

**Erving Goffman at 100: A Rorschach Test  
in a Kaleidoscopic Wrapper**

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*Let all men know thee but no man know thee thoroughly.*

Benjamin Franklin

*Find it estranging even if not very strange,*

*Hard to explain even if it is the custom,*

*Hard to understand even if it is the rule,*

*Observe the smallest action, seeming simple,*

*With mistrust...*

*We particularly ask you –*

*When a thing continually occurs –*

*Not on that account to find it natural.*

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Abstract

**The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Erving Goffman’s birth was in 2022. Drawing on his work, the Goffman archives (Shalin, 2007), the secondary literature and my personal experiences with him and those in his university of Chicago cohort I knew, I reflect on some implications of his work and life, and the inseparable issues of understanding society. This goes far beyond historical interest in the person or his time period. The central concern of the paper is making some sense of the highly varied, often conflicting, characterizations of Goffman. *He was the ultimate Rorschach test in a kaleidoscopic wrapper, ever ready to be turned to a different angle*, which even then, doesn’t guarantee that observers will draw the same conclusions. I identify 14 contrasting characterizations of**

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**his work (e.g, map maker-theorist/hypothesizer; structure functionalist-symbolic interactionist; conservative-liberal; outsider-insider) and note ways of connecting, or at least making sense of, diverse perspectives.**

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The meticulous scholar, mindful of the need to know the literature on a topic and wanting to have something fresh to say, must tremble in the face of writing about anyone with 377,959 citations in Google Scholar (as of February 15, 2022).<sup>2</sup> I have read only a small number of these and recall even fewer.<sup>3</sup> Only the intrepid, overconfident, or the retired with no reputation left to lose would claim to offer something new, at least not without a note from their mother. Trying to be comprehensive, or even representative, in referencing is a fool's errand. After so much has been said, my conclusions are neither fresh nor novel. However, after 60 plus years in the show and watch business they feel right.

Goffman's resonance echoes loudly today, perhaps now more strongly than ever. Consider the colonization of society by social media with its imperative for persons and organizations to "take charge of their narrative." Branding is not restricted to bovines. Whatever the current means of delivery --Facebook, Tik Tok, YouTube, LinkedIn *et al* have significantly altered the presentations of selves and organizations. He wrote (1969), "during occasions when new industries and technologies are developed, the physical and physiological details usually taken as given can become a matter of concern with consequent clarification of the assumptions and conceptions we have of what individuals are."

Given the rise of the new surveillance and internet communication that have so radically upended notions of the always historically situated private and the public, he was prescient. The kind of micro level work he did offers a tether to the sweeping societal changes in personal and public borders seen between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As well, the situations he described at mid-century and a bit beyond, are a tether to the equally radical historical shifts we see today chipping away at the substance of the previously reassuring signs of normality that characterized literal face to face interaction. Among other elements, --the territorial irrelevance, visibility, speed, memorialization, transmission ease and immediacy and analytic superpower brought by computerization alter the physical and social limitations and supports of the patterned adaptations previously taken for granted.

While he did not leave us with an easily defined method or precise explanatory theories, he helped to broaden and legitimate the looser approach which he imbibed at the University of Chicago sociology as a student. (Fine 1995) The astounding number of citations that his work inspired is evidence of, if not a paradigm shift relative to the dominant theorists and methodologists of Harvard and Columbia of the 1950s, it at least provided for a larger table with seats at, rather than under it, for those of the other persuasion.<sup>4</sup>

Goffman spent his formative and most productive years at Berkeley from 1958 to 1967. The department then was a refreshing, pluralistic exception to other leading schools. It was not dominated by a single approach or one or two powerful figures. He had solid intellectual and social contacts across the aisles such as –(e.g., theorist Neil Smelser, methodologist Hannan Selvin and social policy scholar Nathan Glazer). The department was built by Herb Blumer who hired others he knew from Chicago (Goffman, John Clausen, William Kornhauser and Tom Shibutani) but also theorists from Harvard and methodologists from Columbia.

Goffman was a crafty craftsman and a brilliant metaphorician (if there isn't such a word, there should be!). Keeping with the alliterative metaphorical, a few more that apply to him and understanding society --maps, meanings, masks, meshes, misses, messes, mendacity, mavericks, morality, mirrors, mirages, magic and mystery apply as well. The laser-like precision and redolent richness of his concepts and illustrations are central to his insights and impact. He provided compelling examples not as proof, but rather to almost pre-cognitively orient the reader, often with “aha” moments in the waiting.

His x-ray vision exposed the missed (whether obvious and unseen, seen but unacknowledged, or hidden) meanings and structures for social order in the mundane, taken-for-granted interactions of everyday life. The song “little things mean a lot” captures that. In the same way, highly ritualized big things could feel empty and meaningless given the thin and changeable line between the sacred and the secular. The former is ever at risk of being emptied out and becoming merely a ritual in the pejorative sense. By refocusing the lens and following Simmel who lurks large, if largely unseen in the background, he revealed similarities within things that seem different and differences within things that seem similar.

Yet beyond the allure of his compelling examples and language, there is a broader goal that separates social analysis from literary art. He works the empirical, minutia mines for what they say about more general social forms (a study of

gambling is about risk-taking). He had the courage to swim upstream in cloudy waters abundant with sharks.

Drawing on Goffman's his work, the Goffman archives (Shalin, 2007)<sup>5</sup>, the secondary literature and my personal experiences with him and some of his university of Chicago cohort, I offer thoughts on some implications of his work and life, and the inseparable issues of understanding society.<sup>6</sup> The article is intended to go beyond historical interest in the person or his time period and has implications for the sociology of knowledge with respect to understanding social worlds

In the voluminous commentary on Goffman's work over his three decades, we see textual analysis as intellectual history or biography that tracks the influences and contours of the work. This contrasts with critiques of its empirical adequacy, logic and usefulness. The two approaches involve different kinds or objects of truth. The approach here offers some of each and is proudly, or at least non-defensively, a personal essay, not a research paper.

In a 1969 letter Goffman thanked his mentor Everett Hughes "for giving us the conceptual framework we would later live off of" (Jaworski 2000). I second that emotion! A class I took with Goffman at Berkeley in 1961 set me on a life course still in process (others in the class were John Lofland, Travis Hirschi and Marvin Scott. Sherri Cavan, Jackie Wiseman, John Irwin, Harvey Sax, Mel Pollner, Arlie Hochschild, and Thomas J. Scheff were in the neighborhood). This article is part of a 6-decade project studying information control questions and concepts encountered through Goffman. In particular, as these involved information strategically, perceptually and emotionally present for a diversity of role players in varied settings.

My interest in the sociology of information starts empirically as it touches social issues/problems involving --undercover police, surveillance, secrecy, confidentiality, privacy, deception, informers, borders, identity, anonymity, dirty data, muckraking sociology and the career of a career -- at [www.garymarx.net](http://www.garymarx.net). In this I am engaged with Goffman and his generation (including Merton, Riesman, Coser, Shils and Simmel) in what Huebner (2014) in his study of Mead called a "common intellectual project" (Huebner 2014). Gary Jaworksi (2000) notes that as a "reluctant apprentice" Goffman does this with Park, Burgess and Hughes in seeking to unmuddle the place of words in communication (he saw game theory with its emphasis on moves rather than words as a corrective). Park had studied with Simmel.

The view from Goffman is clear and opaque, changeable yet with continuity --contradictions and enigmas abound, but with empirical and logical analysis and intuitive leaps, they are not impenetrable and are partly resolvable. However, no

such optimism is possible for the ironies and paradoxes he noted. Those simply are. The depth of his perceptions often came with melancholy and ambivalence regarding the mixture of good and evil within persons and societies and the limits on our ability to understand and control. Those praising or damning him could give more emphasis to how the mixed picture he presented reflects the nature of social interaction and society.

A jejune journal reviewer of an article like this might well reject it because it violates the second rule for authors, “have an argument”. Yes, the paper is self-consciously all over the map (see Table 1). When dealing with the immense topic of Goffman’s work over four decades how could it be otherwise? That is particularly the case when one is grounded in a Meadian perspective honoring the ways that perceptions are real to perceivers. Combining that tilt with the vast subject matter with its changes, contradictions and ambiguity (some intended by Goffman) over decades in varied contexts, a hard-driving central theme (beyond the pluralistic approach argued for here) would be unhelpful. In such cases, not to have a uni-dimensional argument is the argument.

More realistic for the topic would be a sociology of knowledge focus connecting the varied characterizations of Goffman’s work to contexts and the characterizer’s personal, social, intellectual (methodological, theoretical, political) and time period locations. Much of that needed work with a swell sample remains to be done.

The major topics covered here: Multitudinous Characteristics; Rorschachs and Chameleons; Maps; Not by Maps Alone: Critiques; Justifications; Who or What was He Really? Here’s the Beef (Two Meanings); Disciplined Eclecticism; Outside, Inside and In Between; Professional Wavering; Costs; Yes, But; Politics; His Personal Politics; The Gap; Personal Links: Beyond Words; Forever Enigmatic.

### Multitudinous Characterizations

He is not easy to characterize. Table 1 identifies labels that have been applied to him. Their variety and the opposition of many reflect the richness of his work. What is true of Goffman also applies to his subject matter --the interaction order and the canopy of the larger society that covers, undergirds and is partly built up from it.

Table 1 Characterizations of Erving Goffman

Chameleon – Rorschacher

Scientist -- Humanist

Map maker – Theorist/hypothesizer

Structuralist -- Functionalist --Deconstructionist

Social anthropologist -- Median social psychologist – Hughesian  
Urban Ethnographer

Symbolic Interactionist – Ethnomethodologist--Existentialist

Ethologist – Ecologist -- Social Linguist -- Semiotician --  
Cybernetician-Systems Analyst

Biological, Physical Environmental, Social determinist – Free  
will/agency/voluntarism indeterminist

Apolitical – Anarchist -- Conservative -- Liberal

Misogynist-- feminist

Moralist – Immoralist – Amoralist –Egoist –Communalist

Optimist -- Pessimist

Dramaturgist -- Comedian -- Tragedian

Outsider – Insider – Peripheralist -- Centrist

In the beginning there are the questions. How has the distribution of such characterizations of Goffman changed over the last 7 decades across time, contexts and places? Apart from Goffman per se, what do they say about the characteristics, goals, time periods and location of the characterizers? Most importantly what do they say about understanding society?

Cautionary Notes –Biography, Privacy

*To the living we owe respect, but to the dead we owe only the truth.*

Voltaire

But first some notes of caution. Goffman's was leery of views of commentators and biographers, and even of what authors say about their work. Humility and the proverbial tentativeness of the scientist (if not the cynicism of the

skeptic) is of the essence in writing about Erving Goffman. In a rare interview he told Jef Verhoeven (1993) “biography seems to me to be a way of reifying something that is not worth it. It's a way of exploiting someone's social niche for the material rewards that can be derived from it. Biography strikes me by its way of transforming opportunism into virtue, displaying piety where self-respect should dictate sorrow”.

Nor did he seem to value self-reports –whether from subjects or researchers:

“What an individual says he does, or what he likes that he does, has very little bearing very often on what he actually does. It seems to me that you can't get a picture of anyone's work by asking them what they do or by reading explicit statements in their texts about what they do. Because that's by and large all doctrine an ideology .... if you just take a person's version of what they do, you will end up with a very superficial view of what goes on and, furthermore, you will then be contributing a statement that itself will act as a barrier to anyone else finding out what goes on.” (Verhoeven 1993) Of course, he often contradicted this with confident assertions about the problems of current social research, accounts of what he was about and the empirical work that was needed.

Nor was he appreciative of autobiography. He told his student Gary Fine who proposed doing a self-study of his own wedding, “only a schmuck studies his own life”. (Fine 2009) Yet his reliance on the method of participant observation and introspection suggests the contrary. It is hard to think of Goffman's work apart from his own experiences and intuitions --whether in the Shetland Island or with gambling and mental illness, writing about embarrassment or stigma.

### Public and Private

Goffman was naturally drawn to the public and the private in considering presentations. Temporary, emergent behaviors --whether in disasters, riots or simply waiting lines rests in the Chicago collective behavior tradition (Park and Burgess 1924, Blumer 1957, Turner and Killian 1957). They and their students took seriously the study of the public, masses and the temporary behavior of crowds. The collective behavior tradition is in the background for Goffman's consideration of behavior *in* (rather than *of*) the public.

The concern of Chicago sociologists with crowds most closely fits his interest. This is in contrast to an interest in disembodied, diffused “publics” (e.g., Lippman 1922) that share a common concern; masses; and social movements and are also a part of the tradition. For Goffman “public” information was in opposition to that which was private and withheld and in this sense is adjectival. In the collective behavior tradition these are treated as nouns and little is said about the private within information control.<sup>7</sup>

Any discussion of Goffman must confront privacy and confidentiality issues around the borders of information control and discovery. The scholar whether as biographer or field worker must consider the pursuit of knowledge and freedom of inquiry in the face of concealment preferences of a subject. This is particularly relevant for Goffman. How does his deep interest in piercing informational fronts connect to the fact that he was so extraordinarily protective of his own privacy? We see that in his sealed field notes and unfinished papers; his resistance to being photographed or even to have his picture published when he ran for president of the American Sociological Association; the absence of personal examples, asides, or opinions in his teaching and writing (other than about the status of social research); few if any autobiographical details --even re prefaces and or introductions to work he did; not revealing his personae during field work; and in the minimal self-promotion of his work and avoidance of interviews.

That pattern is inconsistent with his frequent boundary crossing actions in face-to-face behavior. Persons wanting to be in the background and observe behavior uncontaminated by their presence would not take actions that call attention to themselves and generate folklore ala "Tales of Goffman" (Lofland 1984). Here his actions could involve verbal insults and breaching experiments as in spilling a glass of water on a colleague in a restaurant to see the response and then commenting on it. The Goffman archives overflow with gossipy examples of his supposed immodest treading on others' modesty. Perhaps this was for educational purposes; as part of a crusade against hypocrisy; or merely to experiment with the kinds of violations noted by his friend and competitor and almost co-author Harold Garfinkle (1967).<sup>8</sup> This performative, attention-getting style does not reflect the invisibility he so assiduously sought in other areas. Those who trade in other's back stages and masks cannot expect to be beyond equivalent inquiry regarding their own.

Rummaging around in the details of an intellectual career raises other issues, more pronounced perhaps for persons like Goffman, but more broadly applicable. That is the case when a broad sociology of knowledge approach is taken that considers the impact of the social context and the personal situation of the scholar doing the rummaging. When archived memories of others are a source of data as with this paper, particular caution is needed.

The electronic Goffman archives which this article draws from contain interviews that were voluntarily offered along with published materials. The archives' board (of which I am a member) considered the privacy, confidentiality, and validity issues around disclosure of personal information (Marx, Cavan, Shalin



2009). Some relevant general factors –is the person living or not; is this a public figure; does the subject make claims to truth that scholars are called upon to interrogate; is the information in the public domain even if not widely known; has it been ethically obtained; does it appear to be factually correct; will it harm the reputation of the person apart from the legitimate needs of scholarship; how would revelation affect others such as family members or co-workers in the subject’s network; is the revelation closely connected to understanding the person’s work? To understand the person do we need to get personal? Where the above factors lean against revelation is some higher, outweighing purpose served by it?

In drawing on the archives for this article, major guiding principles were common sense, proprietary, seeming facticity and direct relevance. There is a middle ground between the extremes of maximum openness and closure. As with so much, “it depends”. In the board’s discussion 12 twelve more general principles applicable to personal information collection as this involved human and technical surveillance were identified.

### Rorschachs and Chameleons

The Rorschach and the chameleon as images can help make sense of the discordant, cacophonous characterizations of his persona, his work and the broader society.<sup>9</sup> For observers he offered an intricate, even byzantine projective test. It illustrates the multiple faces of social inquiry that intertwined his writing and responses to it. The test, as with any situation, has an external, objective quality with determined borders and inkblots on white cards. These are available to the sited. But with the interpretative question of what the image shows an observer and what is said about it, we encounter another kind of datum.

Both the chameleon and the kaleidoscope involuntarily change appearance as the external environment changes. At any given moment both have factual, external qualities that are constant until the environment shifts (of course it always does if often imperceptibly). The response of non-human organisms in the presence of the chameleon (if they can sense it) is largely automatic without reflective, aligning concerns such as humans wondering, or asking, “what’s up?”, “what’s going on?”, “are you for real?”

Humans of course also involuntarily and automatically respond to the external environment through instinct, biology, perhaps archetypical or soulful residues, the unconscious and various forms of unwilful leakage. But humans --in the best of existential voluntarism, have a degree of choice in what they present and in how they respond to what others present. That choice, whatever its degrees of freedom, brings

a personal morality and identities into the picture which can be fogged up by the forces of varied social locations.

Goffman in his work and life was more chameleon and secretive than most scholars and he was masterful at turning his kaleidoscope for varied takes on what was up.

## Maps

Central to Goffman's brilliance was cartography. He was the paradigmatic map maker generating hundreds of concepts. Despite the obvious limits in any concept chosen, they are fundamental to scholarship. In 1981 he wrote:

I believe that the provision of a single conceptual distinction, if it orders, and illuminates, and reflects delight in the contours of our data, can warrant our claim to be students of society.

Single? No!, a cornucopia of concepts! *Relations in Public* reveals what Berger (1973) called "his love affair with kinds, types, sorts, modes, and ways." For example *Relations* identifies "...three kinds of offenses against the self, four forces of alarm, five types of accounts, six modes of violating personal territoriality and eight kinds of "preserves" of the self...and in a glorious footnote, twenty-four conceivable defenses for running a red light."

His work offers a splendid, large, warm tent with room for all the children: the qualitative and quantitative, description and explanatory theories, structure, function and process. The problem or question should determine the approach, theory and method, not the reverse. As social knowledge evolves it may move closer to natural science (if forever far from physical science) and the premature positivist claims Goffman rejected (the timing, not the principle). In class he said, "life is too complex for theory". He also said that what was often passed off as theory, whether in attitudinal and experimental social psychology or deterministic theories of history, was too simplistic for life. This might be because it was tautological, naïve or the cognitive deficiencies of the theorist. When you get down to cases sweeping scholarly generalizations, however attractive given the structure and limitations of the mind, too often fail. With change and additional research, they are shown to apply only under limited conditions.

With the bible Goffman believes that in the beginning there is the word. Understanding requires closely attending to, and creating categories for the cacophony of passing stimuli. These may be unseen in part because they are so

common, because of deception or the “messy irresolution” of people’s “unknowable circumstances” (Goffman 1981b, p. 195).

