Introduction

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Long before the untimely death of Erving Goffman in 1982 his early publications had achieved the status of classics in American sociology. Although he did not form a school in the proper sense of the word, his influence nonetheless quickly permeated many sectors of sociological and anthropological research. His books are still among the most frequently quoted publications in the social sciences. Goffman has also been fortunate in another respect: few other modern sociologists have attracted so many theorists of stature whose critical interpretations have kept their ideas fresh and alive (e.g., Collins 1986, 1988; Ditton 1980; Drew – Wootten 1988; MacCannell 1983; Rawls 1987; Schudson 1984).

Goffman seems to have understood (perhaps from modern art?) that in the long-run nothing succeeds quite like a style which combines a lucid surface and an inner core which resists unambiguous interpretation. His style obliges readers to be creators in their own right and fashion their personal version of his multi-layered theory. Several of his books are apparently simple enough that they are assigned as required reading for introductory sociology courses, but so complex at the level of their theoretical assumptions that scholars still puzzle over whether he should most accurately be defined as a deviant symbolic interactionist (Fontana 1980), a latter-day Durkheimian (Collins 1988), a structuralist (Gonos 1977), a post-modernist ‘avant la lettre’ (see Clough and Battershill, this volume), or a semiotician (McCannell 1983). This variety of interpretation bears witness to the originality and profundity of his probing into the complexity of social processes.

This book is a collection of original articles which endeavors to expand the scope of the theoretical views and empirical research Erving Goffman contributed to the social sciences. Most chapters take a critical stand toward his ideas while still recognizing his fundamental contribution to the field. Hence, the title Beyond Goffman. From this critical and multi-disciplinary examination, Goffman emerges
as a provocative, protean figure, whose relevance to contemporary issues in the social sciences is more evident than ever. The book is divided into two parts. The first concentrates upon theory and explores Goffman's intellectual heritage (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, the notion of social situation, the relation between micro and macro levels of analysis) and also examines the way his work relates to contemporary theoretical movements (semiotics, postmodernism, deconstructionism, and feminism). The second part of the book probes the insights found in his diverse empirical studies and expands the domain of their applications.

The project of publishing this book originated at an international conference titled 'Institution, Communication and Social Interaction: The Legacy of Erving Goffman,' which was held in December 1987 at the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore, India. It brought together Western and Indian scholars, for whom Goffman's work had played a significant part in their own research, and who had confronted some of the seemingly intractable issues raised by his theoretical stands. Goffman had himself little interest in being an ethnographer of the developing world, but many of his insights into the self-society relation and symbolic communication should in principle apply everywhere (Giddens 1988:253, 273-74). Self-presentation and social interaction are problematic processes in all societies, although the social context in which they occur may be quite varied (see, e.g., Asante and Gudykunst 1989). Several of the contributors to this volume expand the scope of Goffman's ideas by applying them to India, which is more rural, more diverse, and perhaps more traditional than the 'Anglo-American society' with which Goffman felt most at home as a professional sociologist.

The personal relationships which the contributors to this volume have had with Goffman are diverse. Some were his colleague, neighbor, friend; one was a fellow graduate student at the University of Chicago; another took one of his introductory sociology classes. One contributor was afraid to enroll in his graduate courses because of his reputation for being so critical. It is also worth noting, since it was a sign of the times, that another contributor missed in the early 1970s his only chance to hear Goffman deliver a public lecture out of a mistaken belief that his ideas were narrow and dated.

The opening section of this book includes eight papers whose focus is more theoretical than empirical. The division is, of course, somewhat arbitrary since all of the other papers discuss theoretical
issues to a degree. This first part probes aspects of Goffman's theoretical significance either by investigating his intellectual roots or by developing some of its theoretical potential. In so doing, well known Goffmanian concepts are assessed, refined, and in some cases reframed in novel perspectives.

