# From Erving to Goffman

## A Work in Performance?

Yves Winkin

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Goffman in the Open Series

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by

Yves Winkin

*translated by*

*Yves Winkin &*
*Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz*

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**translated by Yves Winkin and Wendy Leeds-Hurwtiz**



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PROLOGUE

# Regal Goffman, Against all Odds

A soft light from outside shines on his back, hair, and right cheek. He turns his head towards the lens that overlooks him with a serious air, without smiling. Around him, piles of notes, pencils in a holder, a notebook. Nothing is missing, not even the hand-cranked pencil sharpener behind him. Erving Goffman poses majestically in his office, late 1974 or early 1975.[1] No one had ever seen him like this, but it was to become his official image, and the one still most prominently displayed on the internet today. The photo was taken by Frederick A. Meyer, a press photographer who worked for the *Philadelphia Bulletin* for thirty-five years.[2] Meyer was commissioned by *The New York Times,* whose *Book Review* was to publish a review of Goffman's latest book, *Frame Analysis* (Rosenberg, 1975). How is it that Goffman, well-known for his refusal to be photographed, permitted it this time? Some have suggested that he was flattered by *The New York Times*'s request. He was very fond of *Frame Analysis* and was undoubtedly prepared to make a promotional effort. But this was not the first time *The New York Times* had published a review of a Goffman book: *Relations in Public* had been so honored three years earlier (Berman, 1972). We might then suggest that he trusted Frederick A. Meyer, who lived, as Goffman did, in Philadelphia, was the same age, and had already photographed him a few years earlier.[3]

[1] See first photo in the insert.

[2] Email from René Salomon, January 26, 2019.

[3] A photo of Goffman taken by Meyer appeared in *Time Magazine* on January 10, 1969 (p. 50); another appeared in *Time Magazine* on April 10, 1972 (p. 47). The mug that Goffman

But we can propose another explanation: Goffman was a performer. He was not the stand-up type—rather, a professional who performs, i.e., who brings his public persona to life with great seriousness and rigor.

Let us return to the photograph published in *The New York Times*. Its professionalism is obvious: the slightly bird's-eye view, probably taken from a stool, the side lighting, the capture of Goffman's gaze. But Goffman's professionalism matches the photographer's: He poses seated behind his desk, hands folded, in jacket, white shirt, and dark tie, very dignified, without a smile, but no sign of exasperation either. No one could guess his height—Goffman was about 1.60 m (5'2") tall. No one had ever seen him like this, surrounded by his files. But for all the seriousness he projects here, no one could deny the possibility that he might be wearing shorts and sandals under his desk. It was as if his readers were to understand: "I'm a researcher totally committed to my work; you can see it emerging all around me." In fact, among the manuscripts is perhaps that of a text to be published in 1976: "Picture Frames," the second chapter of *Gender Advertisements,*[4] which reads:

> When a renowned scientist graciously submits to a magazine interview (in the interests of disseminating knowledge), he is likely to be posed fingering his equipment as though a slice of his occupational life had been caught: he is shown peering into a microscope, writing a formula on the board, holding a test tube up to the light, or arranging a fossil. Thereby, he crudely mimes a posture plucked from his own role, momentarily transforming the living tools of his trade into dramaturgic equipment and himself into a pantomimist of fixed expressions. And what we see is not a photographic record of an actual scene from the scientist's life, as would be available were a secret camera trained on his laboratory, nor a clever contrivance of such a photographic record (this presented either as a real one or as an admitted simulation), but something that is *only* to be found as a posing for a picture, having been staged in response to a conception of what would make a colorful, telling photograph, and, behind this, a conception of what constitutes the appropriate convention for "representing" the particular calling. (Goffman, 1979, p. 19)

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holds in both photos indicates that these were taken at the same time, as part of a set. It has often been said that Goffman was furious at being revealed in this way in *Time*. According to Dean MacCannell, Goffman only agreed to be photographed again on condition that certain details of his life were not mentioned (email to Yves Winkin [YW hereafter], December 29, 2021).

[4] *Gender Advertisements* first appeared as a monograph in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 1976). It was then published as a book in 1979 by Harper and Row.