#### Concepts from Out of Left, Mundane, Unseen or Unacknowledged Fields

With the bible Goffman believes that in the beginning there is the word. Understanding requires closely attending to, and creating categories for the cacophony of passing stimuli. These may be seen or unseen, and if the latter in part because they are so common; because of deception; or the “messy irresolution” of people’s “unknowable circumstances” (Goffman 1981b, p. 195)

But where do the words come from? Beyond his own inventions, Goffman had the courage to look widely, not only from the low of popular culture, but from the high of other academic disciplines. He was a concept importer from alien fields. Most scholars are too narrow or intimidated to do that, --unless driven by the anomalies Kuhn (1970) saw as vital to scientific breakthroughs.<sup>10</sup>

The man from Manitoba offered a cornucopia of often metaphorical concepts dealing with fundamental aspects of the interaction order. He followed Kenneth Burke’s (1984) advice to wrench a term out from its familiar terrain and apply it to unexpected ground, generating abundant terms for ordering social activity and experience and for thought experiments. Our “professional training” too often comes at a cost of failing to turn the plebian inside out and upside down, feeling self-righteously superior to it and never taking it seriously, not to mention killing imagination. As well, when unquestioned, there can be the risk of taking the commonsensical or the sacred too seriously. Can you see it all as ‘data’ without defiling it?

In *Relations in Public* (1971) he borrows from ethology in developing the concept of the *umwelt* with its prey and predators and related terms. Shared elements in the behavior cattle, lions, red deer and even lizards and fish and spiders offered ways of viewing human behavior (even as this undercut the Durkheimian need to only explain the social by the social).<sup>11</sup> Topics such as embarrassment or shame and emotions which had been left to students of individual psychology might also offer sociological data. He also imported issues of literary style, as well as kinds of data such as images, sounds and silence.

Goffman was very appreciative of Freud and echoed the latter’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in the title of his first book, regarding self-presentations in everyday life. Much of what Goffman focused on was ordinary,

seemingly trivial in its everyday obviousness (walking so as not bump into others, conversational turn taking, facial expressions at a funeral vs. a wedding).<sup>12</sup> Bennett Berger (1973) notes that Goffman could indulge in the exotification of the familiar. He could also familiarize the exotic.

These are “known” about in a general sense, but certainly not *noted* or something you could previously get tenure for. Prior to Goffman bringing the news, they had mostly escaped systematic scholarly attention. Doing this however is not without risk.

In offering more than faint praise for the mundane the analyst faces the risk of being the posterior of jokes. Consider folklore wherein sociology is said to be about “mixing commonsense with nonsense” or a character in an Alison Lurie novel (1974) reporting that sociology consists of, “findings of the obvious by the devious”. Perhaps she had some insider knowledge, --her father was a sociologist. Of course, as up-enders of the palpable we must be judicious and evidence and logic based, avoiding an emotionally gratifying categorical desanctification.

Another source of concepts is found in seeing the unseen and involves asking about behavior that might occur but does not. In his first published paper (1951) he showed his ability to identify this invisible aspect of variation. There he asks about “...the division between items of characteristic conduct that are employed as status symbols and those items which *could be employed in this way but are not* (italics added) (p. 302).”

He observed that a major element of dinner parties was who *wasn't invited* – reflecting the hierarchical preferences of the hosts. Or consider his fresh take (1972) on the marvels of electricity and gas available in most urban homes by the 1950s. In advertisements these were defined as desirable characteristics for the modern home. But in “Normal Appearances” he sees them as potential tools for willful death and injury. That then opens up background questions about standards, education, failsafe mechanisms and using them to make crimes, –whether homicide, suicide or arson, rather than to make dinner.

Consider as well one of his most cited observations (1971, p. 288) in response to the question posed by Columbia university’s president after the destruction in his office during a sit-in. He asked: “My God, how could human beings do a thing like this?” Goffman shifted the president’s question: “The great sociological question, of course, is not how could it be that human beings would do things like this, but rather how is it that human beings do this sort of thing so rarely? How come persons in authority have been so overwhelmingly successful in conning

those beneath them into keeping the hell out of their offices?” This brings in broader ideas from the study of social systems, culture and labeling as well as of degrees of visibility and anonymity.

Many of his concepts deal with the implications of ever-present little disorders always at the ready, whether seen or not. The classic example of the latter is the disgruntled waiter sneezing onto the plate or spiting in your soup, let alone all the possible non-social disruptions such as weather or building collapses.

Much of his work from 1951 onward wrestles with the question of small social orders and disorders and their propellants and inhibitors and factors conditioning the latter (although horrific disorders are noted in his article on “Normal Appearances” in *Relations in Public*). Consider an unsuspected predatory criminal who stops an elevator between floors and attacks the only other person in the elevator --hardly the faux pas of embarrassment.

### Not by Maps Alone: Critiques

Goffman offered empirical generalizations, but did not consciously work at providing hypotheses, or the explanatory/causal assertions they invite as the next step in science, nor did he do much in systematically connecting his hundreds of concepts. He broke the building into its component parts but didn't try very hard to put it back together. He was not a dot-connector. This is like paint by numbers with clusters of numbers missing. Small sections with adjacent numbers are present, but the larger picture is not. Of course, some meaning is possible in imagining what lies between fragments to connect the fuller picture, although this depends a lot on what the observer brings to the situation.

While innovators can perhaps be cut a bit of slack, he does not much build on, or connect, his ideas from book to book or even chapter to chapter. When there is so much to unpack and our efforts are so preliminary the task is (as he wrote in a letter to his mentor Everett Hughes) to “look only forward” (Jaworski, 2020). He rarely offers the reader opening summaries of where a piece goes or in the conclusion, where and why it has gone there. Furthermore, a more general atlas for driving the maps that are offered is not present.

Without an atlas his empirical and logical cornucopia often overflows, indeed to the point of flooding out the reader with descriptive examples and concepts --as interesting and revealing as they often are. Some of his writing resembles a series of

ever smaller Russian dolls within smaller dolls, each one surrounded by parentheses within parentheses.

How many categories, cases, anecdotes and “for instances” does one guy need to drive an analytic offering? The issue is partly one of personal preference and style (holding apart the needs of the reader). He argues that we do it because it is ours and we can. In addition, you never know what might be useful until it is offered.

What rules can tell you when to stop the elaboration and the addition of ever more examples and dimensions? Parsimony and the pleasure of colorful examples remain at odds within the divided soul of the humanist who also seeks to be a righteous scientist. Is the pleasure/goal in the satisfaction and even joy the writer takes in ever more rich examples, or in advancing an abstract knowledge (and how general should the level of abstraction be?) Can we have it both ways? Perhaps if there are cleanup crews that follow the cornucopians.

Even with the abundance, there are gaps and a need for expansion in some areas. Fortunately, a well-developed secondary literature critiques and extends many of his naming and other efforts. One group of observers are in deep disagreement about what it is that he says. Another group agree on what it is that Goffman says, but then differ in agreeing or disagreeing about the merit of what he has said. The hair can be continuously split, but I take it no further than five commonly occurring types of response reflected in this essay:

- 1) historical locators
- 2) concept and theory extenders
- 3) keeper’s of the faith (criticism of him for not being faithful to, ignoring or misusing the critic’s game --whether theoretical, methodological. political, disciplinary, comparative or level of analysis)
- 4) explicators who inform us what Goffman was *really* saying/intending whether he knew it or not
- 5) defenders and keepers of the faith --critics of the critics just mentioned. <sup>13</sup>

Consider a few extender examples. Tom Scheff (2006) offers an incisive, critical, yet supportive, analysis of Goffman’s concepts. He notes weaknesses and efforts to transcend them, with an emphasis on overlooked emotional elements which Scheff broadens to include positive emotions. Tavory and Fine (2020) have supplemented Goffman’s one-sided emphasis on factors that serve to align interaction via shared definitions of the situation. They call attention to factors that serve to disrupt interaction, whether disruptions *of* relations or disruptions *for* them. Another area that calls for elaboration involves the natural and physical properties

of tools, objects and subjects in the setting (apart from social, cultural and historical factors he attends to). Byrne and Marx (2011) Marx (2015) consider this in looking at technologies used for social control.

A factor overarching many of his early concepts involves contingency in its multiple forms. Many contingent conditions are unpredictable re their occurrence at a known time and place, even if the fact that they *could* appear or disappear is known. Given the ubiquity of change there are also the rare outcomes that were not imagined or that seemed wildly improbable if they were. A fuller enumeration of types of contingency is needed as they relate to encounters, situations, contexts and settings –themselves concepts that would profit from more systematic elaboration. Gary Jaworski (forthcoming) helps us see Goffman’s treatment of the concept “situation” in the traditions of pragmatism, existentialism and functionalism.

An important factor in many situations and contingencies and situations is location. Mel Kohn (2008) knew Goffman when they both worked at NIMH while he was doing the research for *Asylums*. Kohn found the work brilliant, but it did not adequately “delineate the time and place”. Goffman’s broad generalizations would benefit from greater specification with respect to the locales, types and conditions under which they apply.

Goffman is not clear about the locations to which his ideas apply and how universal they are across groups and societies. At times even, he is uncomfortable with his approach. With respect to the heterogeneity of the US, he told Jef Verhoeven (1993) “...the reference unit, ‘American society’ (which I use throughout). Is something of a conceptual scandal, very nearly a contradiction in terms...” Considering comparative international work he said, “I’ve never had any experience of a really alien culture.”<sup>14</sup>

Even while ever ready to split the next concept, he never fully gave up on the search for overarching principles that, at a higher level of abstraction, might bring greater order to the rest. He sometimes bootlegged in implications of universality – as in referring to total institutions or in writing emphatically about structures and processes involving groups and interaction.

Here we see the inherent tension within the scientific method for ever finer differentiations and ever broader overarching principles that will order them all, even if it turns out that what is taken at the moment as general, turns out to be only a limiting case requiring qualification. Re the competing imperatives of specification and generalization researchers tend to tilt toward one or the other. What Coser (1958) said of the critiques made of Simmel in the early 1900s might also have been said of

Goffman, “they stressed the dazzling brilliance of his writings and the brittle elegance, but they also noted the lack of systematic exposition and the almost studied disorderliness of his method”.

Another major concern of many critics (noted in the politics section below), is that he almost never took a direct moral or policy stand, even as his topics often screamed out for this. When is an inauthentic self or organizational presentation reflective only of undignified self or instrumental purposes, as against being warranted (given the standards at play) by a deeper moral code? We are left wondering or searching for morality cues within statements that might be tongue in cheek or sarcastic.

His fulsome observations so rich in ordering dimensions and distinctions and implicit values and standards, are not directly linked to questions of social policy. What moral code underlay his exquisite sensitivity to various information control settings and scenes and the slings and arrows of social practices? For example, in settings of sanctified deception with respect to informers and undercover police we need to ask, “who is hurt or helped and in what ways and when? What does this imply for laws and policies and the “expert” having an opinion and an obligation to express it as a professional?<sup>15</sup> The public intellectual role is beset with landmines and worse, but there are time when the scholar, like the medical doctor should offer an opinion.

### Justifications

His approach is justified by the work being exploratory, with scholarship in the area in its beginning stages. There is also need for a division of labor re tasks performed. Throw a lot of ideas out and some will stick. Let others worry about methodology and get bogged down slogging through the heavy lifting of statistics, testing hypotheses and documenting variation in cultures beyond North America and historically. He even says, “I never have [used numbers] because I'm lazy, but I'm not ideologically disposed against them”. (Verhoeven 1993: 334)<sup>16</sup> He was however opposed to the reductionist superficiality of opinion surveys and social psychology experiments conducted in air-conditioned laboratories.

His style of work can be done in good conscience with many escape hatches. He offers “verbal hedges” such as “the occurrence qualifier” (what is being described occurs “routinely”, “often”, or “on occasion”) and “the distribution qualifier” aka “in our society”. Don't over emphasize claims to universality or



representativeness or the truth or falsity of what an actor says. Just let your subjects speak, if they step on their tie, or something shorter, the reader will know. But even then, whether the speakers are ethnography subjects, analysts of other's work or an author's claims about what they did --be wary.

In a classic self-protective move, he admits his guilt and offers deference and obeisance to the then powerful in the profession, "certainly, the method that often is resorted to here –unsystematic, naturalistic observation –has very serious limitations." Yet what he referred to as, "the informal memories of colorful people" is a vital source (1959 p.xi). In telling us that "the unsubstantiated assertions" he makes in *Relations in Public* (1971: xv-xvi) are "a necessary evil" given the subject matter and current state of knowledge, he takes an in-between position.

In one sense, Goffman as a conceptualizer took the easier route. He had the evidence, but did not offer more systematic links between his concepts nor directly develop extended propositional theories. He did not even offer lists of his concepts. Perhaps that is too cold and formal for hot blooded data. Perhaps it is because, as he noted, his concepts could spill over into each other. But even in a spongy universe, sponges have borders. Hidden within his implicit atlas is a secret rhizomatic garden map of potentially linkable names.

For example, in writing about expectations with respect to whether or not a situation seems normal or there is reason for suspicion he writes, "at one end there will be periods of ease with themselves and each other, and at the other, a situation in which everyone finds many signs for alarm." (1971) That suggests four types (self and other both at ease, both show alarm, self is at ease and other shows alarm or self shows alarm and other is at ease). These can be richly connected to other of his concepts such as benign and exploitative fabrications within 3 basic game types!

Had he located his concepts within broad, multi-dimensional tables they would be easier to grasp. Those of an analytic mind set would find it easier to build on them, even as it would be a monumental turn off for others. This would offer a better appreciation of the connections of the small pieces that make up the big picture, in contrast to just naming them in run on sentences like some of his students do. Perhaps unlike ordinary mortals his mind was such that he could just see all this without needing to see a visual representation.

An initial factual discovery or naming a concept is usually far more fun and exciting than slogging through the often even more hidden, intertwined rhizomes of social reality and any enduring meanings or explanations. While naming requires

“seeing” and imagination. it is easier than systematically linking the parts (whether of process or structure); than having a theory about “why”; and then publicly testing the theory (holding apart the rarity of finding strong correlations). But good luck to those who want to try. They might get lucky, be really smart, or be deceived by spurious or artifactual correlations or tautological thinking.

Perhaps he didn’t do more out of humility, given the monumentality of the task, or perhaps out of an excess of caution in not wanting to risk a scholarly reputation, given the odds of finding a really strong (non-circular) explanation for anything socially important.<sup>17</sup> Better to take a thousand blooming flowers approach in the hope that some would be hardy. It may also be because of the sheer joy and sense of excitement and satisfaction that can come from creating a name for what was no less real for being unnamed. There is so little time and so much to name. Perhaps his impatience here parallels his rapid-fire speech and fast walking.

Who or What Was He “Really”?

*“Who are YOU?” said the Caterpillar.  
Alice: “I-I hardly know, sir, just at present  
at least I know who I WAS when I got up  
this morning, but I think I must have changed  
several times since then.*

L. Carroll

Goffman would likely have viewed the voluminous efforts to classify his approach and to unpack his work with distaste and bemusement. Consider what he said about the dramaturgy concept applied to his early work: “the term dramaturgy I can’t take all that seriously.” (Verhoeven 1993) It was better to mint new empirical data than to discourse on other people’s articles and books. He did not take kindly to exegesis or writing books about other books (“Bucher uber Bucher schreiben”, Winkin 2022b). He wrote only three book reviews (one in 1955 and two in 1957) and those at the start of his career. He ignored reviews and critiques of his own work<sup>18</sup> –an exception is the rejoinder in *Contemporary Sociology* (1981c pp. 60-68) to Denzin and Keller (1981).

He had the distance, and perhaps courage, to apply the labeling perspective not only to elites, but to the home team. Labelers have their own interests and impose borders after the fact. Why should we believe them? He saw labeling a scholar’s

work and dividing it into professional categories as somewhat accidental, ahistorical, exclusionary and unduly determinative. He would have been supportive of his student Dean MacCannell's (2022) observation that there should be "...no place for "schools of thought in research and scholarship. They only serve to enable stagnation..."

Those with "paradigms to grind" and views to promote have a "stilted sense of social reality" that can move away from scholarly dialogue to "theological or political denunciation". He writes:

"One proclaims one's membership in some named perspective, gives pious mention of its central texts, and announces that the writer under review is all off by virtue of failing to qualify for membership. A case of guilt by pigeonholing. As if a writer's work is a unitary thing and can be all bad because he or she does not apparently subscribe to a particular doctrine, which doctrine, if subscribed to, would somehow make writings good." (Goffman 1981c)

However cozy, too tight an identification with the discipline (and even worse one strand of it and worse still, with "the profession") could be blinding, and even boring, after a few decades in the biz. Labels not only can hide unholy power differences, they run the risk of oversimplification and reification. He was suspicious of labels, ideology, loyalty tests and institutions, whether total or merely greedy. Furthermore, when the labels come with the visible and/or self-imposed strings of the sponsors, it can be hard to sustain scholarship in the "spirit of unfettered, unsponsored inquiry" he strongly advocated and lived. (Goffman 1983)

But as Henry James in his short story "The Middle Years" observed, "we work in the dark. We do what we can. We give what we have." To answer the "who" and "what was he?" questions we need several voices –what he *says* about his work and about social science more broadly, what he *does* and how *others* label that. Those do not necessarily sing in harmony and as he noted, skepticism is needed about what a person says about his or her own work.

What to make of the contrasting, and even polarized categories in Table 1? Conflicting, even diametrically opposed views are found in both the academic literature and the personal reminiscences of the archives. I'd prefer not to have a pony in the "but what was he really?" race.

Is the lack of clarity or unanimity because some characterizations in the table are clearly wrong? A given answer may involve a bad sample, looking in the wrong place using the wrong yardstick, an atypical example/illustration, a misreading or

bad faith propagation of ideas the spreader knows to be inaccurate. It can mean his (or his critics) being unclear about whose voice is being heard –the actor, others in the situation or the author as reportorial observer or commentator (from a phenomenological perspective, Psathas (1980) notes the significance of such distinctions).

Perhaps it may simply be selective perception, --as Paul Simon sang, “a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest.” A conclusion might be nothing more than wish fulfillment under the sway of the blindness of subfield disciplinarity, ideology, or cognitive, memory and ethical deficits or the kind of data available to the senses of the claimant.

If it is selective perception there might be a partial, acontextual, but minor truth involving low hanging fruit, a different level of analysis, a different problem or changes within the same body of work or at different stages of his life.

