all else, to avoid a scene. Audience tact is so general a thing that we may expect to find it exercised even by individuals, famous for their misbehavior, who are patients in mental hospitals. Thus one research group reports:

At another time, the staff, without consulting the patients, decided to give them a Valentine party. Many of the patients did not wish to go, but did so anyway as they felt that they should not hurt the feelings of the student nurses who had organized the party. The games introduced by the nurses were on a very childish level; many of the patients felt silly playing them and were glad when the party was over and they could go back to activities of their own choosing.³

In another mental hospital it was observed that when ethnic organizations gave hostess dances for patients in the hospital Red Cross house, providing thereby some charity work-experience for a few of their less-favored daughters, the hospital representative would sometimes prevail on a few of the male patients to dance with these girls in order that the impression might be sustained that the visitors were bestowing their company on persons more needful than themselves.⁴

When performers make a slip of some kind, clearly exhibiting a discrepancy between the fostered impression and a disclosed reality, the audience may tactfully "not see" the slip or readily accept the excuse that is offered for it. And at moments of crisis for the performers, the whole audience

³ William Caudill, Frederick C. Redlich, Helen R. Gilmore and Eugene B. Brody, "Social Structure and Interaction Processes on a Psychiatric Ward," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, XXII, pp. 321-22.

⁴ Writer's study, 1953-54.

may come into tacit collusion with them in order to help them out. Thus we learn that in mental hospitals when a patient dies in a manner that reflects upon the impression of useful treatment that the staff is attempting to maintain, the other patients, ordinarily disposed to give the staff trouble, may tactfully ease up their warfare and with much delicacy help sustain the quite false impression that they have not absorbed the meaning of what has happened.⁵ Similarly, at times of inspection, whether in school, in barracks, in the hospital, or at home, the audience is likely to behave itself in a model way so that the performers who are being inspected may put on an exemplary show. At such times, team lines are apt to shift slightly and momentarily so that the inspecting superintendent, general, director, or guest will be faced by performers and audience who are in collusion.

A final instance of tact in handling the performer may be cited. When the performer is known to be a beginner, and more subject than otherwise to embarrassing mistakes, the audience frequently shows extra consideration, refraining from causing the difficulties it might otherwise create.

Audiences are motivated to act tactfully because of an immediate identification with the performers, or because of a desire to avoid a scene, or to ingratiate themselves with the performers for purposes of exploitation. Perhaps this latter is the favorite explanation. Some successful women of the street, it seems, are ones who are willing to enact a lively approval of their clients' performance, thus demonstrating the sad dramaturgical fact that sweethearts and wives are not the only members of their sex who must engage in the higher forms of prostitution:

Mary Lee says she does no more for Mr. Blakesee than she does for her other rich customers.

"I do what I know they want, make believe I'm ga-ga

⁵ See Taxel, *op. cit.*, p. 118. When two teams know an embarrassing fact, and each team knows the other team knows it, and yet neither team openly admits its knowledge, we get an instance of what Robert Dubin has called "organizational fictions." See Dubin, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-45.

over them. Sometimes they act like little boys playing games. Mr. Blakesee always does. He plays the cave man. He comes to my apartment and sweeps me in his arms and holds me till he thinks he's taken my breath away. It's a howl. After he's finished making love to me, I have to tell him, 'Darling, you made me so happy I could just cry.' You wouldn't believe a grown-up man would want to play such games. But he does. Not only him. Most of the rich ones."

Mary Lee is so convinced that her prime stock in trade with her wealthy customers is her ability to act spontaneously that she recently submitted to an operation for prevention of pregnancy. She considered it an investment in her career.⁶

But here again the framework of analysis employed in this report becomes constrictive: for these tactful actions on the part of the audience can become more elaborate than is the performance for which they are a response.

I would like to add a concluding fact about tact. Whenever the audience exercises tact, the possibility will arise that the performers will learn that they are being tactfully protected. When this occurs, the further possibility arises that the audience will learn that the performers know they are being tactfully protected. And then, in turn, it becomes possible for the performers to learn that the audience knows that the performers know they are being protected. Now when such states of information exist, a moment in the performance may come when the separateness of the teams will break down and be momentarily replaced by a communion of glances through which each team openly admits to the other its state of information. At such moments the whole dramaturgical structure of social interaction is suddenly and poignantly laid bare, and the line separating the teams momentarily disappears. Whether this close view of things brings shame or laughter, the teams are likely to draw rapidly back into their appointed characters.

⁶ Murtagh and Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 165. See also pp. 161-67.