Goffman was certainly aware of all this when he posed amidst his papers for Frederick Meyer. Rather than the more typical academic attire of polo shirt and khaki pants, he is shown wearing a black-tie ensemble, and sitting at his desk with his hair neatly combed and his hands wisely folded.[5] But he did not pretend to write, as many writers caught "in the act" do; he did not lean against a bookcase full of bound books, as many politicians so often do; and he did not put his glasses on his nose as if he were reading. Rather, he consciously became a "pantomime with frozen expressions." Unlike most scholars, who might have naively put on an act in front of the photographer, Goffman knew exactly what he was doing, and to show it, he installed three details in the image that show he is not naive: no pen in hand, no books behind him, no glasses on his nose. In this way, he keeps some distance from his assumed persona, all while playing along for the magazine. It is this constant reflexivity that is fascinating about Goffman: He put his work into practice in his life. If his work, which was comprised of written texts, was about competence, his public life, which entailed accomplishments in the here and now, was about performance. I am not attempting to set up an opposition between his private life and his professional life; rather, I am drawing a distinction between his life in the public eye (including at a restaurant where he dined privately with friends) and his life "under the radar," whether at home or when he was doing fieldwork incognito. My working hypothesis is that whenever he was to be found in public, Goffman was hyper-managing the impressions he was making, to allude to one of his most famous concepts.[6] No doubt we are all looking to make a good impression, as Goffman suggests. That's what the "presentation of self in everyday life" is all about. But in Goffman himself, as shown by his pose for Frederick Meyer's camera and his analysis of scientists miming their own gestures for a professional photographer already quoted, there is an acute awareness of what is at stake in these "public relations."[7] One could argue that he deliberately chose how to represent himself.

To establish this hypothesis, I will begin by tracing his life, from his childhood in Manitoba to Philadelphia, where he settled comfortably in the late

[5] Let's not forget that he can be seen in shorts and sandals on the cover photo of the collective book *Le Parler frais d'Erving Goffman* (Editions de Minuit, 1989). The photo was taken surreptitiously by Isaac Joseph on a Philadelphia street in the late 1970s.

[6] The notion of "impression management" appears at the very beginning of his first book (Goffman, 1959, pp. 1–16).

[7] Relations in public form the core of several of his works (Goffman, 1971; Goffman, 1963).

1960s. I will then trail him as he gives lectures across the United States and around the world. It is in this eminently public situation that I will observe him performing in a highly constructed manner. Erving eventually became Goffman through his books, of course, but also through his performance work.

Strangely enough, little documentation of his performances has survived. Very few photographs, no film, no video, and no sound recordings. How did this man, famous since the early sixties, manage to escape capture? Admittedly, he had been known to interrupt his lectures to run after a photographer to whom he had not granted consent. Despite the fact that all performers asking not to be recorded still always seem to end up bootlegged, apparently this was not so for Goffman. Only one sound recording has surfaced, and this was eventually published (Goffman, 2012b). Otherwise, nothing. We have to rely on the notes of a few participants, on their memories, sometimes many years later. But it seems essential that we at least try to reconstitute this Goffman—the oral Goffman—and not limit ourselves to the extracts of written work he read in public. For Goffman was, as in front of the photographer, very conscious of what he did when delivering a presentation in public. The proof is in the text "The Lecture," included in his last book, *Forms of Talk* (Goffman, 1981). How many sociologists have reflected on what happened to them behind a microphone, to the point of turning it into a text—or rather, a lecture which was read and later turned into a publication? Many of his peers have produced an oral work, yet none of them have produced a lecture about their lectures. This is what makes Goffman's performance work unique. As a John Cage of the social sciences, he could easily have adopted the musician's phrase in describing his own work: "My intention has been, often, to say what I had to say in a way that would exemplify it; that would, conceivably, permit the listener to experience what I had to say rather than just hear about it" (Cage, 1961/2011, p. 23). Thus, the life of Goffman is also an introduction to his work. His work, unlike that of many of his contemporaries, has turned out to be astonishingly ageless. What is the secret of its longevity?