We see weaving and ducking in the same ring –note the varied meanings of the term “ self” he employed in *Presentation*. In 1959 (p. 252) he wrote, “The self ...is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, mature, to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented.” But earlier (p. 229) he suggests something more stolid beneath the veneer, “the degree that the individual maintains a front 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”. (italics added).<sup>19</sup> The implication here is that the self is present prior to emerging from “a scene that is presented”. That must be the case if the disjuncture in conning the audience is to generate unease within the actor. The same sense of a person beyond or behind the public offering is clearly expressed in the concept of role distance (1961b) as it reflects a singular pastiche of identity patches.

In another *Presentation* example, Philip Manning (1989) observes that between the 1956 and 1959 versions of the book greater emphasis was given to rituals and the objective and less to the individual as a secret manipulator. Alan Dawe (1973) notes a marked change of tone and content between the last chapter in *Relations in Public* on “Normal Appearances” and what came before. There is a move from the minor infractions, jokes, wit, jesting and rituals of integration and re-integration in the first parts of the book to a darker suspicion and fear of the severe and threatening disrupters that might be waiting beyond the masks and lurk lines, -- a concern well captured in *Henry IV*: “I speak of peace, while covert enmity under the smile of safety wounds the world”.

His treatment of gender underwent significant changes after several decades. Handling of gender and sexism as seen in his 1976 and 1977 works differs in content and tone from his earlier writing, as he moved from a typical 1950s, unwoke white guy to a crypto-feminist.

Goffman makes a strong case for how hard individuals often work to be in congruence with, and helpful to others. Yet he also shows how they do the opposite. The playful, subtle, contrary, mercurial Goffman as a slipper and a slider, sometimes may purposefully mislead the observer. Or what is intended as satire or humor may be taken literally. Or what is intended as neither may be misconstrued, and endlessly debated, because certainty resides more in the faith of the observer than the proof of the data.

What, for example, should we make of his entitling a paper on gambling “Where the Action Is”? Is it “alienating” because it reflects “patriarchal experience” as Deegan (2014) argues? Or in a more positive light, is it an example of hyper-masculinity against the backdrop of an America going even softer since the 1950s? (Scheff 2010) Or is the term intended to call attention to the concrete *interaction* order in opposition to Talcott Parsons’s abstract use of the term *action* as part of a formal theory? (Shalin 2016) Does it reflect Goffman’s role distance from the staid and safe role of the professor and from the mundanity of means-ends relations? Is it a form of sociation or pure play as the means become the end? Or is it nothing more than vernacular for gambling activity? Can a deeper phenomenological experience be grasped without attention to the facts of gambling per se? (Wanderer 1987) Do we have to choose? It is helpful here to separate out an author’s intention (however elusive it can be) from its impact on other readers and the world more broadly.<sup>20</sup>

The emotional wallop of Goffman’s work, along with what Stan Lyman (1973) calls his “artfulness”, go beyond analytic understanding. It is partly grasped by being experienced. Novelist Flannery O’Connor observed that “the meaning of fiction is not in abstract meaning *but experienced meaning.*” [italics added] That applies to non-fiction life stories as well. Understanding can come from thinking about how bits and pieces of one’s own life connects to another’s with a bit of *verstehen* and intuition. A personal illustration concludes this article.

As with the subtlety of great art and scholars who write about frames and definitions of situations and those performing within them, a lot (but not everything) is in the eye of the beholder. Who does the beholder want Goffman to be? By what means is he to be understood?

Those questions are particularly relevant to the markedly different memoirist accounts found in the Goffman archives. These should be seen as accounts that are (assuming good faith) meaningful to the memorialist (Cavan 2011) while taking into account the limits of memory and selective perception. From another vista, conflicting stories are themselves the (or a) story. There, we also look at what an account says about the person offering the account.

Whether or not the account of a memorialist is factual or valid is a different issue. But the thirst for meaning via cross-observer validity is hard to resist and puzzles are in Murray Davis' (1971) words, "interesting."<sup>21</sup>For a broader understanding, the accounts of story tellers should be held to criteria beyond the subjective.

Story tellers need to be heard, but the radical relativism of sacralizing the subjective cannot stand. Just because all are stories, doesn't mean that all stories are equal, the same holds for performances or anything that is constructed. To varying degrees, stories have attributes and build from something. Central to understanding a life is figuring out the interplay of the external and verifiable with the claims from conflicting perspectives and memories.

Correct answers are helped by the adequacy of the logic, the clarity of the empirical and by consistency with what is known from other facts and contexts. Other factors (more guardedly) include an intuitive feeling that it is correct or incorrect and the democratic science question "how many see it that way?" Of course, for some claims there is the pragmatic and usefulness question: "does the plane fly?" Is their proof in the pudding? While the pragmatic gives an answer that can't be avoided, it is morally hazardous if it is the only standard or not subject to some qualification.

Just because most of the observers with disparate views are college professors, and some even intellectuals, doesn't mean that they are stupid. As the little dog Toto knew in *The Wizard of Oz*, there really was something behind the curtain that could be factually known across observers sharing the same sensory tools. In broad outline, most turns of the kaleidoscope reveal something empirical, and as Jacobsen and Kristiansen (2010) conclude after an exhaustive review of Goffman's multi-faceted effort and persona, there is something "valid and reasonable" in the varied accounts. To reverse a 1960s Buffalo Springfield song, perhaps "nobody's wrong [because] everybody's right" (more or less).

If Table 1 was on a multiple-choice exam, I would answer "all of the above" and then some, –at least sometimes. Yet, as Orwell said in *Animal Farm*, some are

more equal than others. While it may be unmanly in an age of gender awareness to say it is “either and”, --not “either/or”, the former response fits best. In addition, at times it will be neither/nor, but rather some third dialectically sparked way as a result of blending and balancing opposing strands. It could not be otherwise for someone like Goffman who so appreciated Whitehead’s fulsome view that every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing within omnipresent change.

Goffman was deep and very serious about his craft, yet sometimes also a mercurial and playful chameleon who changed over time. His topic is rife with contradictions, enigmas and ways of knowing that reflect the limits on human understanding. What then can be said about who he was?

### Here’s the Beef (Two Meanings)

The predominant answer in Goffman’s own words is he was, “a qualitative, social ethnographer of small-scale entities”, a “structural social psychologist” who was “oriented to social anthropology”. He said, “Radcliffe Brown [to whom he dedicated *Relations in Public*] was central to my interest and concerns – and a model for writing papers more than any sociologist.” He reports, “The person I worked for initially was Lloyd Warner.” (Verhoeven 1993) Yet a bit later in his graduate study he emphasized sociology and drew from Simmel, Mead, Blumer, Hughes and Shils with turns to urban anthropology, and later socio-linguistics. At Penn his office was in the anthropology department and he seemed there to have found his strongest intellectual community around scholars of linguistics.

With a clear acknowledgement of Durkheim he suggests, “not to look elsewhere but to ourselves and to our discipline” (Goffman 1983). He considered himself “...a symbolic interactionist .... But I am also a structural functionalist in the traditional sense,” (Verhoeven 1993: 318) He brings them together via his mentor Everett Hughes (Jaworski 2000). This reflects the widely accepted view (at the time anyway) that “functional analysis” was synonymous with sociology per another of my teachers -Kingsley Davis (1959). Dean MacCannell (1983) suggests that in *Frame Analysis* he presciently draws together existentialism, phenomenology, structuration and semiotics into an emerging, single theoretical view.

From the social process perspective actors with their give and take are *doing life* (not to be confused with that expression as applied to those serving long term prison sentences, or the fact that with technological constraints the entire society shows increased parallels to a prison). Researchers in the symbolic interaction tradition are *doing sociology* by understanding as a result of *listening, observing,*

*interpreting and even experiencing*. This may be done inferentially or directly as participant observers. The goal is to grasp what actors who are “on” and/or at the scene are presumed to be inferring, thinking, feeling, believing and doing. The ethnographer’s descriptive details can be and end in themselves and, if lucky, in their presentation may occasionally even reflect the art and truth found in literature and film.

The data from this approach is soft, fleeting, alive and in process. Because it is dynamic, it is challenging to codify, beyond naming. It is sociology by lists and subjective resonance. It catalogues rather than more systematically organizing.

In contrast, structuralism involves the search for more systematic and formulized (whether or not legally or bureaucratically formalized) codes imposed on the data by both the actors and researchers. <sup>22</sup>These in principle guide behavior and inform expectations. The seemingly local, idiosyncratic details of a given strip of behavior are pigeon-holed into some prior conceptual boxes provided by culture, including micro-cultures unique to the interactants.

Both the observed and the observers *frame* the activity. Whatever our role in a given moment, we are all in the inference and codification business. Sense making resides in what the actors and the researcher think is occurring. In doing this they draw on a limited number of mostly inherited (given) ideas of “what’s up?”, “what’s going on?”, and “what should be done?” across the observable and inferable. To varying degrees this involves presumptions made about the actor’s subjectivity informed by our own.

Structuralism involves codes or patterns –whether found in the kinship studied by anthropologists, the syntax studied by linguists or in routine or atypical interactions. His sociology by metaphor and satire (Fine and Martin 1990, Jaworski 2022b) fit here as well, as when a given example is shown to fit within a more general category or process not conventionally associated with it. As noted, Goffman welcomed both approaches although he turned more to framing in his later work, although the dramaturgic approach with which he began is also illustrative.

His approach treated the external and the internal, the objective and the subjective, structure and process, stability and change in the traditions of Simmel’s formal sociology. As Gregory W.H. Smith (1989) writes he sought, “the structuring principles which provide the order within the flux”. He saw structure and process connected in an endless dance, particularly when it involved parties with conflicting interests. But there is also a cooperative dance when parties of good will compete to



best serve each other. Settings are also hemmed in by uncontrollable contingencies and background or stage-setting factors within the environment that surrounds them including the sense apparatuses we have for awareness.

His method was more one of curving than linear lines, as he mixed structure and process, subjectivity and objectivity, continuity and change, control and lack of control, predictability and surprise, fact and concept, and satire and realistic accounts, --like a feather bouncing in air currents or a stone seeming to eternally skip across the water touching all, never to have a fixed landing. The variety of potentially conflicting elements inherent in the topic guarantees that ambiguity and ambivalence are ever in waiting, further nourished by the limits on perception and cognition and by deception.

The difference between the endurance and solidity of structures and the fluidity and fragility of process is relative. They are eternally interwoven and reciprocal. The latter change and in their infinite richness, the contexts of process are never *exactly* the same, in spite of enduring patterns across varied settings.

Consider a basketball game with tools, rules, expectations, and a referee but whose final score and the precise way of reaching it is unknown (absent a affixed game). Structures are imposed and shape the context, but if the outcome was known in advance, it would not be a game. Out of the creative and adaptive challenges of process and earlier and immediate history, new patterns emerge to structure events (note new rules such as the appearance of 3-point shots or the need to shoot within a specified time period and new defensive moves against them. These factors interact and are intended to keep fan interest high).<sup>23</sup>

In his first published paper (1951, p. 302) he identifies six “general devices” that work against the misuse of social class symbols. But after identifying the thrust to control, he immediately notes its ironic insufficiency and the ever-present opposing thrust to violate: “...there is no single mode of restriction which is not regularly and systematically circumvented in some fashion.” This twostep dynamic is a key to his natural history process approach involving interaction at all levels and the patterned expectations of actors thrashing about within.

This includes the “careers” of individuals and social practices. It also speaks to the interaction of creative choices and determinism. It alerts us to disagreements about the relative freedom individuals have to act independently of the givens in a situation, a topic briefly considered later in the section on politics.

An additional factor in understanding Goffman requires going beyond the written word. As Winkin (2022a,b) observes there was a performative quality to his communication. That was also true of Simmel. Coser (1958) cites several contemporaries of Simmel, "...the process of thought took possession of the whole man, how the haggard figure on the lecture platform became the medium of an intellectual process the passion of which was expressed not in words only, but also in gestures, movements, actions" and "one doesn't really listen, one participates in the thought processes."

That was true for Goffman as well. His presentation resonated at levels beyond the cognitive. Words can be "performative utterances" (Austin 1962) apart from immediate acts. Goffman also "spoke" in behavioral strips in which his actions did the talking. His dead pan facial expressions, his timing, his gestures and his body language could be artful. If you knew the language what was not said could matter more than what was.

His offerings could be playful or hostile—as with sometimes in a lecture speaking too softly or rapidly and communicating that he didn't care if his audience could hear him or not; stopping his talk when a photographer took his picture, once even getting down from the stage. Or consider breaking expectations by standing too close to a person and saying nothing. The delivery of a paper entitled "The Lecture as Performance" (1981b) was itself a performance (when he gave it in Brussels he showed up late presumably to make a point, Winkin 2022b). In some lectures he mixed explication and demonstration, for example taking a sip of water and using that to explain the role of the dramatic pause.

In offerings and responses to others the literal content of words is not the only form of communication. Goffman helped introduce a more performative sociology with images, music, costumes, physical movement and even props used in lectures. In recent decades, the ease of showing slides and video excerpts from film and the news along with the internet have greatly expanded the lecturer's repertoire. His use of images and popular culture was likely informed by his work at the Canadian National Film Board before graduate school.

Goffman's cornucopic oeuvre is not easily encompassed within a narrow framework. Simmel (2010 1918) wrote that his own impact would be like, "a cash legacy divided among many heirs, and each converts his share into whatever business suits his nature..." So it is with Goffman's legacy which adaptively and expansively splays across intertwined questions, levels and disciplines.

## Disciplined Eclecticism

What observers see depends on who they are, where, when and how they look and what is going on in the external environment. Above all, Goffman was not a one-topic pony<sup>24</sup>. As noted, in spite of some constancy, he moved back and forth and sideways, in the best dressage tradition. He let the issue and the moment drive the method rather than the reverse.

He went for the combination plate. Dilatants have more fun and, contrary to popular belief, they can be deep as well. He moved around and had a lot of arrows in his quiver. He practiced, in Merton's felicitous phrase, a disciplined eclecticism, --listening to all and looking widely, being ever ready to shift stance and not prematurely showing any positivist aces. More than most members of the scribbling classes, he offered readers a fulsome Rorschach test re potential labels. *Goffman was the ultimate Rorschach test in a kaleidoscopic wrapper, ever ready to be turned to a different angle*, which even then, doesn't guarantee that observers will draw the same conclusions.

For takers of this Rorschach test we duck the complicating issue of what may be unseen because of repression, the unconscious or Goffman's slippin' and slidin' as a shape changer. Is it not there if the viewer doesn't see it (note sounds, sights or electro magnetism beyond the unaided human senses so readily available and "there" for other life forms) ?) It is easy to confound the actual shape with what is symbolically taken from it (or better imposed upon it) by the test taker. Even with advances in brain imaging technology, subjectivity remains (at least for now) a modest tool in the positivist tool bag.

His mixed drink overflows with many elixirs and finding a pure taste is challenging. Idiosyncratic? Maybe but for an understandable end. His emphasis was significantly inductive, using the accessible data from interaction to illustrate conceptual forms and ideas, rather than using the theories or systematized methods to illustrate the data. Whatever your theory or method, being too patriotic meant excluding too much. In addition, communication is greatly helped when it involves empirical and tangible data immediately available to the senses. The focal point for applying a variety of helpful tools was the kind of social order produced via interaction.<sup>25</sup> This could involve Simmel's forms, exchanges, numerical and cultural relations, Meade's self, Durkheim's rituals, Parson's functionalism, Weber's *vershten*, unconscious slippages from Freud, deeper linguistic and cultural codes from Garfinkle and Sacks, even *umwelts* from ethologists and so much more. These dissect and twirl throughout his work, permitting patriotic observers to find their

flag, or bemoan it not receiving its' due. A pragmatic veneer over-arches all of these re, “ is it useful for grasping what is observed?” Of course, the definition of useful draws us back into the abyss.

His work is a kind of half-way house between the literary stylist à la Kafka or Orwell and the ponderous positivist, with the best of both worlds. The essay style gives one a lot of bang for the buck. Have fun, get to the heart of the matter with surface skimming, colorful examples, satirizing and being provocative. Here, as with his persona and much of his work, Goffman was at both the center and periphery (to use the terms of an early mentor Edward Shils).

Outside, Inside and In-between

*Clowns to the left of me,  
Jokers to the right, here I am,  
Stuck in the middle with you,*

G. Rafferty

Robert Park, a student of Simmel and the teacher of some of Goffman's teachers, popularized the term “the marginal man” (1928). This drew from Simmel's (1971) treatment of the stranger, a bittersweet social form. Earlier and unappreciated W.E.B. DuBois (1994) used the term “double consciousness” in 1903 in referring to the experience of blacks in the U.S. As an outsider this social type is often unseen, while seeing what is unseen by insiders with the added burden of code-switching and perhaps increased stress and neuroses.

Or perhaps better, such outsiders have a blurred vision, with time coming to be distant from both the old and new group and feeling even more homeless until connecting with other marginals sharing the pattern. For the early Chicago social pathologists studying the presumed social and personal disorganization of immigrants and their children, the source was located in their uprootedness and the tensions between traditional and the new culture. That was particularly likely for the interstitial second generation. The successful cultural assimilation, if not social integration, of later offspring might even qualify the latter to be seen as “honorary insiders”. While sharing a communal sentiment, it is the reverse of the “courtesy stigma” status allocated the wise outsider in *Stigma*.

For Simmel the stranger is a permanent resident but remains a resident alien. Not fully outside, he has a connection to the inside group, but in important ways remains outside of it. He or she is a straddler.<sup>26</sup> While a participant, the stranger experiences more disconnection (less role commitment) and risks rejection relative

to real [sic] insiders. The objective social factors that make him marginal or a stranger can distance and confound his subjectivity relative to that of the natives and add a strong motivation to succeed.

By his social inheritance Goffman was initially an outsider to the higher reaches of American society, elite institutions and aspects of post WW II American identity culture. He wrote, "...in an important sense there is only one completely unblushing male in America, a young, married, white urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father of college education, fully employed of good complexion" [and following *Stigma* able-bodied] (1963, p.128). Contrary to the misreading of some critics he did not favor this culture, he merely described it at that time. Goffman felt and faced the onslaught of that culture. Yet a note of caution. Those on the outside relentlessly exposed to dominant culture ideals need not always or only have a negative self-image, nor fail to see the strengths of their group or of themselves as an individual with multiple sources of identity.<sup>27</sup> To note issues of self-doubt, and at times wishing to be someone else for all those so relentlessly exposed to dominant images of a cultural ideal with benefits, is rarely the whole story.