Tact Regarding Tact

It has been argued that the audience contributes in a significant way to the maintenance of a show by exercising tact or protective practices on behalf of the performers. It is apparent that if the audience is to employ tact on the performer's behalf, the performer must act in such a way as to make the rendering of this assistance possible. This will require discipline and circumspection, but of a special order. For example, it was suggested that tactful outsiders in a physical position to overhear an interaction may offer a show of inattention. In order to assist in this tactful withdrawal, the participants who feel it is physically possible for them to be overheard may omit from their conversation and activity anything that would tax this tactful resolve of the outsiders, and at the same time include enough semi-confidential facts to show that they do not distrust the show of withdrawal presented by the outsiders. Similarly, if a secretary is to tell a visitor tactfully that the man he wishes to see is out, it will be wise for the visitor to step back from the interoffice telephone so that he cannot hear what the secretary is being told by the man who is presumably not there to tell her.

I would like to conclude by mentioning two general strategies regarding tact with respect to tact. First, the performer must be sensitive to hints and ready to take them, for it is through hints that the audience can warn the performer that his show is unacceptable and that he had better modify it quickly if the situation is to be saved. Secondly, if the performer is to misrepresent the facts in any way, he must do so in accordance with the etiquette for misrepresentation; he must not leave himself in a position from which even the lamest excuse and the most co-operative audience cannot extricate him. In telling an untruth, the performer is enjoined to retain a shadow of jest in his voice so that, should he be caught out, he can disavow any claim to seriousness and say that he was only joking. In misrepresenting his physical appearance, the performer is enjoined

to use a method which allows of an innocent excuse. Thus balding men who affect a hat indoors and out are more or less excused, since it is possible that they have a cold, that they merely forgot to take their hat off, or that rain can fall in unexpected places; a toupee, however, offers the wearer no excuse and the audience no excuse for excuse. In fact there is a sense in which the category of impostor, previously referred to, can be defined as a person who makes it impossible for his audience to be tactful about observed misrepresentation.

In spite of the fact that performers and audience employ all of these techniques of impression management, and many others as well, we know, of course, that incidents do occur and that audiences are inadvertently given glimpses behind the scenes of a performance. When such an incident occurs, the members of an audience sometimes learn an important lesson, more important to them than the aggressive pleasure they can obtain by discovering someone's dark, entrusted, inside, or strategic secrets. The members of the audience may discover a fundamental democracy that is usually well hidden. Whether the character that is being presented is sober or carefree, of high station or low, the individual who performs the character will be seen for what he largely is, a solitary player involved in a harried concern for his production. Behind many masks and many characters, each performer tends to wear a single look, a naked unsocialized look, a look of concentration, a look of one who is privately engaged in a difficult, treacherous task. De Beauvoir, in her book on women, provides an illustration:

And in spite of all her prudence, accidents will happen: wine is spilled on her dress, a cigarette burns it; this marks the disappearance of the luxurious and festive creature who bore herself with smiling pride in the ballroom, for she now assumes the serious and severe look of the housekeeper; it becomes all at once evident that her toilette was not a set piece like fireworks, a transient burst of splendor, intended for the lavish illumination of a mo-

ment. It is rather a rich possession, capital goods, an investment; it has meant sacrifice; its loss is a real disaster. Spots, rents, botched dressmaking, bad hairdo's are catastrophes still more serious than a burnt roast or a broken vase; for not only does the woman of fashion project herself into things, she has chosen to make herself a thing, and she feels directly threatened in the world. Her relations with dressmaker and milliner, her fidgeting, her strict demands—all these manifest her serious attitude and her sense of insecurity.¹

Knowing that his audiences are capable of forming bad impressions of him, the individual may come to feel ashamed of a well-intentioned honest act merely because the context of its performance provides false impressions that are bad. Feeling this unwarranted shame, he may feel that his feelings can be seen; feeling that he is thus seen, he may feel that his appearance confirms these false conclusions concerning him. He may then add to the precariousness of his position by engaging in just those defensive maneuvers that he would employ were he really guilty. In this way it is possible for all of us to become fleetingly for ourselves the worst person we can imagine that others might imagine us to be.

And to the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others. As one American college girl has said:

I sometimes "play dumb" on dates, but it leaves a bad taste. The emotions are complicated. Part of me enjoys "putting something over" on the unsuspecting male. But this sense of superiority over him is mixed with feelings of guilt for my hypocrisy. Toward the "date" I feel some contempt because he is "taken in" by my technique, or if I like the boy, a kind of maternal condescension. At times I resent him! Why isn't he my superior in all ways

¹ De Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

in which a man should excel so that I could be my natural self? What am I doing here with him, anyhow? Slumming?

And the funny part of it is that the man, I think, is not always so unsuspecting. He may sense the truth and become uneasy in the relation. "Where do I stand? Is she laughing up her sleeve or did she mean this praise? Was she really impressed with that little speech of mine or did she only pretend to know nothing about politics?" And once or twice I felt that the joke was on me; the boy saw through my wiles and felt contempt for me for stooping to such tricks.²

Shared staging problems; concern for the way things appear; warranted and unwarranted feelings of shame; ambivalence about oneself and one's audience: these are some of the dramaturgic elements of the human situation.

² Komarovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 188.