PART ONE

# Such a Short Life, Such a Powerful Body of Work

Erving Manual Goffman was born in Mannville, Alberta, Canada, on June 11, 1922. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Ukraine (Russia at the time). His father, Max Goffman, tried to establish his clothing business in several small towns before settling, in 1926, in Dauphin, Manitoba, 250 kilometers northwest of Winnipeg. His mother, Ann Averbach, stayed at home with the two children. Frances, born in 1919, remained the older sister who looked after the younger brother. Dauphin had a population of four thousand, and in just a few years became a "wheat and rail" town: Wheat was brought to the vicinity of the train station, stored in silos, and then loaded onto long trains that transported it across Canada. This was the city's source of wealth, and it weathered the Great Depression with seemingly little trouble (Little, 1988, pp. 186–187). A large Ukrainian community had developed by the turn of the century, and relations with the tiny Jewish community were neutral to cordial. Max Goffman's ready-to-wear business was doing well, so much so that he bought a second store, named "The Model Shoppe," in the early thirties. He sold it a few years later to buy a beautiful house in Winnipeg's North End, where he moved his family in 1937, while commuting weekly himself. Max was a quiet, pipe-and-cigar-smoking man who loved to play cards and had a strong business sense. [1] He would buy

[1] Interview on June 1, 1991, with his daughter Frances and his son-in-law, Charles (Chuck)

clothing in bulk in Montreal to sell at retail prices in Dauphin, publicizing his role as middleman in the *Dauphin Herald and Press* with articles [2] and spectacular advertising inserts. [3]

Moving to beautiful, tree-lined Scotia Street in Winnipeg represented an important social and symbolic step forward for the Goffman family. Not only did they leave a small Canadian prairie town to become part of a large city with 250,000 residents, but Winnipeg was becoming one of English-speaking Canada's great cities in every respect. In addition, by moving they joined a Jewish community of seventeen thousand households, [4] most of them in the North End, a densely populated neighborhood that was virtually a city within the city, having its own stores, schools, and synagogues (Gutkin & Gutkin, 1987). And, above all, they lived on the right side of Machray Avenue: They could not be confused with first-generation Jewish immigrants (although that is exactly what they were); they lived surrounded by wealthy Jewish families, who were spatially and culturally close to families of English descent. [5]

It was only natural that Erving should enter St. John's Technical High School, a top-tier state school run by an alumnus of Oxford's progressive Ruskin College. He even found his way into the group of "competitive sharks," as one of his fellow students, Jack Ludwig, put it in *Requiem for Bibul*, a partly autobiographical short story (Gutkin & Gutkin, 1987, p. 242). No longer called "Goofy" as he was at Dauphin Junior High, [6] "Goff" was brilliant, but different from the others: He did not invite guests to his house; he loved Wagner; he conducted chemistry experiments in his cellar; he did not care about politics or practice any religion. But he was very good on the parallel bars. [7] In the 1939 yearbook, he was not very visible in the group photo, as

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Bay.

[2] "Max Goffman left on his annual buying trip to Montreal Tuesday," reported "The Local Round," in an early February 1932 edition of *The Dauphin Herald and Press*.

[3] "You've never seen such a diversity of stunning hat styles. All designed to lend you the sort of individuality you admire in stunningly groomed women." Consider that his son would later write a book entitled *Gender Advertisements*.

[4] *Canadian Jewish Yearbook*, 1939.

[5] "Eastward from Main to the Red River, the well-to-do Jews lived in style, gradually encroaching on the 'English,' who occupied the leafy, elegant Scotia Street running along the river to Kildonan Park" (Gutkin, 1980, p. 145).

[6] Interview with Hugh Fox, Goffman's classmate at Dauphin Junior High School, May 29, 1991.

[7] Interviews with two of his fellow students, Meyer Brownstone (March 30, 1993) and Brian Burke (May 30, 1991).

if he were already trying to go incognito. A pattern of his public behavior was becoming established.