Terms such as "the dominant cultural ideal", which *Stigma* is based on, are not adequate for a polyglot society in which pluralism (in principle) grants legitimacy to minorities who may have an alternative view of the value given to the dominant group's ideals, and space to resourcefully and imaginatively undermine and exploit it. Much of his work can be read as a paean to the human spirit of resilience, resistance, and creativity, however partial. The resources and will were there for Goffman to become an insider in many ways. This reflects the gnarling, blurring and exchanging of roles, and aspects of identity, he noted in *Stigma*.

If Goffman were writing today, I am sure the language contrasting the "normal" with so many kinds of stigma would be more qualified—particularly as this relates to lifestyle choices, gender and ethnicity. There would be more unblushing people. The term "normal", if used at all, would refer to what is statistically common, rather than what is necessarily healthy ala a medical model or morally superior (or at least qualified by reference to a particular group's standards). Many traditional invidious status rankings, distinctions and advantages would remain, if weakened. But they would have to make room for alternatives within other groups and cultures. That would include the advantages such groups could offer and secondary gains from their outsider status. The question, "says who?" would be more in the forefront. Since the 1960s many excluded groups have seen an expansion of role models and resources encouraging them to challenge dominant conceptions.

Yet there are limits. Positive thinking and indomitable will are not enough. Interaction settings and allocated life chances are not a blank page. There are pre-existing borders, costs and media socialization influences, that limit and partly define what can occur no matter the will and creativity of individuals. The actor as heroic inventor encounters restrictions even as the weight of the social machine may decline. Beyond inside or outside Goffman said, "...I don't think the individual himself or herself does much of the constructing (relative to the perspective argued by symbolic interaction). He rather comes to a world, already in some sense or other, established" (Verhoeven 1993: 324). This is the meaning of his oft-cited, "not then, men and their moments. Rather, moments and their men" (Goffman 1967: 3) --a misperception he felt called upon to right.

He viewed and appreciated individuals as creative forces acting back against organizational and other machines, bravely facing great odds to become the person they would like to be or seen to be, beyond the identities they are involuntarily provided. But much of the time the individual is only a pawn in the game -- drawing on what his or her accidental culture provides, even if what is offered is not accidental in the sense of being random. Rather it has a *function* in sustaining, and at times undermining, the game on playing fields that can be unlevel. Society uses and constitutes individuals in order for the show to go on, even as individuals may introduce alterations to the expectations they were handed.

Yet even if inherited cultural dictates can rarely be fully or fundamentally altered, the sociology of knowledge cage can be rattled by the rare scholar standing apart. As R.D. Laing said, "Goffman was such a brilliant frame analyst .... he was someone who was always *outside* things, who could sort of put his frame on whatever was occurring" [italics added] (that included what he was saying in the moment). His timing was impeccable, waiting just an instant for the audience to catch on to what he was saying. But he also would pause in seeming profound reflection or distance from what he himself had just said as he applied his framing-questioning stance to himself.

Goffman was bestride and traveled freely between the inside and the outside and his distinctive side. His relationship with insiders was ambivalent, reflecting and in some ways appreciating, the hegemony of the dominant culture (whether across society or within institutions and specific organizations), yet feeling distinct from them and it. He was aware of the ways experts (of whatever coloration) could be effective because of their knowledge and experience, but could misuse their position. Their location gave them cover to self-serve, be unfair and cruel.<sup>28</sup> He was forever caught in the throes of ambivalence and ambiguity offered by the society of irony

integrated by, but also torn apart, by conflicting values. He never had a smooth landing. But the turbulence kept him fresh, alive, ever fueled, and creative. As a metaphysician he was in a state of permanent role distance.

In my 1961 class Goffman recommended a novel by Chandler Brossard (1962) *Who Walk in Darkness*. The book's title is from *Isaiah* 50:10. It is not clear if the book's title refers to the secrecy and/or self-delusion of the protagonist, the audiences he dupes, or both. The book is about a middle-class writer drawn to the underside of Greenwich Village life. In the novel a friend asks him, what is this

“...about you being the Arrow Collar underground man?” “That's what I am', I said laughing a little, 'partly underground'”. “Do you think you will ever go all the way?”

The question is not only will he, but how far does he want to go and is he able to? It is not surprising that Goffman recommended this book. It speaks to his own situation (and indeed to everyone's to varying degrees) in being the observing, but unseen outsider immersed in scenes with diverse expectations and varying degrees of “chez moi” and prideful or less resonance. The novel's character is aware of his duality. Like the novel's protagonist, Goffman manages his marginality.

For him it was other kinds of marginality (immigrant, somewhat rural, Canadian, Eastern European Jewish, upwardly mobile, doing a less valued type of work on the fringes of a lesser discipline). He clearly expresses his early sense of outsidership in telling his colleague Dell Hymes (1984), “I grew up (with Yiddish) in a town where to speak another language was to be suspect of being a homosexual.” He did not embrace the more tribal and religious aspects of this identity.

With respect to Jewish identity, from the perspective offered by Cuddihy (1975), Goffman like other outsiders Marx, Freud, and Levi-Strauss looked for what is true about the human condition and therefore inclusive of all humans. In this setting of uneven genteel universality (informed by gentile, Protestant culture) Jewish tribal identity loses significance, if not fully disappearing.<sup>29</sup>

There is a Jewish comedic and ironic ethos to many of his wry observations. As with comedians, he could make the common place seem strange, even illogical and bizarre. Marvin Scott (2010) reports that Goffman much admired comedians such as Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Bob Newhart, Don Rickles and Jonathan Winters.

Lenny Bruce said, “If you live in New York you’re Jewish” even if you are not.” The same might be said of Goffman’s cohort at the University of Chicago, even when they were not, as with Dennis Wrong, William Westley and others. His outsider ethnic background connects with his sociology and his work in several ways—as a cautious outsider attuned to hurts and slights; rationalism; a voracious reader; cosmopolitan; ambitious; a wry ironic, telling it-like-it-is view of the world; and through his put down, contentious, if somewhat friendly double edged, humor (ala the game the dozens). Whether or not being acerbic is the armor of the insecure, it can deliver social insight.

Gary Jaworski (2022b) has traced the background sources of Goffman’s righteously critical satire and humor to British and U.S. popular books and shows. He notes that he released “his inner satirist” after WWII. His humor was also fed by the intelligence and espionage literature he drew from which is rich in the ironies and unintended consequences associated with secrecy and complex, massaged or even cooked presentations even if not messaged or cooked with artificial flavors.

Do we all have sarcastic light bulbs that go off in our heads with unoffered words (as in the bubble above the head of cartoon figures)? No doubt Goffman’s were brighter, he had more and he was less shy about expressing them than are most people. While their expression brings risks, it can as well offer protective cover available to those receptive to the message and, if called to account by those less receptive, a response of “only kidding”.

Sherri Cavan (2011), following Sartre (1948), observes that “in large measure the identity of “jew” came from and was reinforced by the outside world, --from other people who reacted to the “idea of the jew”. Goffman did not advertise it, but neither did he hide his secular version of what he called in *Stigma* “marks of the tribe.” Unlike some mid-century leaders of the profession he did not change his name. Others with last names such as Salomonsen, Ehrenberg and Schkolnick did and became household names, if with names other than the ones in their parent’s households.

Goffman’s accommodation (helped by being in a society offering upward mobility) involved neither undue denial, nor assertion. This fits within the vague moral and empirical meaning of the term *authenticity* that he used in class and later in *Stigma*. The higher ideal apparently being to do the best you can with the hand you were dealt. Don’t spend any more time than necessary in fighting it, nor in denying it. Here Goffman departs from Sartre, even as he drew from him and Brossard (1950) -- a character in the novel by Brossard mentioned earlier. Goffman



more fully acknowledges the limits of social, historical and environmental limits, even as a degree of the existentialist's freedom to choose within the offerings provided remains.

### Professional Wavering

Until the very end with his American Sociological Association presidency in 1980, he showed an independent spirit –not belonging to any of the latter's rapidly expanding interest sections, not using students as researchers, not seeking large research grants. At the annual conventions he did not spend time schmoozing in the public areas nor wear a name tag.<sup>30</sup> In spite of his acclaim, I think for most of his career he felt on the outside of Sociology Incorporated, being neither a sweeping big picture theorist, a fancy methodologist, nor a big grants entrepreneur and, what is worse still for the *ancien* guardians, focusing on social problems topics and finding data in everything and everywhere.<sup>31</sup> For the field's elites the latter were often seen as less serious and tainted relative to studying the family, organizations, social theory or methods.<sup>32</sup> Some of the taint spilled over onto those studying such topics who had less hallowed origins.

When Travis Hirschi (2012) told Goffman that a journal editor wasn't sure if a paper Travis submitted on prostitutes, "was really sociology". Goffman replied, "they'll always find a way to put you down." Sherri Cavan (2011) asked Erving why he wanted to run for ASA president when he had shown no interest in any kind of organizational work in the past. His response, "Well, this is one way I can validate myself in the field." In commenting on this he told Jef Verhoeven, "I need it like I needed a hole in my head."<sup>33</sup>

Nor did he give sociological researchers the reference deference they usually receive. He was criticized for "ignoring the literature" of his peers. Much of his referenced data came from first person non-fiction, journalistic or novelistic accounts. This was a way of keeping it real. Since you were writing about familiar everyday life encounters, it should be understandable to lay persons. The higher flying, abstract jargon of the specialists for things that could not be directly observed not only made the authors subject to humor, it was not of much use.

As a somewhat raggedy, beginning graduate student leery of premature commitment as a 1950s dreaded organization man, I asked him if it was necessary to join the association. Bemused, he assured me it was not and cited some well-known sociologists as examples, some even succeeded without a PhD. It is hard to imagine that in two short decades this self-proclaimed maverick would become the dignified head of an organization he once role-distanced.

In a break with tradition, he did not choose a theme for the annual ASA meeting he was to chair, regarding it as unneeded self-promotion and unhelpful in such a varied field. The Society for the Study of Social Problems and the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction were founded by his close colleagues within the University of Chicago tradition. But he did not belong to either group.

### Costs

Goffman took the distanciation favored by Levy-Strauss, framing, and self-reflectivity to Olympian heights. While closeness to the scene at hand was essential, so too was emotional and psychological independence from subjects. With this can come buried insights, things not seen by insiders, and refreshing hypocrisy-exposure. I imagine his brilliance could make him feel outside, lonely and set apart, even from the insiders within his scholarly world, --as he saw things they did not. Yet there can be costs.

When others are aware of the framing powers of the distanciator, there is the risk of impeding honest expressions, as the audience is put on guard. Berger (1984) observes, "I have seen people become fidgety when Goffman walks into a room, suddenly self-conscious that their apparently effortless sociability might reveal something unintentional." That is the case even if, as Freud is reputed to have said, "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar".

Hard working, hyper-aware, meta role players as buffered frame analysts, have other challenges. Their heightened self-consciousness is not unlike the detective who can never put a pressing case to rest or the actor who, even off stage, cannot get out of the act or questioning. In an engineered media environment with omnipresent cell phones, tracking and usage devices, drones, video cameras and computers there is ever more to attend to. Traditional back stages shrink even as new ones appear behind which data is quietly gathered.

The analyst steeped in Goffmanian awareness of culture, context and contingency may find it hard not to be thinking of what is behind the frames others present. Analysts as well may be unduly self-conscious in fretting/obsessing about how successful they are in their strategic presentations and the need to avoid slippages.

Just as an architect looks at the design of a building or a chef at ingredients in a dish, an analyst of interactions may find it hard not to reflect on the environment and what can go wrong --the physical factors that can intrude to disrupt the moment (power outages); slips of the tongue or of the foot, unwanted

bodily sounds; unseen signals given off by the other such as an unzipped fly; and not least the culturally resonant attributes the other presents such as ethnicity, gender, body size and capability. People may be seen as social types rather than as unique individuals. Of course the analyst might also wonder why things work so well when they do.

While all people have some awareness of the above factors, they do not define their work life, nor risk overflowing simple interactions. In addition, for Goffman and others lacking conventional restraints, every day interactions bring opportunities and temptations to experiment, learn and educate. The outsider as analyst, particularly if a workaholic like Goffman, may find it difficult to just be unpreoccupied in the situation. There is no *now* there.

At times with a shout to yester year's TV band leader Lawrence Welk, one needs to "turn off the bubble machine" and just be present. There can be a cost to personal relations in not being fully present and as a result not inadequately attending to the other. Being the detached frame analyst always outside of any life situation may destroy spontaneity and the joys of the moment. If not well hidden, it shows a lack of respect for the other. There is also the danger of knee-jerk cynicism and the risk of arrogance toward, rather than empathy for, the unwise not privy to the meta-analyst's presumed knowledge gained from standing apart.

There is the disconcerting, paradoxical sociology of knowledge fact in being aware of the strong limits on standing completely outside. This is a result of the cultural, physical, and natural factors that make awareness and conclusions at least somewhat relative and tentative. This can immobilize the scholar watching the building burn, while pondering the regeneration process that appears out of the ashes. Of course, for others this can mean a blindness that leads to delusions of grandeur.

The humility brought by reflexivity, tolerance and awareness of legitimate value conflicts can bring one too close to the shoals of moral relativity gone amuck or nihilism. Irony, paradox and tradeoffs are ever present and human situations are endlessly negotiable and contestable, no matter the purity of motives and intentions, the tenacity and energy brought to a problem, or the clarity of the evidence. At times it is of course necessary to just be in the moment and also to stop analyzing and to go beyond value conflicts and an imperfect empirical record in order to take a stand. The challenge is knowing when.

There can be other costs involving missing the beat, fear of exposure, or hurtful leakages directed at the outsider. In class he pointedly offered veiled, if

humorous, warnings to those among his students (almost all) who were “upwardly mobile”, “detrified persons of stigmatized ethnic identity”. He reminded us of the recent and perhaps precarious nature of the "intrusion" of Catholics, Jews, Blacks, and those of humble origins into the genteel (and genteel) elite places –“our kind” that had previously been denied “our kind” status to them. No matter how good a student or nouveau role player you were, there were risks. Things might not be as rosy as they appeared. The polite veneer of acceptance might mask some really ugly attitudes toward your people and contingencies beyond your control might reveal who you were or started as, or who you remain (for some aspects anyway) -- no matter the fine costumes and trappings of place. Caution was needed. A little feigned role commitment to the natives (whether their person or their ways) might be the best defense for a deeply felt, underground role distance.

The book the *True Believer* was published in 1951 and later several of his Berkeley students did work on cults. The cults provided data for categorization and human-interest fodder (“how can they believe that shit?”) and also could engender discomfort with the disingenuousness implicit in the outside researcher role in its unadulterated form.

Some of his students even crossed over providing a moral lesson --be wary. The observer needed to avoid being captured by the observed –e.g., in studying drug users or skiing/surfing dropouts they might conclude it was more fun to indulge than to study, even as understanding in one form required deep immersion. Cults – whether among world savers or professors (who should know better) were to be marveled at, but not embraced. In his secretly recorded and posthumously published talk on fieldwork he states, “The most difficult thing about field work is remembering who you are.”<sup>34</sup> That means for most who “are” not like those they study being able to get out. For the natives putting on a show for the visitors – whether tourists or researchers can be disconcerting as well (MacCannell, 2022).

Goffman’s self-definition at work as a “participating observer” not an “observing participator” (Verhoeven 1993) nicely captures his distancing. However, this stance runs contrary to the methods advice he gave in several places re walking in their shoes. The issues are tangled. A few searchers such as Victor Rios (2011) and Sam Heilman (2008) initially were insiders who brought authenticity to their outsider findings as scholars. Heilman who did participant observation in a synagogue might even be described as an “observant participator” (Mendolovitz, 2009). Rios moved out of the participant role. This reverses the fieldworker’s usual concern with crossing over to the group being studied. Here we have insiders pulled by the norms of the professional scholar to become outsiders

in one sense. Goffman's daughter Alice conversely was muddied in the gray waters while dipping in and getting out, or in some observer's eyes not getting out and moving too far from outsider to insider. (Goffman, 2013) (Lewis-Kraus, 2016).

Fieldwork requires a bit of fancy footwork with respect to where one really stands, and maintaining social distance and independence from tacit cultural assumptions. That is difficult because of the involuntary, or at least barely conscious, habits and positive emotions that so easily flow from interaction over long periods of time with those studied, as well as the temptations that may be present.

Keep a low profile. Chameleons get away with more. Masks exist for a reason. He sought invisibility or minimum visibility and avoided self-promotion and publicity in being indirect about his field work. His ostensible public reasons for his early field work (an interest in the farming practices of islanders, being an athletic director in the mental hospital) hid his true purpose.<sup>35</sup> I would be surprised if he told those who trained him to be a card dealer or the licensing authorities in Nevada that he and his wife had been banned from the tables for counting cards, nor about his research interests.

#### Yes, But

As so often, there are the contradictions and “yes, buts” in reaching strong, unitary conclusions. Thus, Goffman was also in many ways an insider. In his first teaching job he was almost immediately given tenure and at Berkeley, although “only” as an associate professor (that quickly changed a few years later). Moving to Penn from to Berkeley he had the best gig –one that ever-competitive, elite research professors only dream of –the highest salary of any social science faculty member and almost no teaching (one quarter 1/4 –13 lectures). He was elected president of the American Sociological Association and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was among the most widely read and cited social scientists of his era and that continues.

Nor did he choose an unconventional lifestyle. He was conventional in his personal presentations (often a bow tie in class and a preppy look with the then fashionable white buck shoes; scheduling and honoring appointments; marrying into a high-status Episcopalian family; fancy sports cars, fine wines, beautiful homes in the best neighborhoods,<sup>36</sup> a vacation home, antique collection; private schools for his son, intense involvement in the stock market).<sup>37</sup>

Sherri Cavan (2011) who was among his best students and who became his close friend, told me, “I always thought of him as being very conventional and

conservative and I thought he was attracted to me because I was none of those things.” That observation might also apply to his close friendship with his student John Irwin who wrote about his experiences as a former armed robber and felon, activist for prison reform and surfer (1977, 1987, 2007). Erving did not have those experiences, nor was he a bohemian, hipster, beatnik or fate tempting-character-revealing risktaker, although he could be appreciative. Onlookers may have vicarious emotional experiences of rule breaking beyond those experienced by perpetrators as documented by another Chicago sociologist Jack Katz (1988).