Goffman's debt to Durkheim is well documented in the secondary literature on his work. Why Durkheim exerted such influence on Goffman and on American sociology in general does require some explanation, however, because Durkheim's perspective seems so different from popular American values which one would assume to be part of the intellectual infrastructure of any major American social theory. This is the question raised by Dean MacCannell in the first paper of this volume. As he writes: 'How can a new discipline which is founded upon, and insists in no uncertain terms upon, the principle of social determinism, take root and flourish in a society which thinks of itself as based on the opposing principle of individual liberty?' In MacCannell's view the ideological similarity between Durkheim and American values begins to become apparent if one tries to rewrite some of Durkheim's most famous passages substituting 'ego' for 'society'. Thus, Durkheim can be seen as depicting society in a manner familiar to Americans as it fits their ideal of ultimate independence and power for the individual. Since Durkheim the prevailing theoretical perspectives in American sociology have also narcissistically identified the self with society, turning it into a giant unified ego. A belief in social determinism and individual freedom should seem incompatible. However, if society and the individual are assumed to have common interests, this can be avoided. In Goffman's formative years the popular view was that the individual was highly socialized and thus upheld the dominant values.

In many respects Goffman is the exception in American sociology. In his writings neither society nor the individual is thought to be a unified whole. MacCannell believes that Goffman was one of the first people to 'describe social life as it is lived as marked by ambiguity and uncertainty, fragmentation . . . and discontinuity . . . .' Goffman did this by combining dramatism and Durkheimian sociology. For Goffman, even the individual is a 'team' because it consists of a performer and an audience (although united in one person) and the unity of society is simply fictional. What holds society together is just a 'veneer of consensus'. MacCannell concludes his essay by defining sociology as a branch of semiotics. He argues, as do several contributors
to this volume, that symbolic interactionism and semiotics are complementary although integrating them requires a notion of social situation which is at odds with Goffman.

In the second chapter, Eric Schwimmer surveys some of the anthropological literature on southern Asia and comes to the conclusion that its treatment of the interaction order is similar to Goffman's. Both insist on the autonomy of the interaction order; neither is willing to grant causal priority to interactions or to structures. Schwimmer describes sociologists and anthropologists as rival clans trying to establish a claim to a theory of micro-events. He writes:

For let us recognize that the setting up of a concept such as the interaction order is equivalent to what a chief (in, for instance, New Guinea) would do if he wished to set up his own family as a new lineage in the village. He would build his own patio, give feasts and claim his own emblem. More particularly, he would restructure the story of his ancestry, emphasizing some prestigious local lines and devaluing some more dubious foreign ones. It is because of this aspect of Goffman's operation that his handling of anthropology becomes interesting.

The term Goffman invented for the relation between the micro and macro level was 'loose coupling'. For Schwimmer, this is one of Goffman's most profound concepts and he explores how it is implied in the empirical details of Goffman's books *Gender Advertisements* and *Strategic Interaction*. These books illustrate loose coupling in the sense that a 'mythic text' is only loosely transformed into a 'performance text'. Behaviour is always something more and something other than what is theorized. Loose coupling also applies to the difference between Goffman the ethnographer and Goffman the theoretician. The ethnography appears to be organized around the idea of status differences while the theoretically more important concept seems to be the way social statuses are diffuse and overlapping. Schwimmer has interestingly structured his paper in the oral mode in order to illustrate how the circumstances of a paper's production influence its content, an idea which is inherent in Goffman's theory of the interaction order.

The notion of a social situation is central to Goffman's work. Joshua Meyrowitz assumes that although Goffman usually wrote about social situations as bounded by physical places, his analysis also shows that he was working with a less explicit concept of situations as 'information systems'. The advantage of this second definition is that it does not limit the theorist to the interaction of people who are literally face to face. It allows one to take into consideration the impact people
exert indirectly via electronic and broadcast media. 'Increasingly, our interpersonal interactions are interrupted by, or interwoven with, encounters with or through media. Such recontextualizing of behaviour also demands attention. In fact, it suggests that Goffman’s analytically neat view of “naturally-bounded” face-to-face interactions is losing much of its experiential primacy’. Similar criticisms of situations as bounded social systems can be found in the chapters of this volume by Perinbanayagam, and Riggins.