Early in the fall of 1939, Goffman enrolled at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. Like most of his fellow students, he could have stayed at St. John's Tech for a "twelfth year" and thus entered directly into the university's second year, avoiding tuition fees. Instead, he set off on his own after his "eleventh year" and, without scholarships or assistance of any kind, began a bachelor's degree in the sciences: essentially courses in mathematics, physics, and chemistry.[8] On the surface, the war that was already shaking Europe was still far away, and Canada continued to move at its own pace. But something must have been going on in Erving's life. In 1942, his sister Frances, with whom he remained close, was unable to contact him.[9] That time remains a black hole. Did he finish his studies in physics and chemistry? Probably not. Did he enlist in the Canadian army (university students were exempt from military service)? Was he discharged? Probably not. In any case, he reappeared in the summer of 1943 at the National Film Board (NFB) in Ottawa, which became the home of many young Canadian intellectuals during the war. The NFB produced hundreds of documentaries and morale-boosting films for the Allied troops. Erving did not make any films, but the experience imbued him with an aptitude for visual culture that he would go on to cultivate throughout his life, as evidenced by *Frame Analysis* (1974) and his analysis of advertising photographs in *Gender Advertisements* (1979).

One of his NFB friends, Dennis Wrong, suggested that Erving complete his undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, enrolling with him in various sociology and anthropology courses.[10] In this way, Erving would experience three significant initiations. The first was with a somewhat strange anthropologist, C. W. M. Hart, who had been trained by the mythical Reginald Radcliffe-Brown. Hart lectured in a formal academic gown, pacing up and down the amphitheater stairs.[11] It was thanks to him that Goffman studied Durkheim's *Le Suicide* over the year. The second was with a twenty-six-year-old anthropologist from Chicago, who had no equal when it came to showing how a young bourgeois woman should hold her cigarette or how one should smile in the South (by curling the lower lip). This was Ray Birdwhistell, the only teacher who dared to take his students

[8] Information supplied on June 13, 1983, by the archivist at the University of Manitoba to Greg Smith, who kindly forwarded it to me.

[9] Interview with Frances Bay-Goffman, June 1, 1991.

[10] Interview with Dennis Wrong, September 1, 1986.

[11] Interview with Ray Birdwhistell, May 14, 1985.

outside the confines of the university to observe the relationship between clothing, gestures, and social class, from the perspective of anthropologist Lloyd Warner, who had been his thesis supervisor. Goffman would later say how formative the young anthropologist's perspective had been for him.[12] The third initiation was even more direct: It was offered by his girlfriend, Elizabeth (Liz) Bott, whose parents were both professors at the University of Toronto. She took him to quite a few chic parties; he made her read Freud. They went to the University of Chicago together, she in anthropology, he in sociology. They broke up in 1946 but remained very close all their lives.[13]

It was not so much the courses he took over the next four years that strengthened the young Goffman's intellectual disposition, even though his teachers were among the best-known in American sociology at the time (Herbert Blumer, Louis Wirth, Everett Hughes, Lloyd Warner). Rather, it was the endless discussions with his fellow students and the countless books he devoured, from detective novels and treatises on the epistemology of science to literary works by Marcel Proust and Elizabeth Bowen.

His closest friends in Chicago were often older students with real-life experience, far removed from the academic world. Ned Polsky was a professional pool player. Howard Becker played piano in nightclubs. Fred Davis drove a cab. Bob Habenstein sold brushes door-to-door to feed his small family.[14] Most served in the war and had scholarships as veterans. They knew that Erving could be difficult, and that you had to be on your guard with him: Some of them called him "little dagger."[15]

In 1948, Bott introduced him to one of her master's students in human development: Angelica Schuyler Choate, nicknamed "Sky." Erving liked her and found her calming. Did he know that she was a Boston brahmin? Her family tree could serve as a guide to American history. On her maternal grandmother's side, there was John Pierpont Morgan, Jr. Her maternal grandfather's cousin was Walter Van Rensselaer Berry, a lawyer who lived in Paris and cultivated friendships with Marcel Proust and Paul Valéry, among others. Her mother's brother was Harry Crosby, who lived in Paris in style with his wife Caresse—before committing suicide with his mistress in New York in 1929. A year before his death, he and Caresse founded the Black Sun Press, which published several famous authors in the 1930s through

[12] Interview with Erving Goffman, April 23, 1980.

[13] Interview with Liz Bott, October 10, 1987.