### Politics

The Rorschach infused tea leaves can be read to suggest whatever the observer wants about his politics. Who gets to make the call about what is in a work? If we cannot trust the author as Goffman suggested (Verhoeven 1993) to reliably tell us, can we trust the disharmonious kibitzer chorus to give us adequate answers when they can't agree? Note the varied takes of Gouldner (1970), Young (1971), Gamson (1985) and Collins (1986) on regular politics and the opposing views of Wedel (1978) and West (1996) involving feminism.

A distinction is needed between the presence of explicit political goals and/or policy relevance in a person's work and their absence. The former can involve advocating a political ideology, a particular policy position or, a more neutral engagement with a social issue, --offering concepts and data about it, but not starting with a policy argument to advance. None of the approaches are value neutral (in the sense that both involve non-scientific choices and assumptions), but in principle they can be independent.

Goffman was educated during a less contentious time when there was an effort to divorce politics from scholarship and, to the extent possible, engage in value-free inquiry. Political struggles took energy away from the work and could delegitimize results via taints of unholy and unclean partisanship.<sup>38</sup> Most of Goffman's teachers sought to divorce their personal politics from their work. “Just the facts, Ma-am” as Jack Webb of the 1950s tv program “Dragnet” said. A bit before Goffman, that was even the case for Robert Park, despite the relevant topics he studied. This approach contrasted with Jane Adams and the earlier social pathologists at the University of Chicago who sought to join research with social amelioration (Deegan 1990).

Louis Wirth one of Goffman's teachers, did value policy research. But Goffman made it clear that he did not play on that team. (Verhoeven 1993) At the end of the last meeting in the class I took from him, a student said, "this is all very interesting Professor Goffman, but what's the use of it for changing the conditions

you describe?" Goffman did not appreciate the question and replied, "I'm not in that business" and left the room. His business was generating knowledge.

He agreed with his University of Chicago friends Howie Becker (1967) and Joe Gusfield regarding care in listening to all sides. His elaborating on the hegemonic "normal" view needs to be considered alongside of the view of the stigmatized towards that view and the views held of their own group. (Hunt 1966, Tyler 2018).

Given power and information imbalances with respect to groups having their say, special warrant should be given to subordinates who lack the same resources to define and spread the narrative. That does not however mean we should not listen to, and analyze, narratives of the hegemon as he did with the voice of the "normals" in *Stigma*.<sup>39</sup> When that is done we see "the hierarchy of credibility" which requires awareness of the controlling impacts of dominant narratives and the limits on doing research untouched by any personal and political interests. He would also be in strong agreement with Gusfield who, in a personal communication, answered Becker's question, "Who's side are we on by saying, "we are on our side" --with doses of skepticism applied even there. With Weber (1961) he was aware of the need to identify the "inconvenient facts" in disagreements --on all sides, including "our side."

Goffman was initially skeptical of any communication. As noted, he sought to be as independent of sponsors and organizations as possible, whether academic or political.<sup>40</sup> He was particularly alert to hegemonic narratives --whether from political or academic groups. He was acutely aware of the self-serving nature of groups that had the power, reward strings and megaphones to define and proclaim what was legitimate and real and of the inertial habit of the taken for granted.

He appreciated libertarianism and how satire could upend expectations. Goffman's "disruptive imagination" as shown in his writing that could be iconoclastic, provocative and jarring and which might, or might not, be tongue in cheek, is ever refreshing. This might suggest a flirtation with anarchism and when asked by Verhoeven (1993) about his politics he responded, perhaps jocularly, "anarchist". However, he never mentioned or likely read Proudhon. He was not a politicized sociologist of any stripe.

Apart from links to social issues in waking people up in ringing the alarm, there is the interesting question of what satire does for the psychic needs of the satirist gleefully throwing verbal stink bombs. Real stink bombs thrown during a

high school gathering (as he did according to an account in the archives) are another matter. The former can permit having and eating your cake. It can offer protective cover, having it both ways—being righteously critical for those who get the message, satisfying his and their inner indignation, while offering plausible denial to the suspicious.

A further factor, Goffman came of age during the era of the McCarthyite, cold war, anti-communist hysteria. He was aware of the risks faced by outspoken professors.<sup>41</sup> Impression management, secrecy and suspicion went beyond the mundanities of one's daily round. They are taken to an extreme in authoritarian societies where the wrong attitudes or symbolic offerings could lead to imprisonment or worse.<sup>42</sup> Extreme care in impression management could be about the game of staying alive, whether professionally or literally.

Being in a somewhat vulnerable positions as a double immigrant, upwardly mobile outsider, the non-boat rocking, hyper conformity of deminstrelization (Goffman 1962) could be appealing to the outsider. Blending and blanding in could be a smart play. In threatening times, as President Johnson said, it was better to be inside the tent pissing out, than the reverse. Hedge your bets, don't show your aces until you really have to. To get along go along, or at least express your criticism indirectly with the chance for plausible denial --should you be called to account. Deftly lead the reader to what is hidden between the lines. This connects to the status insecurity or incongruence the outsider who moves toward the center can experience.<sup>43</sup>

In his view it was unwise to make direct moral arguments in one's writing. If you wanted to offer a moral argument, simply present the facts that point in the direction of the argument one would make. As he told John Lofland (1984), "just let it lay there." Readers should draw the right conclusion without it being forced on them. The poignancy of so many of his well-chosen examples permit that.

One of his gifts was the ability to select powerful examples that moved the reader --such as the letter that opened *Stigma* from the girl born without a nose. Dennis Wrong (2011) catches this in noting that Goffman had "a palpable sense of reality" and that is even more important than a sociologist's "theoretical reach, logical rigor, empirical exactitude, or moral passion". Based on his own responses, he had a deep, imaginative sensitivity to how others would respond to his memorable examples expressed with literary flair. A less creative scholar might be more politically explicit, making the point with a heavier hand.



His stance is consistent with Hemingway's advice to "show the readers everything, tell them nothing." It also fits with sociology's neutral 1950s' imperative to become a respectable science with a tone of, "if you want to send a message call western union". Let your veiled (but not too veiled) message (if there be one) hit the reader in the gut through self-discovery, rather than lecturing and hectoring. Is that manipulative? –perhaps but for a good cause.

### His Personal Politics

While his work can be seen as a plea for the dignity of persons in the face of self-serving authorities wherever they are found, he avoided the political activism of the time. As he walked by an open meeting in the midst of one Berkeley crisis or another, someone asked, "Professor Goffman, where do you stand?" He responded, "When they start shooting students from the steps of Sproul Hall, I guess I'll get involved, but not until then."

Smith and Jacobsen (2019) note that in 1967 Goffman was listed as a participant in a conference on "The Dialectics of Liberation" with notable radical activists on the program. For unknown reasons he did not attend. A fellow faculty member told me it was because he did not want to share a platform with activists such as Stokely Carmichael.<sup>44</sup>

Despite starting with an MA thesis on aspects of social class and his awareness of the serious determinism of the collectivity and its culture, he was more drawn to private troubles. This is seen in his work on embarrassment, face and stigma. The intricacies of observable identity presentations interested him more than the esoterica of ideological claims. Rather than directly confronting the functionalist or naked power issues around stratification or advocating for, and looking at, those wanting to change the system, he studied how people made do in working ever vulnerable systems. Individuals might be able to personally reverse it for themselves, but that did little for their less fortunate brethren. Whatever they may share as Mertonian (1956) straining innovators, --comedians, rebels, and bank robbers are different from revolutionaries (although Stalin reportedly had robbed banks).<sup>45</sup>

What Goffman's student Michael Delaney (2008) said of David Riesman -- that he was "an establishmentarian contrarian" –he could be critical and skepticist without being "capaciously negativistic" also applies to Goffman. Like Weber, his breadth of vision, science-based humility, and his initial skepticism made him too large for the simplistic, and ever variable, conventional political labels. Perhaps he might be characterized as a dialectical and bemused whack-a-mole.

One needed distance from the claims made, even while carefully listening for the fragments of empirical or ethical truths they might contain. With respect to political beliefs apart from activism, Goffman can be seen as a mixture of liberal, conservative, and radical. Different spins of the wheel align him with different perspectives.

He was a liberal:

To the extent that he had a definable politics it would have been a kind of enlightenment humanism focusing on the dignity due citizens, with an appreciation for pluralism and protecting the rights of the disadvantaged and the stigmatized and avoiding the unwanted consequences from secondary deviance.<sup>46</sup> (Lemert 1951 and 1972, Becker 1963). His politics anticipated feminism in seeing power as it involved hierarchy, status and opportunity in personal interactions and in his appreciation of emotions as a proper topic for social inquiry.

Situations of power were not restricted to government or persons in costumes holding the scepter or more broadly only within political economy. He made this clear in the statement from Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology* that opened *Relations in Public*:

If ...we consider only that species of conduct which involves direct relations with other persons, and if under the name of government we include all control of such conduct, however arising, then we must say that the earliest kind of government, the most general kind of government, and the government which ever spontaneously recommencing, is the government of ceremonials observance...This kind of government...[has] and continues to have, the largest share in regulating men's lives.

Apart from face-to-face behavior, as sociologists knew long before Foucault, governance goes far beyond the state and police uniforms.<sup>47</sup> Governance as social regulation and control is found in interpersonal interactions at all levels, including work, educational, and religious organizations, not just congress, legislatures and courts. In addition to the limits and facilitants of natural and engineered environments, the threats, coercion and rewards of formal organizations exist alongside of the gauze of a translucent, subterfugal, almost all-encompassing culture that provides direction and justification for conventional interaction (existing, if hardly equally, along with factors that can undermine it.

He retained his Canadian citizenship, although dual citizenship was possible.<sup>48</sup> Knowing his Chicago cohort (Joe Gusfield, Fred Davis, Howie Becker, Ned Polsky, Lisa (Redfield) Peattie, John Clausen, Ralph Turner, Henry Quarantelli, Tamotsu Shibutani, Morris and Charlotte Schwartz and senior colleagues such as Everett Hughes, Herbert Blumer, David Riesman and Lewis Coser, Hal Wilensky and Bennett Berger) if a political affiliation was asked, I think it would likely have been liberal democrat. But if correct, that would have been without great enthusiasm given his awareness of the potential disjuncture between claims and the actual state of whatever is being claimed about.<sup>49</sup> Would he agree with the answer to the question, “Do you know how to tell if a politician is lying?” --“When his lips are moving”.

He was a conservative:

There is a sense in which not to challenge the status quo is to support it.<sup>50</sup> Some observers see his default position here, the apoliticality of his research and his not being a more direct political actor as conservative. He might also be indirectly accused of guilt by association given his financial support from Tom Schelling in the year spent in Cambridge. As a cold war intellectual Schelling had worked at the Airforce’s RAND Corporation. His ideas about conflict contributed to prolonging the Viet Nam War.

With respect to content, in wearing his Durkheim hat he can be seen as conservative. He appreciates the role of tradition, shared standards, and self-correcting measures in sustaining society (apart from what he personally felt about what was sustained).

He shares the conservative’s emphasis on the fragility, vulnerability and risks of individual and joint actions and the importance of institutions and culture in making group life possible. He would likely agree with Goethe that, “none are more hopelessly endangered than those who falsely believe they are safe”. His writing (1971) about normalcy and the insanity of place rise to oxygen gasping heights in the infinite paranoia and regress of doubts and doubts about doubts they invite. He was very aware of the eternal frailty of the ties that bind and the subsequent vulnerability of social control efforts to strengthen or repair them. He sees this without denying the harms in the routine (non-destabilized) workings of unfairly stratified settings fueled by contestable dominant narratives. Perhaps informed by a principled conservatism, he was acutely aware that tradition and communality could also portage heavy, entropic baggage. He winces at the personal hurts caused by injustice, misalignments, breakdowns and monkey business and the social harms caused by wroughting the sacred order asunder, particularly in public settings.

What he failed to study can also be taken as a sign of conservatism or at least *status-quoism*. As Gouldner (1970) observes, because he mostly worked at the micro level (if not in the beginning where role and organizations were more prominent), he does not give much attention to the broad history, institutions, or organizations within which interaction occurs.<sup>51</sup> For Goffman these are background residuals accepted, but not much questioned. They are too removed, hazy, multi-faceted, variable and changeable to be easily captured by the direct reality of immediate experience.<sup>52</sup> Observation and participation in daily life is not of much use in grasping the immensity of civilizations over decades and centuries as done by big picture scholars such as Spencer and Sorokin. As Watts (1951) observed, “one cannot appreciate a flowing river by scooping up some of the water in one’s hands and examining what has been collected.”

He did not directly deal with the meshing of political and economic factors at the societal level. In 6 of his books I found only one reference to Marx –that was in *Stigma*, and it wasn’t to Karl or Groucho but to one of his students. As noted, nor did he develop the direct policy implications of his work. That was unfortunate because his sociology of information control lends itself so well for generating criteria to judge and set policies.

A student named Linton was in the class I took. When Goffman read the name list in the first meeting and saw the name Linton he said, “A fine name.” He was referring to Ralph Linton a famous anthropologist of the time whose work on roles he appreciated. He next read my last name and judiciously said nothing, at which point the class laughed.

Goffman was wary of broad claims about the abstraction called “society”, let alone predicting the future ala historical determinism. In one of his more memorable observations:

He who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interests has much to do, because the sleep is very deep. And I do not intend here to provide a lullaby but merely to sneak in and watch the way people snore. (1974:14)

Here he departs from Freud (1965) who wanted instead to “Agitate the sleep of mankind.” His sociology of knowledge and stratification approaches made him wary of hegemonic claims to moral and factual truths that were not to be questioned. To announce that the emperor is without clothes, muck-raking exposure and unveiling individual and organizational masks can be a profoundly radical, in-your-

face act. A skeptical stance re dominant narratives is a consciousness raising event for any group. As with comedians and cartoonists, unveiling can be “radical” not in the left-right sense, but in its exposure of hypocrisy and rejection of conventional accounts and their frequent inadequacies, lies, distortions, and omissions. Muck rakes encounter dirt but for higher purposes.

He was a radical:

Liberal-conservative labels fail us badly in dealing with the intricacies he offered. He can also be framed as a radical, transcending the conventional left-right distinctions. Whatever their coloration, knocking sacred cows over is a radical act, as is the scripted quality of political messages with their hint of disingenuousness, --whether in depicting heroes or villains, utopias or dystopias. Zhengyuan Fu (1989) offers a rich analysis of the politics of impression management in the repression found in the People’s Republic of China.

Goffman’s acute awareness of how “already existing circumstances” (such as power, wealth and status) set conditions and limits on the acknowledged freedom individuals have to act reflects Karl Marx (1951):

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past”.

Given the constraints of the natural and physical worlds, the investors whether coercively or softly, call the tunes the group dances to. Existentialist claims about the possibility of choosing freedom need lots of qualification. Hegemony with its legitimating frames is a powerful constraint humans face across various settings and life roles. He broadly accepted Karl Marx’s, and later Gramsci’s, ideas about consciousness. Goffman writes, that presenting a face reflecting approved attributes can “...make every man his own jailer; this a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell.” (1967, p. 10)

This shows the ultimate victory of culture and its henchperson socialization in a marketing/media oriented, other-directed society. Whether for Marxists, critical theorists, Huxley, Orwell, Vance Packard, David Riesman or C.W. Mills, liking your cell, drugs or escapist media involve a terrible bargain that speaks directly to false consciousness and several kinds of alienation, (Seaman 1959). There are of course factors working against this through the dances of control and counter-control and counter-counter control ad infinitum.<sup>53</sup>

## The Gap

*Words and images are like shells, no less integral parts of nature than are the substances they cover but better addressed to the eye and more open to observation....all these phases and products are involved equally in the round of existence...*

George Santayana

In opening *The Presentation of Self* with those words Goffman suggests that masks along with what they cover are real and vital natural elements. A central concern lurking, but rarely adequately anchored, within the shifting sands of his oeuvre involves the congruence or incongruence between what is said and shown to an audience (whether of one or more persons) and what the presenter knows and/or feels but does not reveal.<sup>54</sup>

Within the *fantastical, idealized presentations* of politicians, parents, salespersons and even online dating profiles, there is often little or no acknowledged gap between the claimed promise and outcome, ideal and real, advertisement and product and virtual and actual. But the wise know otherwise.

The authenticity-inauthenticity dynamic in self and group offerings to others is central to much of his earlier work and delivers the moral haze and confusion surrounding the topic. Erving Goffman was exquisitely attuned to the *degree of fit* between what is communicated in word, expression, appearance and deeds and what the person offering the communication actually knows, believes and feels. That can vary from an almost perfect fit (no gap) across the elements that can be voluntarily communicated to an audience (whether of one or more) to an enormous gap (even a chasm). Given more than 50 commonly understood kinds of personal information that can be attached to a person,<sup>55</sup> there will likely always be gaps. The taxonomic questions regarding the gap/fit involve their types, location, degree and the conditions of their messing or meshing with the expectations of the audience.

The sender and recipient of the communication are joined in an elaborate dance or chess match as the parties respectively (but not necessarily respectfully) speculate on the authenticity of each other's presentations and, in infinite regress, may ponder what the other thinks the other thinks they think about what they think (whew!) That is equivalent to holding a mirror in front of a mirror and looking for the end point and with the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland* wondering about reciprocal imaginings.<sup>56</sup> The infinite spiral is also in the song "Looking Back to See": "I was

looking back to see if you were looking back to see if I was looking back to see you were looking back at me.”

Among the earliest and more memorable terms within Goffman’s lexicon are face, mask and backstage. These along with other communication and knowledge or information blocking factors such as a shade, screen, curtain, wall, fog, the body as sheath, clothes, shadow, darkness, distance, and underground, restrict what the audience can know. In *Relations in Public* with lovely examples he writes of secret places to hide and ways of keeping others out “...trap doors, panels that open to reveal stairways into caves, permanently locked rooms, hidden entranceways, bars on windows and doors...” and the concealment of weapons and other devices, including transmitters and recorders.

Such factors make it possible for the actor/presenter or organization to “go out of play” (Goffman, 1973 P.121) and/or to maneuver backstage, off stage and even on-stage. No matter where, --even in the total institution unseen space is available within the mind (or at least used to be).<sup>57</sup> With hidden communication and surveillance means they also make it possible for the observer to be present without being present. This can radically upend what may have been taken for granted re privacy, secrecy and trust or it can serve as validation of it.

Formal rules, mannerly or commonsense explanations against disclosure, and respect for privacy, along with compartmentalization involving time and space, separate the actor from the observer and can also be supportive of the gap. The difficulty of validating claims about the past and the future are further supportive.