Meyrowitz examines, unlike Goffman, the long-term changes in the boundaries of situations. He points out that new media create new social situations. For example, the informality which has become so characteristic of daily life since the 1960s is due to a merging of the informality of traditional backstage behaviour with the more conscious impression management of the frontstage. Drawing upon such media theorists as Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, he argues that the main reason for this change is the way electronic media, primarily television, integrate social situations and audiences previously segregated when reading was the major form of mass entertainment. Literacy segregates audiences because of differing levels of reading skills while television (like oral cultures) integrates them since it is more comprehensible to everyone. Dividing the backstage into two parts, Meyrowitz makes a very useful distinction between the forefront of the backstage (the less personal or less discrediting information) and the deep backstage (the more damaging information). Electronic media have made the forefront of the backstage more public.

Richard Lanigan writes about the influence of phenomenology on Goffman as it is reflected in the book Frame Analysis. Goffman’s own discussion of phenomenology seems to show that he borrowed some of the methodology (bracketing, for example), but ignored much of the theory. Thus, Lanigan argues that while Goffman sought ‘ideological guidance’ in phenomenology, his work is inconsistent in this respect. ‘Goffman is a methodological “phenomenologist,” but at the price of being a-theoretical. . . . To adopt the theory of phenomenology would require a focus on the human conscious experience of the person’. On the contrary, Goffman presented himself in Frame Analysis as a structuralist but was still committed to recording ‘the lived-world context of experience’ that would be expected of a phenomenologist. Lanigan relates Goffman’s work to that of Foucault because of their similar interests but finds in Foucault a more explicit use of semiotic phenomenology.
The tension between structuralism and phenomenology in Goffman is explored by Lanigan through an analysis of radio drama which focuses upon the topics of how the medium presents places, the movement from one place to another, and simultaneous events. People direct their attention while listening, not only in terms of the details within a broadcast, but they are also listening to the radio in the context of the general soundscape occurring within their own home. The radio is only one of many objects emitting noise. ‘We understand in the way that we as persons desire to understand. We are choosing the context of our meaning as we live it.’ Goffman was only partly aware of the multiple reality aspect of radio listening. He did not write about listening from the point of view of a personal lived reality, as if he were an audience of one, but speculated about a general audience reaction and even this was done from the vantage point of a naive realist. Lanigan concludes his essay by rewriting one of Goffman’s most famous passages. To Lanigan it should read: ‘I personally hold the person to be first in every way and any of society’s current involvements to be second; this essay deals only with matters that are first’.

Hans Dua reviews the literature on miscommunication and communicative non-success, a topic highly relevant to Goffman but which was not systematically addressed in his work. If social actors are manipulative, or manage the impressions others form of them, or if they are players of ritual games, there is bound to be a certain level of miscommunication because such activities forbid complete truthfulness. At least five aspects are involved in the miscommunication which is inevitable under these circumstances. First, miscommunication may be due to problems in the speaker’s formation and expression of his/her personal intentions. Speakers may have only partial awareness of their intentions or they may be unable to articulate them fully. Tact, also, does not encourage a full articulation of intentions. Secondly, the hearer may misinterpret or mishear statements. As Goffman pointed out, the hearer can be defined in several ways. The fact that it is not necessarily the person addressed but a bystander may result in some misperceptions. In addition, selectivity in listening may create confusion and there may also be some intentional misunderstanding.

Thirdly, problems are posed by failures in sustaining intersubjectivity. For communication to be successful, the speaker and hearer must share a mutual orientation toward each other’s capacities and demands. They must be willing to fulfill their obligations as interactants. But
this is not always possible. Fourth, there may be discrepancies in shared knowledge and context. Exactly what is shared in terms of knowledge has been defined in a bewildering variety of ways, but shared knowledge is certainly both a constraint and a resource. Dua suggests that two levels of context be defined, one which includes the institutionalized framing of activities and another more narrow context consisting of the negotiated interaction which constantly changes. Fifth, the speaker or hearer may not abide by the commonly accepted conversational principles, such as 'be relevant', 'avoid obscurity', etc. Dua observes.