[14] Letter from Bob Habenstein to YW, January 27, 1998.

[15] Interview with Joe Gusfield, April 21, 1987.

the 1950s (e.g., Joyce, Lawrence, Hemingway). How could Erving fit in with this history? How best to interact with Sky's parents? By objectifying them. Specifically, he developed the concept of "class status symbol," which was the subject of his first paper in 1949 and his first publication in 1951. "In many societies, avocational pursuits involving the cultivation of arts, 'tastes,' sports, and handicrafts have been used as symbols of class status. . . . The style and manner of a class are . . . psychologically ill-suited to those whose life experiences took place in another class" (Goffman, 1951, p. 300). Erving certainly speaks here from his own experience. In fact, he thanks Sky in a footnote on the first page. From his very first public lecture, we can see how Erving integrated elements of his private life into an apparently impersonal discourse. No trace of his oral performance has survived; only the reworked text has been published. But we can see in it the first manifestations of the conversion of Erving's life into Goffman's work.

In 1949, Goffman reached two important milestones. The first was the submission of his master's thesis, written under the supervision of Lloyd Warner. To understand its somewhat mysterious title, "Some Characteristics of Response to Depicted Experience," it is necessary to explain that Warner, working at the time with William Henry, a psychologist specializing in projective tests, wanted Goffman to take up their study of the relationship between socio-economic status and the personality of radio listeners (Goffman, 1949, p. 69). It may seem strange today, but during those years, the social sciences, especially in the US, had adopted the investigative tools of psychologists to pinpoint audiences, their expectations, their interests, etc. This explains why Goffman administered the TAT (Thematic Apperception Test: a series of hazy images from which the subject must invent a story) to fifty women from Chicago's urban bourgeoisie. However, he soon realized the theoretical and methodological weaknesses of the TAT. From then on, his thesis was not only a severe critique of the TAT as a social science tool, but also an ethnographic rendering of the interview situations, enabling him to recontextualize the answers provided—and to salvage his work. In the final pages, we discover sentences like this one, aptly describing a "bohemian bourgeois" atmosphere: "In many living rooms the ritual of order and cleanliness was nicely violated by the permitted presence of a dog, a child, a huge toy, or fireplace-basket of coal or wood" (1949, p. 69). Goffman's style is already apparent, including his production of unexpected associations (e.g., "nicely violated"). We can also detect his interest in bourgeois life, as embodied by Sky and her family.

The second 1949 milestone was his departure for Edinburgh in October. Warner had suggested his name to an old acquaintance, Ralph Piddington, who was opening an anthropology department at the University of Edinburgh. Why did Erving accept this offer? It was probably not designed as an escape from Sky, nor for the pleasure of supervising students, nor to baby-sit for his colleague Tom Burns,[16] but rather for the opportunity to work in an island society, just as the great historical anthropologists had done, starting with Radcliffe-Brown. Indeed, as early as December, Erving went to Baltasound, the main community on Unst, the most northerly of the Shetland Islands. In winter, the sun appears around 10 a.m. and disappears around 3:30 p.m. From the start to the end of the year, the 120-kilometer island is battered by winds, sometimes accompanied by brief but violent rainfall. Approximately one thousand inhabitants lived there at the time. Most were farmers ("The average crofter has few score sheep, a few ponies and cows, and a few acres of arable land," Goffman, 1952, p. 3). A second group worked in the service industry, and a third constituted the gentry who owned the land. Between December 1949 and May 1951, Erving spent twelve months in the field. For the first two months, he took up residence at the island's only hotel, where two young maids became his informants. The staff called him peerie Goffman ("little Goffman") amongst themselves (Winkin, 2000). In early 1950, he bought a small bungalow behind the hotel but continued to take his meals with the two maids and the cook (Winkin, 2000). In the summer of 1950, he took a job as a dishwasher at the hotel, thus strengthening his ties with the staff, as well as with a few regular guests, such as the minister, the doctor, and the doctor's wife. In addition, he made the rounds with the letter carrier, played billiards with the youngsters, and attended weddings and funerals. He took photographs with his Leica. But his aim was not to make a study of the community in the manner of Warner. Rather it was a study in a community, as explained at the beginning of his thesis. He wanted to "study the rules of conduct which islanders adhered to as they engaged in social interaction with one another" (1952, p. 3). In a way, he envisioned the island as a giant laboratory, where natural experiments in "communication conduct" could take place.