The above permit subterfuge and dishonesty in the face of temptation. They make possible withheld, distorted or deceptive information, conspiracies, false fronts, false flag operations, dirty work, imposters, fraud, cover-ups, and the routine insincerities of everyday life.

Attending to these environmental factors, whether natural or cultural, ties to Goffman’s interest in the self-serving aspects of dominant narratives. They support a potential gap between what the actor believes as against words and deeds that are expressed. The gap between the actual and the virtual can also serve the legitimate defensive, rebellious or exploitive needs of subordinates, --even as they, lack the full resources of the hegemonic. At the extreme, nothing left to lose offers a kind of freedom. Whether involving the assertions of elite cultures or individuals merely playing their best shot, it is likely that “incorrect assumptions” will be made

(Goffman, 1974: 440). Beyond deception, this can reflect life's vagaries and messiness.

Goffman would have appreciated, yet qualified, Freud's observation that "[I] ...find myself confirmed in my wholly unscientific belief that mankind on the average, and taken by and large, are a wretched lot." (Prophecynewswatch 2022) A leading social theorist even claimed that, "in Goffman's view contemporary man is an amoral merchant of morality and a confidence man." (Martindale 1965)

The con artist is results focused. Traditional moral codes about coloring within the lines are absent. Utility trumps conventional, internalized morality. The impression manager's emphasis is on appearance, not on how well it fits the reality it portrays (the risk of a mismatch may simply call for better deception). This contrasts with the expectation that communication should reflect the reality it depicts, not merely appear to. The *fit* should be in not the *fix* (or in the conceptual language of this section -- the gap).

Yet seeing Goffman's view of the world as only negative, cynical, misanthropic, power and resource controlled and populated by fraudsters of all kinds --con artists, schemers, cheats, card sharks, blackmailers, grifters, pickpockets, spies and informers creatively engaged in dodgy plots, ruses, ploys, deceptions, concealments and stratagems (all terms he favored) is one-sided. It is even more one-sided if too loosely applied metaphorically to ordinary folk in their daily activities.

What is ignored by such critics is the *behavioral irony* that what contributes to inauthenticity also contributes to authenticity and the *moral irony* that positive or negative outcomes can result from either insincerity or sincerity.

In characteristic fashion, Goffman (1974) notes that the mechanisms used by those who "cook up reality" are the same as those used to check up on what is offered. Our environments invite and protect disingenuously fabricated behavior, even as they dialectally do the opposite with respect to revealing it and they provide diverse resources for "uncovering moves".

The enablers of information restriction and even dissimilitude exist alongside of other social, cultural and natural factors that encourage a closer fit between the actor's inner (if rotating) sense and outer claims and actions. Such factors include rules, tools (surveillance, contracts, forensics), reputations, and the validating, prevention and security trades. Apart from socialization, sanctions, manners and reciprocity, the risk of mistakes, slippages, accidents and natural conditions may also encourage a close fit between the actor's inner sense and outer



claims and actions. There are abundant jobs for those in the discovery business such as intelligence agents, detectives, profilers, spies, informants, inspectors, investigative journalists and black-mailers. At the individual level those in the therapeutic trades help those showing too broad a gap between what they know and the reality of what others presumed to be mentally healthy know.

Goffman saw the rich potential social life offered for monkey business and worse, and wondered why there wasn't even more of it. But whatever the chutzpah, he also felt individuals were entitled to be heard and expected to act in good faith. Goffman (1974) made it clear that not all fabrications are exploitative, nor do they shield dastardly deeds. Those that are benign seek to bolster others, help them save face and can have re- or integrative and remediation goals.<sup>58</sup> He offered varied examples of kindness, manners and helping others to maintain face and avoid embarrassment or worse. Tact, manners, diplomacy, deference, felt but unexpressed role distance, composure and character displays, equilibrium-restoring and havoc containing efforts, suggest another view of the person and the society that calls them forth.

Contrary to the selective reading of some critics, he did not have an exclusively negative view of humans. The messenger needn't agree with the message. Indeed, he or she can be seen as sounding the alarm amidst a wry appreciation of the irony and understanding of the forces pushing towards tragedy.

Given the ubiquity of insincerity in the actions of both top dogs and bottom dogs in fighting back or in their interactions with each other), would he agree with Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* who wanted a pox on all? I don't think so. The equally ubiquitous silver linings among the clouds offers reason for some hope, if in a kind of melancholy fashion. Philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1969 p. 188) captures it well,

“The human world is an open or unfinished system and the same radical contingency which threatens it with discord also rescues it from the inevitability of discord and prevents us from despairing of it.”

Like Sisyphus, Goffman did not despair. I think he would have wryly appreciated the hopefulness of the tiger chasing his tail. Someone who can suggest that we ought to feel gratitude to those that violate expectations because they remind us of the codes we need to live together, reflects optimism and in a song popularized by Tom Rush, “making the best of a bad situation”.

The frequent disjuncture between back and front stages and regions calls for ethical analysis. As suggested with respect to policy implications of what is observed, we need to ask, “who is hurt or helped by the degree of gap-fit and how

does this vary depending on the kind of situation?”<sup>59</sup> Beyond Individual faces presented, are the organizational frames that are marketed/peddled what they claim/appear to be?

Some needed caution should be applied to Sir William Schwenck Gilbert who instructs us, “things are seldom what they seem, skim milk masquerades as cream”. However, in a parallel to the dialectics of social order, Sir William might have added a verse, “but wait please, soon the milk will spoil and become cheese.” A little mendacity and vagueness can serve a good cause and too much truth and clarity a bad one. As Robert Merton (1956) observed, unintended consequences, beyond the actor’s strategic goals are common. In an idea unengaged by those viewing Goffman’s image of interactors as only, or primarily, immoral or amoral, there are social functions to not knowing, just as there are to shadings of the truth. What you don’t know or misperceive *can help you*. (Moore and Tumin 1949)

When Goffman wears his existentialist hat, he suggests that despite the prior limits, restraints, tools and conditions of the context/setting/situation/scene pushing toward or away from authenticity, persons and teams have considerable unseen space to construct what is presented, just as the audience does in responding. Issues of moral responsibility reside within the choices made. Are there transcendent standards here?

Philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch (2018) observes that “paying attention is a moral act.” It is central to the other’s dignity and to democracy. Goffman would certainly agree and add that “*presenting something for others to attend to is a moral act*”, or at least intended to be taken as one and is a presumed statement about character. In his first major publication (1959, p. 13) he observed:

*“...when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. 1959, p. 13)*

and in his last article (1983, p.51) he writes:

*Whenever we come in contact with another through the mails, over the phone, in face-to-face talk, or even merely through immediate co-presence we find ourselves with one central obligation: to render our behavior understandably relevant to what the other can come to perceive is going on.*

But does it follow from that, ala Kant's moral imperative against lying, that there should be no gap in what is presented? (Bok 1978) The other extreme --that ends or successful pragmatic outcomes justify the means is morally challenged. With appropriate dialogue and a moral compass, fighting fire with fire may be a workable, even wise response.<sup>60</sup> It may as well --both literally, and morally, mean an even greater conflagration.

The "real" person issues go beyond deep, conflictual means and ends questions. Consider the messy issue of feigned or scripted authenticity that seeks to be appreciated as real. Examples include the pseudo intimacy of the encounter or self-help group; the stripping away bathroom or bedroom doors that show film actors brushing their teeth, retching, sitting on the toilet or engaged in nude, simulated love making. At another level, the disappearance of walls hiding kitchens in restaurants and homes all purport to somehow be more "real" than the formality, reserve and backspaces that withheld actions and feelings in earlier times.<sup>61</sup>

But are such actions somehow more authentic or genuine, given that the code for such behavior is to appear "real"? Certainly, some of the presumed openness, honesty and support of a self-help group does reflect what the actor is honestly offering to another, while at other times it is an act "put on" (interesting term here) as part of the script. Arlie Hochschild's (1983) research on commercializing emotion (the "managed heart") fits here. Or what of actors kissing and more in a film who are "really" into it so to speak? Can following a script be authentic (not in correctly following the code or role, but in the feelings of the performer). This suggests four types and ties to the messy issue of the often-weak links between the person and the role they are performing treated in his 1972 essay on role distance. It becomes ever more complex when a literal (even as they may be pretend or re-enactments of things that did happen (were real?) theatrical presentation is involved. More labyrinthian are cases where an actor in a play is pretending (unbeknownst to others in the play) to be someone other than who they think he or she is, and in addition, offers lines that are said sarcastically or humorously intending the opposite of what was said.

Of course, to be authentic, real, truthful, honest, sincere, genuine, a straight shooter, respectable, a mensch and a person of honor and integrity are highly valued as are organizations with deserved good reputations. The merger of "being and doing" he wrote about in *Encounters* (1961b) in an age of alienation (whether of the person or the epoch) can permit the reciprocity, alignment and justice that are fundamental to the meshing of decent social orders and mental wellbeing. Authenticity and in-your-face honesty, telling it directly like it is with no gilding, is

the gold standard for those under the spell of authenticity. It also can undercut or put a different spin on the idea that all is carefully calculated performance. Yet, however appealing as a knee-jerk, moral imperative for socializing the young, it ignores social reality.

Here we see a ping pong or trampoline model involving subordinate's resistance and innovation through authenticity and inauthenticity, crime and deviance, and pseudonymity and anonymity all protected by literal and symbolic curtains and also through rival narratives, humor and art. These of course engender new counter controls.

The discussion thus far has hopefully fit within the (in principle) pretty disinterested, neutral, observer form of scholarship. But that approach is not adequate to capture Goffman. In the concluding section I offer some personal reflections that help me understand some of Goffman's work and its precipitants.

#### Personal Links: Beyond the Words

*The doctrine of unexamined allegiance to the taken for granted can utterly up-end a person's moral constitution. Is the slumbering scholar nothing more than a robotic cultural clone trying to stabilize a ship ever on the verge before of sinking?*

Mark Gerry comment on Erving Goffman<sup>62</sup>

Apart from textual analysis, the literature and personal stories used thus far, a sociology of knowledge approach requires asking how the personal characteristics of an analyst impacts the meaning they see in, and their attraction to, another's work. What Anne Rawls (2008) said about her initial encounters with Goffman, "he fit me" applies more broadly. The Goffman archives are jammed with accounts of scholars recalling how excitedly drawn they were to his work after an initial encounter. I next consider how some bits and pieces of my life are related to the understanding I bring to Goffman's work and the sense I make of it.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, it is possible to appreciate a work without inflicting the commentator's ego into the mix. For that I apologize, but my upbringing and age made me do it.

Would the understanding and grasping the ambience of Goffman's work be the same for others filtering it through bits and pieces of their life? How far beyond

cognition and the factual do (or can) awareness of how our personal and social locations predispose us to certain understandings and evaluations take us? How true is it as the Dude said in the film *The Big Lebowski*, “Yeah, well, you know, that’s just, like, your opinion, man.”<sup>64</sup>

Would a person of higher status with a very different background and experiences from mine connect in the same way and reach the conclusions that I did? Would my former colleague Boston Brahmin, George C. Homans (1984), a descendant of Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, who was raised across the street from Harvard and (except for war service) never left, feel, and see Goffman differently than I or really “see” him at all? What would we see in common?<sup>65</sup>

I wrote a memoir shortly after his death in which I tried to figure out why I felt so continually connected with his work (Marx 1984) and was so moved by his death, even though we had not had much face-to-face contact for many years.<sup>66</sup> Like another Berkeley student --Dean MacCannell (2022) for whom his work was also foundational, I do not identify as a “Goffmanian”. That is consistent with Goffman’s distaste for labeling his own and other’s work. Yet much of my career has been devoted to the questions and the perspective Goffman presented, even as I drew from other perspectives and questions to offer frameworks for systematically thinking about the social studies, policy and ethical issues involving information control and revelation.

As my professor he was both an anchor and a beacon. Goffman's work and style were particularly riveting for a certain type of Berkeley student in the early 1960s. The skepticism and critical orientation toward self and organizational presentations he offered echoed, furthered, and legitimated what, more inchoately, many students in transition from the secure, bubble encased, middle class world of the 1950s felt.

In class he communicated the thrill and pleasure of intellectual discovery and serious dedication leavened with playful wit. Research became something that was worth doing in its own right. It was actually fun and you could receive recognition and even a job for doing what you loved. For the first time I felt great satisfaction, excitement and a sense of competence from writing a term paper. Reflection on one’s own and other’s life experiences, imagining, reading and systematically observing were righteous methods, --additional resources in a soft, positivist tool kit. With a faith that now seems naïve, if appropriate to the 1960s age and epoch, I believed that honest attention to the facts in democratic settings bequeathed by the Enlightenment

and the Renaissance could make a significant difference and that in the longer run our better natures would prevail.

### Crossing the Bridge and Some Parallels

Goffman was the bridge that helped me move from the callow college graduate, uncertain of what he wanted to be, to the pretty serious professional sociologist. Having crossed that bridge and been on the other side's road for more than six decades, things don't look the same.

Over time melancholy has set in and aspirations have lowered (with Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "so quick bright things come to confusion" (or worse). The dark clouds cover more of the silver lining. I have less optimism now (even apart from contemporary environmental, technological and war issues). The differences between natural and social science are more apparent and the complexity and intractability of many intellectual and social problems are clearer, as is the presence of entropy, particularly in the longer run(s) as the order of most things. With awareness, these can perhaps be managed, but they are not problems that have easy scientific or political solutions. I am better able to see personal and professional contradictions as the order of things and, in Robert Merton's (1977) words, to appreciate the "functional value of the tension between polarities".

In personal life I saw that I was probably more marginal than most people, or at least felt my marginalities more deeply (even if as sociologist and priest Andrew Greeley (1990) said, "virtually all sociologists think of themselves as marginal". Like Goffman, I valued being something of an invisible person and social chameleon, able to fit into, and move in and out of, different worlds. I think he would have appreciated Descartes' motto, "he lives well who is well hidden".

I shared with Goffman a tilt toward role distance regarding our profession. This reflected hints of 1950s anti-intellectualism . There was something soft, uncool, nerdy, impractical, safe and maybe even snobby, effete and unmanly about the academic profession. Note the George Bernard Shaw expression "those that do, do and those that can't, teach." Mel Seeman (1958), an inspirational teacher I had at UCLA, found such attitudes among the college professors he studied. A quote from his article I read more than 60 years ago resonated strongly at the time, "when I'm away from the university, I usually have plenty of dirt under my nails ...I can work with a carpenter for several weeks, and he has no notion I'm a university professor. I take a foolish pride, I suppose, in this."

What Goffman (1963, p.110) wrote of those stigmatized far more hurtfully than academics might also apply to my responses and perhaps some of his. Such persons are advised to show that in spite of the beliefs associated with their status, they are "...very masculine, very capable of hard physical labor and taxing sports."

In my case this stopped short of Broyard's (1950) nifty terms *role inversion* and *deminstrelization*. But it did mean some *disidentifying* activities relative to the stereotypes. This included taking pride in being a self-taught (if not very competent) handyman, as well as being active in physical fitness and in modest risk-taking sports such as surfing, kayaking and even a motorcycle for a few years and, as a young person, taking a break from graduate study to spend a year traveling close to the land around the world. Unlike Goffman, most of my professors advised me not to do the latter. It also meant an interest in immoral and moral rule breakers who challenged the status quo and those who equivalently pursued them.

For Goffman this involved sojourns in places where few sociologists trod –a mental hospital, casinos and an isolated island community, as well as deep involvement in the actions of the moment as a gambler and a stock market player. It also is reflected in his academic interest in risk taking or edgework whether in gambling, high-risk sports, deviance and crime or living off the grid. (Goffman 1967, Lyng 2014), Scheff 2006).<sup>67</sup>

This behavior makes a statement about character –grace under pressure. Life is in the moment and fateful. As Dennis Hopper admirably said of such folk in *Easy Rider*, "You do your own thing in your own time". There is a Buddhist coolness here bordering on withdrawal and indifference to the future. This can mix unevenly with the passionate focus of being in the moment.

This stance is the opposite of the deferred gratification required to receive a PhD and the slow, steady steps towards tenure that can bring boredom and little risk. They reflect Goffman's interest in the class of outsiders whose demeanor and scenes are the opposite of the "steady bloke", non-risking taking, modern middle-class persons mired in bureaucracies and those aspiring to become such persons

Is it coincidental that in *Encounters* (1961b) the articles on role distance and risk taking were joined and consist of the entire book and that the book appeared after the enormous effort that went into publishing *Asylums* and revising *Presentation* in the preceding years (and publishing three other books in a five-year period). Outsiderness (whether literally, or in the imagination of the sociological voyeur) can offer a vicarious, existential high in its' felt moments of truth relative to

the academic role. It involves not being captured by the role and, as Goffman observed, patching together an identity and way of being within the cracks of established roles.<sup>68</sup> It can bring a sense of solidarity and communal feeling for others who are wise about this kind of outsider role. There is a shared secret in being aware of what “the play” is, where the smart money is and not unreflectively drinking the cool-aide. The distancing can also bring the idea of play not as strategy, but rather as a game in the face of the deadly seriousness of insiders.

Some more things shared. I was upwardly mobile and born in a rural hamlet where my father also had a store. As was the case with Goffman’s father and his uncle the bookie, my father loved gambling and for a short time even owned a roadhouse casino on the outskirts of Las Vegas. However, he did not stay with it, claiming, “it was no life for a family man.”

My father, whatever his virtues, was authoritarian (in response to an absent father who wasn’t) and broached no insubordination, even when he could be shown to be in error. I grew up cautious and skeptical of authority. I asked (long before I encountered its legitimation in sociology and in a focused way in Goffman’s class) “says who?” and “why?” I perhaps took more pleasure in the success of underdogs and rascals than most persons. I enjoyed banter with Goffman and his quick sardonic wit. That wit, whether expressed or not, could offer a modicum of self-respect for those feeling less fortunate in other ways.

As a youth I was displaced from agricultural Lemoore, California and raised in Hollywood. Being raised Jewish in the hills of Hollywood, California was a far cry from in Dauphin, Manitoba where Goffman was raised. My parents were not immigrants (some of my relatives came to the U.S. in the 1840s on sailing ships). I could proudly say with Saul Bellow (1953), “I am an American, California born.”<sup>69</sup>

I did not feel the need to explain my absence from school during Jewish holidays by claiming illness, as Goffman reportedly did. (Katz 2010) Yet ethnicity and social position in the 1950s no doubt facilitated my rejection from certain high school social clubs, elite fraternities and a west coast college with beautiful architecture I would have gone to -- if invited.