In whatever way we characterize the phenomena of miscommunication it should be considered in the form of a continuum on the dimension of normality and abnormality. However, it is most difficult to draw a line between the normal and the abnormal with respect to each kind of miscommunication. Furthermore, we know very little about how different forms of miscommunication may be related to each other.

Nirmala Srinivasan examines the concept of self in Goffman's writings, dealing with the theme of how Goffman implies both determinism and free will when he discusses the self. Some of his statements are based on the assumption that the self should be defined from the vantage point of the intentions of an individual agent. This is historically an important element in Goffman's early works because it came at a time when many American sociologists tended to assume a high level of determinism. But, on the other hand, Goffman himself seems to share this attitude when he concentrated upon the way the individual is a passive object who accommodates to structures.

Srinivasan writes that in India where Western-style individualism is no longer a remote possibility:

... the common man is literally plagued by extreme fragmentation and mutilation of the core official identity and wears diverse masks depending on his/her immediate kith and kin. Organized militancy as a way of citizenship protest for distributive justice (has led) to greater and greater fragmentation of personal identities and the masking capabilities of individuals.

In the second part of her essay, she reviews the potential of Goffman's dramaturgical analysis for explaining various aspects of contemporary Indian society. One of her examples is from her research on the minority identity of Muslims and Christians in India; she discusses conflicts between what Goffman called the 'official self' and the
'performing self'. The quota system or the reservation policy in India resembles affirmative action programs in North America. These are policies meant to compensate for past discrimination and socio-economic disadvantages by reserving occupational positions and admission to institutions of higher education. However, in India as in North America, these policies have resulted in unintended tensions and the strengthening of class or caste identity. Her theme is not the successes or failures of the quotas but the way individuals and groups cope with the dynamics of novel social situations.

Goffman's writings might be seen as a very personal combination of intellectual sources only tangentially related to discussions of post-modernism. However, Charles Battershill presents Goffman as a precursor of post-modernism and argues that Goffman anticipated several of the ideas which are presently associated most with such scholars as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. Although Goffman did not write about the post-modern theme of capitalism evolving into an information society, he did nonetheless conceptualize the self as an effect of knowledge and placed great stress on the management of information in one's private life. Post-modern aesthetics have been explained as an effect of consumer capitalism (Buerger 1986). Here, also, there is an overlap since some of Goffman's critics have argued very convincingly that the significance he attached to impression management was a reflection of consumerism (Gouldner 1970).

Post-modern ideas are perhaps most obvious in Goffman's writings about total institutions. Both Goffman and Foucault questioned the humaneness of therapeutic institutions. To Goffman, knowledge developed at mental asylums did not serve the interests of patients; instead, the institution itself created deviant behaviour in the inmates and then used this to control them. Efficiency in handling people in institutionalized settings was also thought to conflict with and undermine therapeutic goals. Foucault and Goffman both examined the complex relation between rationality and irrationality and for neither was reason a neutral tool. Both preferred to explore more subtle forms of domination than class oppression. Both detected an implicit will to power in the development of psychiatric knowledge. Thus, Battershill concludes that 'the pervasiveness of such people-processing forced Goffman to equate totalitarianism, the total institution, and “free society”. Except for the terminology and the research methods, Foucault's findings are similar regarding the “political anatomy” of the disciplinary society'. Since neither Foucault nor
Goffman was willing to state his theoretical position in any easily accessible manner (another quality of post-modernism), one of the results is that readers can be confused about the extent to which they saw themselves as part of the anti-psychiatry movement (Riggins 1988) or even to what extent they were social critics. While Manning does present Goffman in this volume as a social critic, as do many commentators (e.g., Gamson 1985); a few have stressed the messages of passivity and inaction which can be inferred from his publications (e.g., Richard 1986; Gonos 1980). The same can be said of Foucault.

Concentrating upon Goffman’s textual strategies, Patricia Clough also relates Goffman to post-modernism. The aim of her paper is to uncover some of the tacit presuppositions in his writings. This includes explaining what he might have found appealing in the works of Jacques Derrida. Although Goffman is often referred to as an ethnographer, he did not produce the kind of narratives typical of classical positivistic ethnography but compiled much of his texts out of episodic quotations from mass-mediated discourses. His departure from the standard participant observation of symbolic interactionism has disturbed some critics. As Michel Richard (1986:322) amusingly asked: ‘What kind of symbolic interactionist is he who does not interact with anybody?’