Between the end of his contract as an "instructor" at Edinburgh University in the autumn of 1951 and his return to Chicago in the spring of 1952, there was a gap of several months. Where did he go? Probably to Paris with Sky,

[16] Interview with Tom Burns, July 8, 1986. Eminent sociologist of organizations, Burns dedicated an entire book to Goffman's work (Burns, 1992).

in the rue de Lille apartment kept by Aunt Caresse, Harry Crosby's widow. There he would begin writing his thesis; it seems unlikely that he was drawn into the existentialist cafés and jazz clubs of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. He would later tell a colleague that there is no better place than Paris to write a thesis, but we do not know more. [17]

Returning to Chicago, Erving found the atmosphere of the Sociology Department dramatically changed. Louis Wirth had died of a heart attack; William Ogburn and Ellsworth Faris had announced their retirement; Herbert Blumer had left for Berkeley; Lloyd Warner was involved in Social Research, Inc., the consulting firm he had founded with a few former students; Everett Hughes was brooding in his corner. After a brief period of despondency, Erving bounced back: He submitted his final PhD thesis statement in May, married Sky [18] in July, and published "Cooling the Mark Out" in the prestigious journal *Psychiatry* in November (Goffman, 1952). In addition, he landed two contracts. One was with Edward Shils, the redoubtable professor of sociology and political philosophy, who let him do what he wanted, while thinking no less of him. [19] The other was with the benevolent Warner, who took him on board as part of his consultancy firm to study service stations around Chicago on behalf of the American Petroleum Institute (Smith & Winkin, 2012). The result was a report in February 1953, *The Service Station Dealer: The Man and his Work*, which does not list Goffman's name, but does include his sparkling style.

Two births marked 1953 for Erving: that of his son Tom, born in April, and that of his thesis, defended in early summer. Goffman would later say that his thesis was not well-received. The jury, made up of Warner, Anselm Strauss, and Donald Horton, [20] was taken aback. Firstly, by the title: "Communication Conduct in an Island Community." Nobody was talking about "communication" at the time, except Bernard Berelson and Douglas Waples, two professors of library sciences who had just founded the interdisciplinary Committee on Communication at the University of Chicago (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004). Goffman also invented new vocabulary: "safe supplies," "faulty per-

[17] Interview with Dean MacCannell, May 17, 1987.

[18] I've never been able to learn whether it was a "grand wedding" or a "hush hush" wedding. Tom Goffman was born on April 16, 1953, ten months after the wedding, which clears up one red herring.

[19] Interview with Edward Shils, September 17, 1988.

[20] Donald Horton was then a young professor, recently arrived in Chicago. He probably replaced Everett Hughes on Goffman's jury. Hughes worked at Frankfurt University between March and June 1953, before traveling around Europe during the summer, notably to Paris and Liège (email from Philippe Vienne, December 19, 2020).

son," and so on. All of these terms make sense, but some seem to disappear after a few pages, to be replaced by still more new terms. Last but not least, Goffman had overturned the expectations of a department accustomed to fieldwork theses. True, he remained faithful to the ethnographic approach at the heart of the "Chicago School," but he dared to reverse priorities: The descriptive vignettes are clearly secondary to the general propositions. Warner was expecting a "community study" in the style of Solon Kimball and Conrad Arensberg, whom he had sent to Ireland in the 1930s. In fact, as early as 1953, Goffman had laid the foundations for his entire body of work. His thesis was wildly ambitious, a fact that his jury neither understood nor admitted, grudgingly granting him the title of doctor.