Consistent with Durkheim, in the boom time of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, success was elusive, with the bar being ever-raised, or in danger of falling on your head (something I experienced as a pole vaulter). While I had not read them as a youth, *Babbitt*, *What Makes Sammy Run* and *Death of a Salesman* (“be liked and you will never want”) offer insights.<sup>70</sup>



Like Goffman, I grew up in that small businessman's, middle-(North) American culture and experienced, and later read about its deficiencies Charles Lemert (1997) so adroitly described as the background within which Goffman must be located. Not the least of which is the role of television on American sensibilities and its replacing movies in communicating performance and fakery and now the distancing of the internet and deep fake and AI fakery. This is within the great salesroom of U.S. culture where the business of America is business (i.e. selling). Appearance is central. Good optics help carry the day. This background is part of my intellectual interest in deception, passing, and infiltration.

Like Goffman, I had a lot to prove.<sup>71</sup> I also came to travel in the company of very successful elites. (Marx 1990) I was very attuned to the role of presentation and appearance (apart from the substance that might or might not be beneath). This way of being was captured by David Riesman's *et al* (1956) description of the other-directed person. Riesman had contact with Goffman when the latter was a student at Chicago and connected him with John Clausen at NIMH that led to *Asylums* (Winkin 2022a). I had an acute awareness of status rewards and rebuffs and the role of presentation in seeking the former and avoiding the latter. I worked hard at the presenting and at times felt ungracious and defensive at rejections. Like Goffman, I initially also wrote about reactions to subordinate status and was interested in the varied consequences of hierarchy and the chutzpah of getting away with things.

I also shared with him a 19<sup>th</sup> century individualistic, belief that hard work mattered even as deferring gratification was the Freudian (2021) torture (or at least price) imposed on our discontented civilization. I merged this with what Riesman saw in describing a somewhat adjustable self, a self broadly consistent with what I took other's expectations for the setting to be. Here, the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethos of relentless determination to win was in sync with the outsider's greater willingness to take your best shot, even if it could mean some of the hustler's distance from the insider's rules, per the presumed, predisposing strains of the (in Goffman's language) "Mertonian man". Go for the gold and the gusto, life is short, play hard up to the lurk line. Given all that pressure, some even get pulled over the lurk line (e.g., those who come to feel that it is more fun to use drugs than to study those who use them).

Reconciling authenticity with the fruits that could be offered by disingenuous role playing and rule bending in pursuit of the gold was an enduring tension. Sure, to win it you've got to be in it, but not to sin it. Too much outsidersness would bring moral costs and tangible risks, even as inside and outside were situationally and contingently always interwoven and changeable.

More important (and more realistic) than winning was being a respected player and being in the game. It was not so much a driven, Napoleon-I-must -dominate complex, as a heightened sensitivity to being put down and peripheral to worlds I aspired to enter.

Fortunately, I did not experience much anxiety in learning the opaque texts faced by the upwardly mobile, outsider, even if there was some vague sense of passing, --of not fully belonging. I did not feel like an impostor, rather an individual who felt he was deserving, but needed considerable external evidence of it from my betters. If validated by the heroes of the day, the tenacious roots of self-doubt could be put to rest until the next competition. For me, feeling both outside and inside offers a visceral and cognitive understanding of where Goffman was coming from and what much of his work rests on, or I hesitate to say, sometimes lies in.

I even wrote a never submitted, semi-satirical paper entitled, “Everybody Needs a Shit List” regarding social and professional rejections of various sorts.<sup>72</sup> Such actions were in discretionary contexts where what I believe to be the ideological and personal motives for rebuffs could be easily masked. The paper ends with the realization that I had become a gate keeper and was likely now on other’s shit lists, and as a statesman-like leader and role model, must treat others better than I was treated, even as there always had to be rejects. Goffman as president of ASA also showed a significant turn around and moved from the outside rascal to a statesman and inspiring leader doing at least some of the work of the organization man.

A central perspective echoing through much of Goffman and Simmel is that social life is dominated by vast, contingent, connected and conflicting (dialectical and more) forces that we gamely try to channel and control. That we sometimes succeed should no more lull us into thinking we can continually pull it off than should failure lead us to stop trying. Synthesis is not unwelcome, but the tensions remain as “as irredeemable conditions of human existence” (Jameson 1990).

Patterns and codes, order and disorder are the coin of the realm. Our efforts for understanding must wrestle with the complexities and contradictions brought by the natural and physical world, history, culture, social structure, process, rationality, subjectivity, emotion, irony and simple twists of fate. Uncertainty, ambiguity and ambivalence reside uneasily with the quest for certainty and clarity. What Marianne Moore (1961) sought for poetry, we seek for understanding the social as we locate “real toads within imaginary gardens.”

## Forever Enigmatic

*Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself  
I am large, I contain multitudes.*

Walt Whitman

In his song “Masters of War” Bob Dylan sings of those who hide behind walls and desks, “I just want you to know I can see through your masks.” Goffman above all saw behind and above the masks. He had the courage to articulate what others saw but *did not say*. But he also saw what others *did not see*.

The unseen may involve an immoral gap between what is revealed and what lies (in both senses) behind or the opposite. In considering the masks, meshes and misses that he so creatively mapped, he called out the self-serving hypocrisy and distortions of dominant narratives that masks make possible. As noted, masks as well, could serve the inauthenticity of those who are more “sinned against than sinning”. Yet he also saw their positive meshing functions at both the micro and macro level, including helping reintegration after a miss or a mess. Is this inconsistent?

Caught in an inconsistency in his thoughts on gender and feminism, Goffman remarked, that he was “full of contradictions” (Deegan 2014). And so, as with Walt Whitman, us and society, he was.

Goffman was, and will remain, a pre-eminent social thinker of his era and well into the future. He struck original intellectual chords that resonated with the feelings, needs and anxieties of the time, --whether mass society, nuclear war, the cold war, Korea, inequalities, civil disorder or crime.

Yet many of his concepts and insights are likely to endure because they are so universal. The vase is there, although what it is filled with will vary across situations, societies and time periods. His was the gift of knowledge and wisdom that require no reciprocity, other than the joy of passing them on –the gift that keeps on giving.

Goffman was the poster boy for the *role committed* academic life. In class he said that if you were fortunate enough early on, you would find a topic and approaches that would sustain you throughout your career. If not, you were in the wrong business. For those so fortunate, what began as exploring a possible job would

become a sacred calling, even at a price of some *role distance* given the games professors had to play in the ever more bureaucratic, politicized university.

Goffman's personal style and intellect were unique and interwoven in uncharacteristic ways. He gave legitimacy and inspiration to the pioneer, seeking, as the song says, to do "it my way". With his emphasis on the social creativity of the self, his view of interaction as fluid and somewhat unpredictable, his modesty, and his indifference to self-promotion and exegetical work, he would have had some searing, sardonic comment to make about those seeking to understand and explain him. Yet he also welcomed expressions of sentiment and very much valued ritual and ceremony and believed passionately in the cause of social inquiry and understanding.

Hughes referred to Goffman as "our Simmel". Goffman was initially very aware of the connection and his debt to Simmel. Robert Park, a central figure in early Chicago sociology, had studied with Simmel in Berlin and taught some of Goffman's teachers. Max Weber (1972, p. 158), was also deeply appreciative of Simmel. Goffman is often associated with Durkheim, yet he shares much with the Weber of *verstehen* as this involves both trying to walk in the other's shoes and the iron cages of bureaucracy.<sup>73</sup>

What Weber wrote of Simmel might also have been written about Erving Goffman:

"...crucial aspects of his methodology are unacceptable. His substantive results must with usual frequency be regarded with reservations.... his mode of exposition strikes one at times as strange .... On the other hand, one finds oneself absolutely compelled to affirm that his mode of exposition is simply brilliant and, what is more important, attains results that are intrinsic to it and not to be attained by any imitator. Indeed, nearly every one of his works abound in important, new theoretical ideas and the most subtle observations.... but even the false ones contain a wealth of stimulation for one's own further thoughts.... The same holds true of his epistemological and methodological foundations ....[he] fully deserves his reputation as one of the foremost thinkers, a first-rate stimulator of academic youth and academics colleagues." (Weber and Levine 1972)

John Lofland (1984) is similarly appreciative of Goffman and adds a personal tone:

“These, then, are among Goffman’s legacies to sociology: inspired charter of the interaction order; penetrating conceptualizer who peppered our language; dedicated empiricist; lover of theory; serious ethnographer; incessant questioner; intellectual pluralist; a modest wit striving however falteringly for authenticity; cheerful and graceful analyst in a world of tragedy and melancholy, dedicated scholar; loved colleague and friend who made our moments vibrant and alive.”

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<sup>1</sup> The last part of the poem however is not consistent with his Durkheimian tendencies, nor his lack of support for Marxist optimism:

*“We particularly ask you –*

*When a thing continually occurs –*

*Not on that account to find it natural*



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*Let nothing be called natural  
In an age of bloody confusion,  
Ordered, disorder, planed caprice,  
And dehumanized humanity, lest all things  
Be held unalterable!”*

<sup>2</sup> Yet all is not lost, given the critical suggestions and support of generous co-conspirators to whom I am most appreciative --David Altheide, Pat Gilham, Keith Gusik, Richard Hogan, Gary Jaworski, Sanjoy Mazumdar, Larry Nichols, Dmitri Shalin, Gregory Smith, Jef Verhoeven, Yves Winkin and the late Sherri Cavan.

This article greatly expands a short afterword with a slightly different title in Michael Jacobsen’s (2022) centennial book.

<sup>3</sup> This is reminiscent of a Marx observation, “From the moment I picked up your book until I put it down, I was convulsed with laughter. Some day I intend reading it.” Groucho Marx, <https://quoteinvestigator//2015/01/27/funbook/>

I intend reading more as well, although for the vast majority of the material it would be more honest (in a classic cover-your-ass have it both ways response) to say, “I intend to lose no time in reading what you wrote”. Those not so inclined and wanting broad pictures over the last 40 years might begin with: Ditton, 1980, Drew and Wooton 1988, Riggins 1989, Burns 1992, Manning 1992, Lemert and Branaman 1997, Smith 1999, Fine and Smith 2000, Trevino 2013, Scheff 2006, Jacobsen 2010, Winkin and Leeds-Horowitz 2013, Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2015, Hood and Van de Vate 2017, Jacobsen and Smith 2022, Jacobsen 2022, Winkin 2022a,b and the Goffman archives referenced in note 3.

Scholars with French literacy would profit greatly from Winkin’s unique biographical work on Goffman, growing out of the former’s interest in the history of communications research. For more than 5 decades, from his first interview with Goffman in 1975, like a relentless bloodhound, he has studied Goffman’s life despite being cordially denied (consistent with Goffman’s wishes) access to his personal archives. He has interviewed those (many now deceased) who knew or had contact with him and he has done magisterial archival work across continents. In seeking an understanding beyond words he has traveled to the places Goffman lived, visited and worked. Consistent with the biographical approach of his teacher Pierre Bourdieu,

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he looks at the broader field that Goffman was a part of, including attention to those in his cohort who shared many experiences with him.

<sup>4</sup> With respect to the issues that engaged Goffman, the direct or indirect influence of Chicago was also present down the coast at UCLA –Ralph Turner, Melville Dalton, Harold Garfinkle and later with Bob Emerson and Jack Katz and others. Sherri Cavan started there as a graduate student was my TA there in a methods class. Within the emerging ethno-methodology field and conversation analysis there was considerable interaction between the schools involving scholars such as Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, Gail Jefferson and Mel Pollner.

<sup>5</sup> The Erving Goffman Archives (EGA) created by Dmitri Shalin is a web-based, open-source project that serves as a clearing house for those interested in the dramaturgical tradition in sociology and biographical methods of research. The EGA is located in the Intercyberlibrary of the UNLV Center of Democratic Culture, <http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/archives/interactionism/index.html>. Postings on the website are divided into four partially overlapping sections: “Documents and Papers,” “Biographical Materials,” “Critical Assessments,” and “Comments and Dialogues.”

6. This article greatly expands a short afterword with a slightly different title in Michael Jacobsen’s (2022) centennial book

<sup>7</sup> Work linking the collective behavior “public” in the Blumer tradition with Goffman’s treatment of the term as accessible information immediately available to others who are physically present (e.g., *Relations in Public* and in *Strategic Interaction*) awaits analysis.

In addition, that “availability” can be literal as in not blocked by the immediate, unaided senses (distance, darkness), unblocked by social space (private homes, clubs), lack of perceptive or interpretive skills (language, medical diagnostic, or cultural --as with privacy and confidentiality requirements, “organizational holes” (Burt 1992), disclosure and rights to information norms.

<sup>8</sup> Garfinkle (1967) shared and yet had divergent, concerns from Goffman. More systematic development of their interactions is needed (Carlin 2022), including their never realized plan to jointly author the book that became only Goffman’s *Stigma*. Goffman was more focused on the uses and perceptions of information and less with its unstated background structures and assumptions that drew Garfinkle. A sociology of information and communication needs both. An article expressing the triple threat (and more) Rorschach qualities (and mischaracterizations by critics) that Garfinkle

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shared with Goffman is awaited. Turowetz and Rawls (2020) suggests that Garfinkle, like Goffman, was many sided, expressing concerns with injustice, drawing from Durkheim and Parsons and using “ethno-methods” as a way to reveal interactional structures rather than denying structuralism. In a sense they were both morally guided believers, but sought empirical grounding to enrich the sacred texts, although without the religious grounding of early progressives or successors such as Robert Bellah (e.g., Bortolini (2021).

<sup>9</sup> The projective psychological Rorschach test asks subjects what they see in a series of nondescript inkblots. The objects and shapes have no intrinsic intended meaning. The meaning resides within the subject’s answers.

<sup>10</sup> When I was in graduate school you risked being seen as disloyal, even an ignorant, reductionist denying the sociological level if you considered ethology, biology, or ecology for ideas, although some dabbling in historical, international comparative or psychological approaches was acceptable.

<sup>11</sup> But also note the uncommonalities across species with respect to experiences of “reality” delivered by the kind of sense receptors an organism has. Ed Yon (2022) richly illustrates the variety across species.

<sup>12</sup> With his willful, explicit violations as righteous social research, Garfinkle (1967) went much further in this direction. To surface the unseen (until broken) codes of behavior it was not necessary to look at social structures, social types, descriptive content, personal incompetence or emotional experiences.

<sup>13</sup> Another type is “name droppers” (success --or for some guilt) by association) who use something from Goffman to add legitimacy to their own unrelated concerns. Another overlapping type, less in number, involves slayers of the father (fewer perhaps because Goffman had relatively few students).

<sup>14</sup> However, to some persons his work in the Shetland Islands, a mental hospital and as a gambler and dealer in Nevada would qualify as alien cultures. Furthermore Winkin (2022b) notes Goffman made many trips to Europe, although he did not write about these or immerse himself in other cultures the way some colleagues do.

<sup>15</sup> His work was very helpful in my thinking normatively about how police *ought* to behave in surveillance and crowd control settings and for borders and personal

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information more broadly, whether involving issues of identity or freedom of information and secrecy. I have responded to this lack in his work --for example in dealing with the challenges and ironies of crowd control, undercover police, surveillance and related duo-use tools (whether deception or coercion) of queasy moral character. (Gillham and Marx 2000, 2018, Marx, 1988, ch. 5, 9 and 2017 ch.13) on the complexity of virtue and public policy).

<sup>16</sup> In fact he did use numbers and standardized tests in his master's thesis and in a later consulting report done for Robert Redfield on gas stations. He used Rorschach type materials in his PhD field work, but did not report the data (Winkin, 2023). At the start of his graduate studies he worked at Social Research Inc. which was a smaller scale Chicago version of Columbia's Bureau of Applied Sociology founded by Paul Lazarsfeld. Redfield was Robert Park's son-in-law and the father of my late colleague anthropologist Lisa Peattie. I like the rooted feeling of being, if indirectly in a personal, not only an intellectual, way tied to Simmel and three generations of his Chicago American students. I wish I had interviewed Lisa about her family.

<sup>17</sup> As he sagely put it in one of the last things he wrote, "There are already enough inflated pronouncements in the world; our job is to dissect such activity, not increase the supply" (Goffman 1981c).

<sup>18</sup> Nor, perhaps did he systematically follow those by others. Lofland (2009) indicates that he thought *Contemporary Sociology* --the review journal for the American Sociological Association was a specialty journal. This is another indication of his distance over the 1970s decade from sociology.

<sup>19</sup> A resolution of the several views might rest in adding my italicized words and dropping "rather"] to what he wrote in *Asylums*, (1961a, p. 168) "the self, then, in this sense is not [*only*] a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but [*also*] dwells [ CUT THIS WORD -- "rather" ] in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him."

<sup>20</sup> Whose pictures, are they? Consider another projective psychological test. A subject is shown an image with two stick figures leaning to the left and is asked what he sees. He replies, "a man chasing a woman". He is then shown the image with the figures leaning to the right and again gives the same response. The psychologist says, "you seem to think a lot about sex." To which the subject replies, "Doctor, come on! They are your dirty pictures."

<sup>21</sup> Davis (1971) who received his degrees from the Univ. of Chicago shared a great deal with Goffman and catches a major reason for his enduring impact: "interesting

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theories are those which *deny* certain assumptions of their audience, while non-interesting theories are those which *affirm* certain assumptions of their audience.” There is also power in surfacing tacit assumptions which cannot be denied once they are revealed, showing the significance of the insignificant. As well, perhaps, there is purchase in revealing what can be the insignificance of the significant.

<sup>22</sup> Of course there are patterns in processes as well, but because they are more dynamic and changeable they are harder to identify.

<sup>23</sup> Even events like publishing an article on a topic presumed to be scientifically studied can act back on the thing being studied changing it as a result of the “neutral” study. Consider the impact of characterizations by David Riesman of the other-directed person or Stanley Milgram’s work on obedience to authority. In raising awareness of the dangers of over-conformism, both became events that had an influence on future behavior.

<sup>24</sup> One-trick ponies (however narrow their vision, partial their view and potentially boring their repetition) are due some credit for their persistence and energy and for the strands they provide for the few master tapestry weavers.

<sup>25</sup> Order of course is also approached as it involves organizations, societies and civilizations. But acting humans give these a substance not found at their more abstract and intangible levels.

<sup>26</sup> For Simmel this contrasts with the more mobile wanderer who flits between groups and the outsider who has no specific relation with the group. One can always elaborate further (e.g. Schuetz 1944, Bauman 1997; on the context for Simmel Goldberg 2021).