Clough believes that Goffman in his later works brought the sociological tradition of ethnography to a crisis of representation but stopped short of deconstructionism. The physical body and the natural world, a primary frame in Goffman’s early works, are later replaced by an imagined body, which is a social construct. Truth is no longer grounded in the physical world of bodies and even primary frames are merely arbitrary ideas.

... Goffman’s writing strategy evokes and is dependent on the reader’s precritical working of primary frames and at the site of the body. Goffman, then, can take the reader by surprise. Never being where the last example left the reader, Goffman out-frames the reader, again and again turning nature into culture and culture into a series of displays.

Goffman’s style and subject matter have the effect of so engrossing readers that they are discouraged from reflecting about the validity of what he writes. This reaction to Goffman is also found in the concluding paper of this volume by Paul Bouissac. Clough applies feminist ideas about narratives to the representation of gender in advertising since Goffman remarked that viewers are likely to invent narratives for the still photographs in advertisements. She argues
that an understanding of narrative practices and discourse analysis is essential for an understanding of Goffman, especially his stylistic techniques of establishing his authority.

The second group of papers follows in the footsteps of Goffman in the sense that they are a tribute to the way he relished presenting himself in public, not as a social theorist but as a humble practitioner of empirical research. The papers attempt to exceed his work by assessing the insights found throughout his eclectic empirical research and by expanding its scope both within Western societies and beyond. This part of the volume is subdivided into two sets of chapters: one mostly concerned with institutionally staged activities and language, the other focusing on objects and events.

Peter Manning and Keith Hawkins use Goffman’s concept of frame to help establish an analytical perspective for studying decision-making within the Anglo-American legal system. Framing events as ‘legal’ rather than ‘political’ and dramatizing and ritualizing this in court is part of a cognitive infrastructure that maintains authority. It is a screen or a boundary separating everyday events from legally relevant ones. The authors do not assume that this defining process is simply the discovery of truth since they stress relativity. Nor is it politically neutral: ‘... arbitrary framing of facts serves the purposes of the framers, and of the institution’. While a court case will have to be resolved in that a decision has to be made concerning guilt or awards of money, the adversarial nature of the law and the difference in the understanding of the law between lawyers and clients can result in a wide range of ideas concerning what is taking place, why things are being done as they are, etc. Thus, the law must be seen as something broader than a collection of rules and enforcement procedures:

It also includes the cognitive and social underpinnings which are necessary, if not sufficient, to sustaining that differentiated social world. Understanding the experiential basis of the social organization of legal life is fundamental to naturalistic studies of decision-making because they link the phenomenological world, outlined in many of its facets by Goffman, and the formal legal world.

Manning and Hawkins methodically set forth the basic assumptions of frame analysis, redefining Goffman’s concepts in the process. The authors discuss how the law stabilizes meaning (the very term ‘frame’ suggests stability), and the dynamic process taking place when legal subframes are assembled to establish a legal case. Some facts and
interpretations must be perceived as relevant to the case, that is 'framed in', while others must be ignored or 'framed out'. Exactly what falls in each category changes as the case is redefined, something that is a common occurrence. In the conclusion of the paper the authors direct their attention to the frames concerning legal controversies which are produced by the mass media and by the highest levels of government. Although media attention may highlight court cases and result in the public redefining events, it is not known with certainty what effect this has on actual decisions. In 'high politics' legal and political frames are mingled. This can have far-reaching consequences in terms of future definitions of what properly belongs within legal frames as opposed to political ones.