In early 1954, sociologist John Clausen, working for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), came to interview Erving for a position in the new Laboratory of Socio-Environmental Studies he was creating. NIMH officials were then concerned about the increase in the number of patients undergoing psychiatric treatment and the corresponding growth in the number of hospitals dedicated to them: up to ten thousand beds in some cities. The medical sciences were at a loss and wanted to know whether the social sciences might have a solution to offer. It was David Riesman, then professor of social sciences at the University of Chicago, who suggested Goffman's name to Clausen: "He's the most perceptive young man I've ever met in my life."[21] But what Clausen had not anticipated was that Goffman would turn the tables and ask his own questions. Apparently satisfied with Clausen's answers, he agreed to bring his wife and child to Washington, DC, but on condition that he would have complete freedom in his choice of hospital, without having to consider psychiatric definitions of mental illness.[22] Clausen was stunned by such assurance, if not arrogance, but hired Goffman anyway.

In early 1954, Goffman devoted a great deal of time to preparing a manuscript, provisionally entitled "Impression Management in Social Establishments": a forerunner of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He circulated the draft to a few close colleagues: Robert Habenstein, Warren Peterson, and Harold Garfinkel.[23] Peterson was enthusiastic:

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[21] Interview with John Clausen, May 4, 1987.

[22] Letter from John Clausen to YW, September 2, 1992.

[23] Pages from this manuscript are held in the Garfinkel Archives at the University of California, Los Angeles, library. I would like to thank Gary Jaworski for putting me on the trail of this document and Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz for giving me access to it.

> This, I think, is truly great. It should rank you among the giants, and if that isn't recognized for a year or two, don't worry about it. . . . It should get into the textbooks within ten years, remain there for thirty or forty, at which time someone will decide that Goffman is out of date and you will be mentioned in histories of sociology.[24]

In the fall, Erving, Sky, and Tom moved to the Washington, DC, suburb of Bethesda. Erving began by working in two pavilions at the NIMH Medical Center. Ward A was dedicated to pharmacological research; patients there were in full possession of their faculties. Erving lived among them for two months as a "control subject." Ward B was reserved for patients declared to be schizophrenic. Erving spent a few days a week there as the team's sociologist. In June 1955 he wrote of this experience in "Notes on Deference and Decorum in a Hospital Setting," published a year later in *The American Anthropologist* under the title "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor."[25] However, the 1956 version no longer includes the pretty gloomy description found in 1955:

> Mental hospitals throughout the world segregate their patients according to "degree of illness." By and large this means that patients are graded according to the degree to which they violate ceremonial rules of social intercourse. . . . In this institutionalization of a black mass it is no wonder that hospital staff can often be recruited for acolytes. (p. 45)

It was in this frame of mind that Erving entered St. Elizabeths Psychiatric Hospital in 1955 for a year of participant observation. As he made clear in the preface to *Asylums*, the book he published in 1961 based on his experience at the hospital, he "came to the hospital with no great respect for the discipline of psychiatry nor for agencies content with its current practice" (p. x). Located in Anacostia, on the southeastern outskirts of Washington, DC, St. Elizabeths is one of the oldest psychiatric hospitals in the United States. It is made up of a multitude of pavilions set in an immense wooded park with a bird's-eye view of downtown Washington, DC (Winkin, 2022c). At the time Erving entered, it had seven thousand beds. It was a quasi-autarkic institution, with a bakery and a small train to transport goods.

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[24] Unpublished memorandum from William Peterson to Erving Goffman, February 2, 1954.

[25] This text was then reprinted in *Interaction Ritual*, published in 1967.

Fundamentally, Erving wanted to understand the hospital from the inside, from the patients' point of view, not that of the psychiatrists. He needed to find a role that would be accepted by both staff and patients: To that end, he became "assistant to the athletic director," with no white jacket and no set of keys, just a T-shirt, jeans, sneakers—and a basketball. That was how he found himself playing tennis with the poet Ezra Pound, who was locked up in St. Elizabeths for several years after expressing sympathy for Mussolini's fascism (and being declared insane for it). All Erving had to do was abandon his sneakers in the corner to look like a patient.[26] He was not supposed to spend the night in the hospital. However, he made friends with the security guards at the entrance, who signed the register for him.