<sup>27</sup> The negative view was encouraged by unwarranted extensions of the Clark’s (1947) early research on race and children’s preference for a black or white doll. Certainly, the term “self-hatred” (Lewin 1997) has some traction, but it is much too sweeping and easily subject to misinterpretation and misuse. A distinction is needed between a member’s attitude toward the group as against towards one’s self.

<sup>28</sup> Goffman (1971?) offers the horrific example of a psychiatrist who sleeps with his patient as part of the “therapy” and then sends her a bill.

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<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Simmel unlike Goffman, remained basically a stranger to the insider world of the German university. In some ways he stands in sharp contrast to Goffman. As Coser (1958) notes, Simmel's rejection by the anti-Semitic German academic establishment led him to go his own way in generating alternative audiences as (what now would be called) a public intellectual. He proudly wore his non-conformity.

<sup>30</sup> This may have been so he would not be bothered (whether for reasons of time, privacy or not to have to politely feign interest in the intruder), a way to increase the mystique or garden variety role distance by ignoring expectations of communality among professional peers.

<sup>31</sup> For most of his time at Penn he seemed rejecting of sociology. He was not in general welcoming of sociology graduate students and had little to do with the department. His office was in anthropology. (Delaney 2013) He did however work with sociology scholars such as Michael Delaney, Gary Fine, Carol Gardner, Sam Heilman and Eviatar Zerubavel.

<sup>32</sup> Other than at Chicago, and even there after the 1950s, studies in social disorganization, deviance and criminology were less valued at other leading schools such as Columbia and Harvard. They were relegated to midwestern state schools. In the early 1970s when the distinguished criminologist Lloyd Ohlin, then a professor at the Harvard Law School, sought an affiliation with the sociology department he was rejected. In the same fashion when Erving Goffman spent 1966-67 there and indicated interest in moving, Harvard would not come up with the funds.

<sup>33</sup> Personnel communication 9-22-22.

<sup>34</sup> How well he was able to do that is unclear. In what may have been said in jest, in talks on fieldwork to at the University of Manchester, he is reported to have told students, "if you have to sleep with them, sleep with them" (Winkin 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Tom Scheff (2006) asked Goffman about how to deal with some ethical challenges from his field work in a mental hospital. Goffman advised his student to be a *lamelke* – ("little lamb" in Yiddish) so as not to impede his research. He gave similar advice to John Lofland (2009) regarding his interviewing of members of the cult he was studying for his thesis.

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<sup>36</sup> A home with a view in the Berkeley hills was rather far from Malvina Reynolds writing about homes as “ticky tacky” little boxes in another part of the Bay area (Daly City).

<sup>37</sup> Among the pulls were minimal teaching and a higher salary. According to one account (Glock 2008) Berkeley might have been able to meet the salary, but the faculty would not go along with giving him a lighter teaching load than they had. Goffman indicated that the real issue was not the salary but the freedom from teaching.

He also wanted to shield his young son from the hippy street culture, as the sacred spaces of Telegraph Avenue faced profanation by the lesser aspects of the counter-culture. He was also displeased with the intrusions into work brought by the political activism of the time.

<sup>38</sup> In encountering students in non-work situations, he feigned surprise. In seeing John Lofland in line at a theater he rushed by saying, “you should be home working.” Another time, as he scurried by a student talking to another, he said, “don’t talk it, go home and write it”. (Lofland 2009) In another example he told a student, “in the time I spent talking to you I could be home writing a paper”.

<sup>39</sup> When he writes of normal it is tongue in cheek even if he doesn’t write “normal” or “so called normal” given his clear statement of how relative the concept is and how all are stigmatized and can have some identification with the feeling.

<sup>40</sup> Burrowing deep within the crevices one can of course find exceptions, particularly early in his career. Note subsidies for his dissertation, research done for a gas company, funds from the military and indirectly elsewhere to research institutes and in the company of Rand corporation defense merchants.

<sup>41</sup> Gary Jaworski (2021) nicely captures the sensibility and scene around the University of Chicago at the time. A vein waiting to be mined is how Edward Shils on secrecy (1956) and civility (1997) influenced Goffman or maybe a bit the reverse. In 1952-53 he was his research assistant. Shils worked for the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the predecessor of the CIA.

<sup>42</sup> Dmitri Shalin (2007, 2013) the founder of the Goffman Archives has a PhD from both Moscow and Columbia. He has done important work on how social, psychological, location and epoch aspects impact a scholar’s work. Shalin’s own work and interest in Goffman is a case in point given the deep role of deception, illusion, authoritarianism, show trials, double lives and fraudulent presentation in

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Russian history, politics and literature. There are many levels –the official government policy narratives, the narratives regarding the impeccable lives and behavior of those in power and what may lie besotted beneath, unknown to varying degrees by subjects. Then of course there is the formal, often cynical, obeisance they offer and the care that must be taken in to whom they reveal their doubts, as well as in advancing (protecting) their dignity and/or self-interests, in opposition to the power.

<sup>43</sup> This theme follows from a classic Hughes’ paper on status dilemmas (1944) and the work of Gerald Lenski (1954). I drew on it in several early papers (Marx 1962, 1967 and Marx and Useem 1971) in writing about the conservatism of black college professors, authenticity issues in contrasting “white Negroes” and “Negro Whites”, and in writing about majority involvement in minority movements.

Another theme awaiting exploration is how Hughes’ (1984) interest in mistakes at work informed Goffman’s views of the fragilities, failures, and challenges of intentional and strategic interactions.

<sup>44</sup> Again, there are exceptions (they hardly prove the rule but might call for a second opinion). He did offer active support in 1970 for an initiative of Thomas Szaz’s on behalf of the American Association for the Abolition of Involuntary Mental Hospitalization. (Smith and Jacobsen, 2019). During the annual sociology meetings in New York City in 1972 he attended a feminist sit-in at a restaurant only serving men at lunch. (Berger 1973). Whether Goffman was there as an observer or a supporter or some mixture is unclear. His work with the clearest political implications involves gender in 1971 and 1977.

<sup>45</sup> In class Goffman was very critical of Merton lumping these diverse characters together in the same abstract box. He was much more tolerant of Parson’s abstractions which, none-the-less, looked at choices actors made.

<sup>46</sup> A lot to be said here regarding contingency, unintended consequences, surprise and the limits of planning and prevention as the shadows of the rational project. One approach, (Marx and Guzik 2017) in looking at uses of technology for social control, systematizes major variables impinging on messy and unwanted outcomes. Work waits to be done on comparing outcomes at the organizational level with the faux pas and other failures at the level of interpersonal action and personal pathology.

<sup>47</sup> This might have been said by Foucault as well. As far as I can see, he never acknowledged the overlap in their thinking, nor did Goffman. *Asylums* was



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published 1961 as was Foucault's *Folie et Deraison: Histoire de la folie a l'age* and in English as *The History of Madness* (1961), and a smaller mass paperback version in 1964. Foucault's *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* appeared in 1975 and in English in 1977 as *Discipline and Punish the Birth of the Prison*.

Didier Eribon (Wikipedia) a Foucault biographer might have been writing about Goffman in describing the philosopher as "a complex, many-sided character", and that "under one mask there is always another". He also noted that he exhibited an "enormous capacity for work".

Foucault's colleague Pierre Bourdieu said the philosopher's thought involved "a long exploration of transgression, of going beyond social limits, always inseparably linked to knowledge and power." The same might have been said of Goffman. Goffman lived in Paris for a period in 1951-52 (Winkin, 2022a) and had enough knowledge of French to evaluate PhD French language exams. Laing and Bourdieu were also colleagues. Bourdieu knew and appreciated Goffman and had a number of his books translated in a series he edited. Goffman and Foucault had to know about each other's work. There are veins waiting to be surfaced here (e.g., Hacking 2004).

<sup>48</sup> He told Jef Verhoeven that he saw no advantage to becoming a U.S. citizen.

<sup>49</sup> The student bohemian culture around the University of Chicago did not show the strong commitment to the left of those in sociology at CCNY and later Columbia. Why not? Perhaps because they were post WWII, more assimilated and had more time to see the failures of rigid ideologies.

<sup>50</sup> This is the proverbial, "If you are not with us, you are against us." The same might be said by conservatives since he didn't actively support the status quo, but it appears not to have been said.

<sup>51</sup> However, narrowing the focus in contrasting the manners of interest to Goffman in the Victorian age and at mid-century with the changes brought by answering machines, caller-ID, cell phones, texting and the internet offers a rich way to grasp historical changes in self-presentations and the accompanying etiquette. In Marx 1994 I explore some of the issues raised by new technologies and manners, This is in a volume honoring Chicago trained Ralph Tuner, one of my UCLA mentors.

Beyond historical changes cross cultural comparisons are central. Yet a factor sorely missed by post-modernists focusing on descriptive differences and relativism, is the enduring presence of some common communication structures and patterns. To the

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extent that some intentions and consequences endure across all human societies, points are scored for the functionalist, positivist team. Whether a pipe carries wine or effluent, it is still a pipe.

<sup>52</sup> In defense of the micro level of analysis he would stress the centrality of awareness, the experience and limits of the immediate environment as a trait humans share with all living things, even if they are not equally determined by them or by biology. As such it must be central to understanding. Here he follows Whitehead's call for a natural history approach given the ubiquity of change.

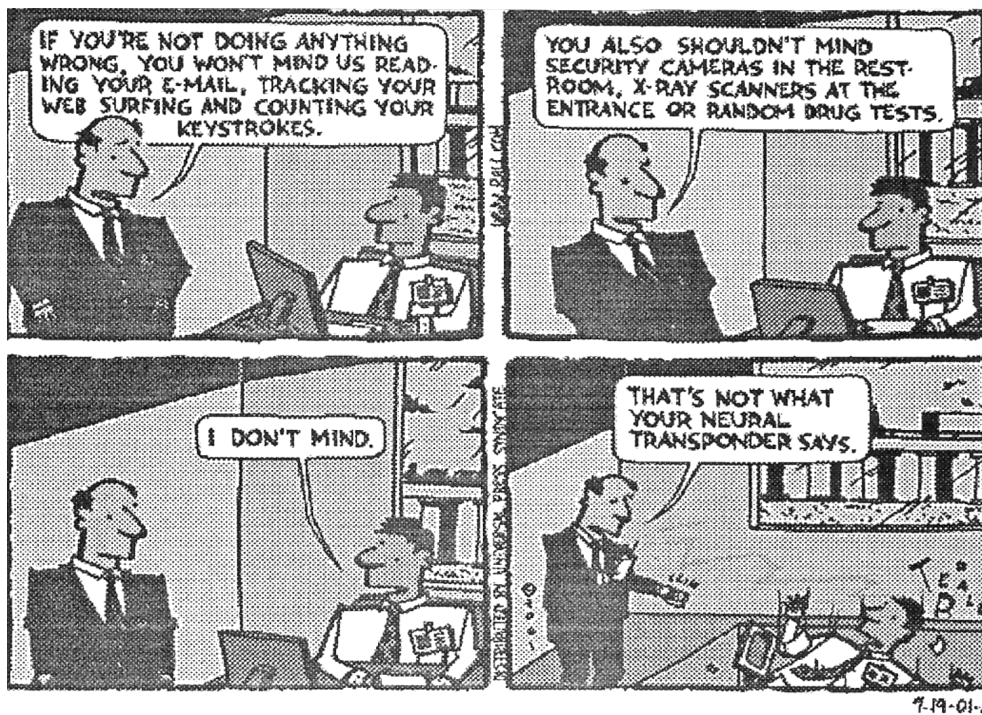
<sup>53</sup> However, adopting the systems view too quickly at this seemingly obvious level can miss the social functions deviance can have for control agents and the broader group or organization, beyond the gains of challengers.

<sup>54</sup> Another complicating factor needing a name involves third parties who, aware of what is going on, take hidden actions to influence events unbeknownst to the actor or the audience.

<sup>55</sup> Marx (2017, Table 4:2) identifies these and puts them into 10 broad categories. Each of these can be genuously or disingenuously presented and analyzed with respect to the gap or fit between what the actor communicates/does, believes and feels and equivalent audience responses. In a related approach two of Goffman's (1971) eight territories of the self connect most clearly to identity.

<sup>56</sup> "Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise." From the film version of *Through the Looking Glass*.

<sup>57</sup> Recall the great 1998 line in film *Truman Show*, "you never had a camera in my head". This however may be historically specific given developments in neuro transmission ( Saha et al 2021, Farahany 2023) per cartoon below.



<sup>58</sup> Are those that protect the individual also benign? Note the self-saving quip in the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, “I always thought it would be better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody.” This is the outer fringe of presentation gone amuck in a society with abundant resources and incentives to be a fake.

<sup>59</sup> A neglected topic here is efforts of the more privileged to shield their good fortune from those less privileged. People pass not only to hide stigmas but to protect the feelings of Leonard Cohen’s beautiful losers. Such understatement regarding one’s achievements or resources and labels is perhaps a kind of *noblesse oblige* shielding the less fortunate, as well as offering self-protection from predation, jealousy and resentment. Is it humility or muted arrogance? This shares something with Goffman’s identification of “courtesy stigmas” allocated to those not within the group who are wise, yet in this case the allocating is done by the persons of higher status to themselves in a case reverse passing.

<sup>60</sup> This is the “Dirty Harry” problem (Klockars 1980) encountered when ethically troublesome means can be seen as necessary evils, or the lesser of evils. John Locke would see this as “prerogative power”, --the exercise of power that can be appropriate only under extraordinary conditions. The issue is who defines those conditions? In *Federalist No. 23* Alexander Hamilton felt that emergency power should even be constitutional because “the circumstances that endanger the safety of

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nations are infinite.” Formal rules and sliding slopes however raise other issues about the licensing of discretion.

<sup>61</sup> In Marx (2005) and Marx and Muschert (2007) I consider the social implications of an array of kinds of material and immaterial border.

<sup>62</sup> With apologies to Mark Twain who wrote: “When the doctrine of allegiance to party can utterly up-end a man's moral constitution and make a temporary fool of him besides, what excuse are you going to offer for preaching it, teaching it, extending it, perpetuating it? Shall you say, the best good of the country demands allegiance to party? Shall you also say it demands that a man kick his truth and his conscience into the gutter, and become a mouthing lunatic, besides?”

<sup>63</sup> The reverse might apply as well regarding what professors see in students of themselves. This could apply to broad shared categories such as ethnicity and gender, but also to personal characteristics. In a letter of recommendation for me to become a teaching assistant, Professor Goffman noted that “he has a very good academic record, is a person of strong and steady feelings in the race relations field [as it was then called] and has a slight tendency to be sullen or perhaps cantankerous.” The issue of reciprocating and degrees of “fits” between teachers and students is a neglected sociology of knowledge question.

<sup>64</sup> All spokes on a wheel might be equal, but are all opinions? Where are we if differential perception, experience and cultural variability are the only coins of the realm? Calling Mr. Hobbes or Jehovah or Darwin or Dr. Kevorkian on the hotline.

<sup>65</sup> Homans (1964) did not engage Goffman’s work in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, nor in his autobiography. Goffman was already a major figure at the time. There are clear overlaps such as in Homan’s doubts about sociological theory of the time and his concern to draw theories from “the behavior of men” not from abstractions from another level. While Homans shared an interest in social processes with Simmel as well as Goffman, in an earlier (1958) Homans’s article in an *American Journal of Sociology* volume on Durkheim and Simmel, there is no mention of Goffman.

<sup>66</sup> A minor factor might be because I physically resembled Goffman when we first met. I had closely cropped (crew cut) dark hair, a boyish look and was muscular, athletic, and not tall. Perhaps I had some less conscious identification with him at that level. Perhaps he saw some of himself in me.

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<sup>67</sup> Scheff (2006) views Goffman's interest as a type of hypermasculinity characteristic of many males involving composure, poise, and control of emotions.

<sup>68</sup> In the article on role distance (1961b) a personal, preferred essence exists. To varying degrees, this goes beyond the role played and others' imputations of what "kind" of a person this "is" and the self-proffered in interaction. The essential person knows there are gaps and may counter efforts at full incorporation or absorbance, even as disingenuously doing the reverse for the benefits of appearing to be what one isn't.

<sup>69</sup> In his case, in *Augie March* it was "Chicago born". As he wrote he would "make the record in my own way", offering a knock that was sometimes innocent and sometime not: "but a man's character is his fate, says Heraclitus, and in the end there isn't any way to disguise the nature of the knocks by acoustical work on the door or gloving the knuckles."

<sup>70</sup> However, within that quote one can imbed the tension between the ethically challenged advantages from the misleading surface reality of appearance and the principle of truth in advertising. The latter of course is on a higher moral plain and might even be better for business.

<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, those born with silver spoons face a different issue --the risk of falling. George Homans observed that it was easier to be an ancestor than a descendant. In the same way, it is probably easier to have one's best successes come later, rather than earlier in a career.

<sup>72</sup> As noted, as an outsider Goffman carried plenty, maybe even with a bit of *schadenfreude*. Yet loss and its frequent partner resentment, is the way of all flesh, even for the most exalted, perhaps more intensively for the hunger of some pathetic elites, lacking all gratitude, whose dance card can never be filled. The rewards at the pinnacle are harder to get, but are they sweeter or longer lasting as expectations keep rising?

Beyond the initial rebuffs, as an outsider at the height of his career, he was apparently rejected by the Center for Advanced Study at Princeton. He had been proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (Winkin 2022a). At the beginning of his career according to Winkin, he considered leaving the academy because he doubted he would receive tenure from Berkeley and his PhD thesis had not been much appreciated by those he most looked up to. He received few awards and only one honorary doctorate, an astounding oversight for someone of his world class stature.

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<sup>73</sup> In his first published paper (1951) he cites Weber on charisma, Simmel on fashion and Durkheim on collective symbols. In *Presentation* Durkheim is mentioned four times and Simmel and Park twice, but not Weber. In *Asylums* Durkheim is cited once, but strikingly no references to Weber's work on the totalizing aspects of bureaucracy, nor to Simmel. His PhD thesis began with a quote from Simmel which was dropped from the opening in the later published version(s). Why was that? Perhaps as Yves Winkin has suggested, he did not more explicitly use Simmel because what Simmel saw seemed so present and obvious that Goffman simply was in accord with it. The data yelled it out and Simmel simply saw it first. On the other hand, a recent review on Simmel's impact has only one reference to Goffman (Brocic and Silver 2021) but Simmel cannot be blamed for that."