George Park applies the notion of lamination, the way frames exist within frames, to the comparative study of religion. This article and the preceding one represent a departure from Goffman in that the authors apply frame analysis to institutionally staged activities rather than Goffman's preferred ahistorical, non-institutional episodes. Park justifies the use of frame analysis in describing religion in this way: 'A religion . . . is never a single institution — surely never simply a church in the narrow sense — but a structure of frames, a plurality of socially constructed realities linked by containment'. Frame analysis gives one a vocabulary and a perspective for discussing how personal experiences are transformed into moral categories and religiously meaningful actions. Park categorizes the evolution of religion in terms of three supernatural frames: proto-religion, animism, and deism. The newer frames are not seen as replacing the older ones; instead, all three are assumed to co-exist, along with secularism, in many contemporary religious institutions. For example, the average church goer in North America may hope for miracle cures and may retain some belief in spirits and superstition, while still believing in the omnipotent god of Christianity. Furthermore, the average church goer tends to be committed basically to a 'lay frame', in which the primary reality is the physical commonsense world, and judges what religion has to offer (psychological security, meeting the right people, occupational success) from this perspective. Nonetheless, he or she still gives lip service to a 'religious frame' in which the primary reality is an unseen world. The inconsistencies of these beliefs are partially hidden by the lamination. Such frames can also be 'mutually contained' in the sense that they restrain each other and that it is not always clear which is the more basic perspective. In other words, who is the deceiver
and who is the victim can be ambiguous. 'There may be a genuine confusion of frames, or possibly just that case of mutual containment which had eluded Goffman's efficient clipping service... Mutual containment is arguably the most important mechanism of religion in the developed world'.

Arlie Hochschild continues Goffman’s examination of public discourse on gender. However, she examines this topic as it is documented in popular advice books for women rather than in advertising and looks at a whole spectrum of advice books from the conventional to the rebellious. She believes that when Goffman wrote about gender he deviated from some of his usual notions about the active self. He appears to assume a much more passive self in his book Gender Advertisements than in his other publications. For Goffman, the presentation of gender was simple and straightforward; the models in the advertising photographs he studied intuitively knew how to behave. But gender is much more complicated now and there is no longer, if there ever was, one standard way of presenting oneself as male or female. Conflicts occur between the surface aspects of gender presentation and how men and women inwardly feel about their own ‘performances’. She writes that Goffman does not ‘suggest how the actor might feel estranged from a code. But actors in Goffman’s other works often do face choices, feel doubt and become estranged. The rules of interaction are always unbudgeably there in Goffman’s works as in life, but the actor continually works at deciding how to get around them, or counter with other rules’.

Hochschild assumes that women combine elements of two codes (the ‘parlor-traditional’ female and the ‘egalitarian-modern’ female). The exact gender strategy a woman adopts for mixing these codes is a product of her past and her expectations about the kinds of rewards she can realistically expect in the future. The recommendations of advice books cover both ‘surface acting’ and ‘deep acting’. The first applies to such recommendations as those concerning appearance and the frame (irony, cynicism, etc.) which should be placed around gender rules. The latter applies to what Hochschild calls the emotional ‘work’ or the personal feelings associated with enacting the rules. When advice books suggest how gender rules should be framed, they are also suggesting what relationship should exist between self and rule.

Goffman proposed abandoning the conventional dyadic model of talk which consists of two interacting conversationalists (the speaker and the listener), and the restriction of analysis to verbal statements.
His alternative included taking into consideration the influence of everyone within hearing range, such as bystanders and eavesdroppers; and developing greater sensitivity to the structural instability of group conversations when the roles of speaker, listener, addressee, non-ratified participant, etc. are constantly shifting. Although these ideas from *Forms of Talk* do not explicitly touch upon politics, some of the chapters in that book might be read as an extended commentary on politics because many ideas are applicable to studying power in conversations. This is the interpretation made by Juliet Flower-MacCannell in her paper: 'Implicit is a critique, that is, of the rules of access to participation: who is allowed to speak is, in the long run and in a democracy, the most political of all issues'. She applies Goffman's ideas to an obscure short story by Heinrich von Kleist titled 'The Marquise von O...'. Through Goffman she interprets this story as being about ritual small talk and the micropolitics of the family and face-to-face interaction. What she appreciates about Goffman is his 'attention to form as the form of a social relation or social tie that is recognizable, if not by those participating in the “footing”, then at least by the analyst or observer. A formal social tie is one that is discernible as a ritual spacing, which can be both masked by speech and its figures and yet also readable through them, by means of a structural reduction...'. Gender is one of these forms. Flower-MacCannell considers Kleist's gender politics to be more radical than Goffman's and regrets that while Goffman generally viewed the rituals of everyday life in terms of how one freely managed self-presentation, he tended to overlook the extent to which males determine gender rituals for women. 'It is the dark, compulsive side of ritual that Goffman has missed here, and he has in some sense consistently done so, in terms of one particular social relation, the sexual one'.

