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## REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

*Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, by ERVING GOFFMAN.  
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University  
Press, 1974. 586 pp. \$12.50 cloth.

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Goffman has devoted most of his work to undermining the integrity of some accepted social entities (like the individual) and the legitimacy of others (like the total institution). *Frame Analysis* is no exception, except in this book Goffman attempts to undermine everyday reality itself, particularly James' and Schutz' claim that it is the prime reality, more fundamental than other realities (like dreams or play). (One wonders what Goffman will subtly subvert next. Watch out, God!)

Goffman begins by dividing the world into an empirical part—a "strip"—which he defines as "any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity" (p. 10), and a subjective part—a "frame"—which he defines as the "principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them" (p. 10-11). (In his later, concrete applications of frame analysis, however, he is sometimes unclear whether frames organize the individual experience of events, as he claims (p. 13), or whether they determine the actual social organization of the events themselves.) We "frame" "strips" of activity by seeing them as natural ("unguided events") or social ("guided doings")—the two fundamental frames; or as fantasied or faked—two of the many instances of secondary frames Goffman discusses.

Frame analysis seems to have two aspects, which I will call the *cellular* and the *concentric*. The *cellular* aspect of frame analysis involves describing the membrane around an activity—the spatial and temporal brackets of each particular frame. For instance, the theater frame (which Goffman analyzes in greater detail than other frames) usually has a sharp beginning and ending as well as a highly defined spatial location. Cellular frame analysis also involves distinguishing the nucleus of an activity from its surrounding cytoplasm—the inner official events (the play itself) from

the outer spectacular occasion (going to the theater). One of Goffman's most incisive conceptual scalpels dissects framed strips of activity into "tracks" or "channels"—a "main" or "story" line at the center of the frame and several subordinate lines "out of frame" (disattended, directional, overlaid, and concealed lines).

The *concentric* (onion skin) aspect of frame analysis involves discriminating the various levels or "laminations" that frame a strip of activity and specifying the ways natural and social frames (basic) are transformed into other, less fundamental frames. One kind of frame transformation Goffman calls "keying," which he defines as "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (p. 43-44). We key a strip of activity by making it into a movie, novel, radio drama, theatrical play, cartoon, puppet show, etc. A second kind of frame transformation Goffman calls "fabrication," which he defines as "the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is actually going on" (p. 83). We fabricate "benign" frames by indulging in leg-pulls, practical jokes, psychology experiments, etc.; we fabricate "exploitative" frames by engaging in espionage, con games, frame-ups, etc. Keyed frames, in which all parties are aware of the transformation, differ from fabricated frames, in which some parties are not aware of the transformation.

Since laminated frames are blown up out of fundamental frames ("upkeying"), they are more vulnerable to deflation ("downkeying"). Keyed frames are liable to fall when they are based on ambiguity (someone is not certain which frame to apply), error (someone thought a bank was being robbed but it was only a filming of a bank robbery), or dispute (the police contend someone dies of a heart attack—a natural frame—but the detective contends he was murdered—a social frame). Fabricated frames are liable to fall when the deceived discover that the frame they thought organized their activity naturally