Although very few instances of human interaction are devoid of verbalization, many aspects of social processes are focused on, or articulated by artifacts and actions. Robert Perinbanayagam's chapter 'How to do Self with Things' is one of the few recent papers by a symbolic interactionist which systematically examines how clothing, hair styles, and body ornaments convey messages about the self. Goffman made many passing comments on the topic but did not pursue it in any systematic way. Perinbanayagam suggests that a close analysis of objects brings into question the notion of the situated self which is such a prominent element of Goffman's perspective. Goffman proposed a version of the self in which memory, recollection and habit
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are relatively unimportant compared to situational factors. In contrast, Perinbanayagam advocates a concept of a more permanent self, one which lacks the flexibility and autonomy generally seen as part of Goffman’s symbolic interactionist heritage. Thus, Perinbanayagam defines the self, not as a changeable formula, but as a ‘semiotically learned habit constructed by the mind over the years . . . .’. Styles of clothing and hair have little intrinsic meaning. To become meaningful these signs about the self must be assembled like linguistic texts in that they are organized according to similar principles; objects are ‘made to function metaphorically, metonymically, ironically and synecdochically’. In this sense things ‘do words’. Hair, for example, can be cut and fashioned in many ways, and grows back so quickly that it can easily be used to convey many messages about the status of one’s self, especially messages related to sexuality. This variety of messages is conceptualized in terms of such categories as ‘self-fulness’ and ‘self-lessness’. Perinbanayagam applies these ideas to a variety of religious and ethnic groups in Indian civilization.

A categorization of domestic artifacts, based in part on the work of Goffman, is developed in my own paper. Isolated insights about material objects as mediators of interaction and relationships are found throughout the work of Goffman and symbolic interactionists.

Even though Goffman specialized in studying what is commonly referred to as face-to-face interaction, he certainly realized that the term “face-to-face” is misleading. Personal interaction is never limited to the faces of the participants. Not only does interaction generally involve the whole body, but people are practically always perceived among objects and in various degrees of association with them. In that sense we are never alone.

Goffman tended to include objects and human actions within each of his categories of symbols, resulting in some insensitivity to the physical reality of material artifacts. In this paper, Goffman’s categories of symbols are redefined and several dimensions of objects are added to develop a systematic approach. Goffman neglected several concepts essential to theorizing about the relationship between the self and objects found in domestic environments. These include: the display syntax of objects, terms that summarize the general character of a whole environment, and the way objects serve as comment elicitors. It is assumed that Goffman did not focus more explicitly on objects because this would have drawn his attention beyond the immediate present to the influence of people absent in intimate situations, to
the past, and to signs which are more than self-referential. This would have undermined his idea that encounters constituted a bounded system. For illustrative purposes the categorization is applied to an artist’s living room.

Promode Misra traces everyday rituals related to the consumption of kwai among the Khasi, a matrilineal society in north-eastern India. Kwai is a mixture of betel nut, betel leaf and lime. The consumption of kwai is a time of relaxation, when people ‘step out of ordinary time’, gossip and exchange information. It can be prepared in a variety of ways, each of which is associated with certain rituals and statuses. Kwai is also in itself a communication device because it is typically a gift from the more powerful to the less powerful and thus helps to resolve structural incongruities in the extended family and between males and females. In the Khasi extended family property is inherited by the youngest daughter; however, authority passes from one of the mother’s brothers to one of the sons of the youngest daughter. The degree of disadvantage felt by family members depends in part on whether a man marries an elder daughter, who is a non-heiress, or the youngest daughter, who is the heiress. In general, those placed at a disadvantage include: males in relation to females, the elder daughters in relation to the youngest daughter, and fathers in relation to brothers-in-law or maternal uncles. Thus, kwai generally circulates in the opposite direction. ‘It is not that offering kwai resolves the structural incongruity in concrete terms, but sentimentally and symbolically it means a lot in the temporary suspension of the rules of the structure’. This article illustrates Goffman’s remark in Interaction Ritual that ceremonial activities carry messages themselves rather than being simply ‘concrete empirical actions’.

T.K. Oommen applies Goffman’s ideas to everyday forms of political protest among the rural poor in India. He writes about a context very different from that of the fragmented self-presentation typical of anonymous impersonal settings usually associated with Goffman. In rural India personal identities are often assigned and permanent and there is a stable audience which already knows most of the discrediting information about everyone in the community. But impression management is, nonetheless, a part of everyday life and is a vital political resource in situations of social inequality. Recent research on social movements has shifted the study of protests in a Goffmanian direction, toward the study of unorganized individual protests seen in the context of daily encounters. Much of this kind
of protest must be very subtle to be effective and because of the poor's dependence on the wealthy, it rarely involves open rebellion. It may be nothing more outwardly disturbing than gossiping; absenteeism, especially at harvest time; pilferage; and adopting the lifestyle of upper castes. Still, it has important long-term consequences.

Public deference shown by the poor to the rich is a device to extract and ensure a livelihood in the precarious conditions of the latter's existence. But this publicly expressed deference needs to be kept "false" lest one should get demeaned in one's own class. Therefore, the real challenge the poor face is how the deference should be presented as authentic to the rich and as false to the fellow poor.

The wealthy are to some extent dependent upon the poor (although the reverse is of course much greater). However, agricultural mechanisation because it reduces the need for workers also shifts the balance of power even more in favor of the wealthy.

In his book Frame Analysis Goffman devoted a chapter to what he termed the manufacture of negative experience, exploring through various dramatic genres the public presentation of incidents involving the loss of control, failure, or a breakdown in character. This is a very popular theme in public performances, especially in the circus where it appears in at least one act in practically every show. Paul Bouissac analyzes two circus acts, a clown act and a trapeze act, in which the staging of negative experiences is a prominent part of breaking the performance frame. Bouissac suggests that Goffman tended to take for granted the technical skills required to publicly stage performances of negative experience. Some of Goffman's interpretations may be incorrect because he did not focus on precisely contextualized performances, something which can only be done for the circus after one writes detailed ethnographic descriptions of acts and then analyzes them, taking into consideration both the immediate and the general social context in which they appear.

Bouissac discusses three types of negative experience (incidents, accidents, and failures) which are defined on the basis of how much disruption they introduce into a social situation and the effect this has in implementing plans. A clown act by George Carl is described in which Carl apparently breaks all of the rules of a good performance. Rather than calling this the breaking of a frame, Bouissac suggests that the more accurate term might be 'framing the frames' because Carl publicly illustrates the rules of good and bad performance.
... "negative experiences" of the sort described by Goffman cannot be taken at face value when they are parts of larger "texts" in which they effectuate some semiotic operations; in other words, the negative experiences which Goffman described are not ends in themselves but means to other, more general ends.

Thus, the messages conveyed to the audience by a trapezist, who appears to lose muscular control momentarily, should not be separated from the fact that the performers appear in the guise of an ideal nuclear family who are space travelers. Bouissac is also concerned about developing an objective, third-person definition of a social situation. Taking Goffman to task for not setting forth such a definition, Bouissac draws upon ethology and semiotics in establishing the parameters of social situations.

This book is obviously not the last attempt at engaging in a critical and constructive dialogue with Erving Goffman’s provocative work. The lively discussions which took place at the Mysore conference demonstrated Goffman’s enduring power of eliciting intellectual debate beyond his lifetime. As is the case for this book, practically everybody took him to task for having blurred a distinction, skipped an issue, straddled conflicting theories and the like; no one was prepared to blindly accept his words as a dogma. But no one questioned his capacity to challenge and inspire whoever was engaged in the study of micro social processes.

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