As he sank deeper and deeper into the hospital's "clandestine life," his anger mounted. He was not always able to control it completely. For example, at a seminar in his laboratory, he wanted to show how the staff physically controlled patients without leaving any trace of a blow. He grabbed one of his colleagues, someone much bigger than he, and twisted his tie, forcing his head to the table. Panicked, his colleagues asked him to stop immediately.[27] Another example: When invited to the Macy Conferences at Princeton in October 1956, he gave a very aggressive speech against psychiatry, despite or possibly because of the fact that there were many psychiatrists in the audience. Led by anthropologist Margaret Mead, they hit back blow for blow. He eventually made amends, but only rhetorically. I will return to this episode later,[28] but I see it as a tipping point: Erving is becoming Goffman, up against older peers who are more established than he, so we will have to stop calling him by his first name too often.

At home, the mood was no better. Sky was alone with Tom most of the time. Erving locked himself in his office, working like a madman. His rate of publication was dizzying: "On Face-Work" in 1955, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" and "Embarrassment and Social Organization" in 1956. Also in 1956, he published the first version of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* with the Social Science Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh. In the acknowledgements, he wrote: "Without the collaboration of my wife, Angelica S. Goffman, this report would not have been written." Indeed, she was his first reader, typist, and editor. But the happy days of student life in Chicago seemed long gone. Erving wanted a settled life, as if haunted by the

[26] Letter from John Clausen to YW, September 2, 1992.

[27] Interview with Erwin Linn, one of Goffman's colleagues at NIMH, December 6, 1995.

[28] See part 2, p. 21.

model of his in-laws, whom he barely knew. No more posters on the walls, no more framed reproductions, but real paintings instead. Sky borrowed a Raoul Dufy from her mother to please him. But such demands weighed heavily on her, and she did not always know how to cope. [29]

A respite came in 1957. Blumer, who had left Chicago to head the new sociology department at the University of California at Berkeley, invited Goffman to join him. Goffman accepted. At the time, Berkeley was doing well: Student enrollment was increasing, and professors were young and rapidly promoted. Interdisciplinary groups were formed on the basis of mutual esteem. Every Saturday morning, for example, an informal seminar was held on the theme of "language and society" (Murray, 1998). Participants included anthropologists (Dell Hymes, Ethel Albert), linguists (John Gumperz, Susan Ervin-Tripp), a psychologist (Dan Slobin), a philosopher (John Searle) and two sociologists: Aaron Cicourel and Erving Goffman, who took up his post in January 1958. He settled alone in Berkeley. Sky and Tom joined him a year later, once Erving had time to earn tenure.

In this intellectually stimulating atmosphere, Goffman published five books in five years: the definitive version of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Encounters* (1961b), *Asylums* (1961a)*, Behavior in Public Places* (1963a), and *Stigma* (1963b). Not surprisingly, he was awarded tenure in 1960 and reached the rank of professor in 1962. In 1961, he received the McIver Award from the American Sociological Association. His career was taking off. He was on the road to fame, thanks to *Presentation of Self*, which was published directly in paperback by Anchor Books and went on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies, benefiting in part from the wave of baby boomers now of university age.

At home, however, life was not easy. Sky experienced episodes of deep depression. Hospitalization was out of the question, as Erving knew the situation too well. So, he made sure to keep the key to the medicine cabinet in his possession. When Sky's health permitted, they drove—Erving had bought himself a Morgan—to Las Vegas, Reno, or Lake Tahoe for casino weekends. They enjoyed playing blackjack, using strategy based on the early mathematical models developed by Edward Thorp. This strategy makes it possible to "beat the dealer" by betting the same amount until the game tips over. This required coming to the table with a fair amount of money—but that was not a problem for Sky, who also had an excellent visual memory.

[29] Information provided in an exchange of letters with Helen and Stewart Perry in 1992. The Perrys were close friends of Angelica Choate. Helen was the secretary for *Psychiatry* and Stewart ran one of the NIMH clinics.

Erving was not very good because he could not keep a poker face. But they still managed to win a fair number of games—which eventually led to them being placed on the unwanted list at several establishments. When they were asked to leave the premises, they were delighted to do so because it meant they were considered too good.[30]

This world of play, which allowed him to reconnect with Sky from time to time, also inspired Erving's third great piece of fieldwork, the most mysterious, about which he published almost nothing. He alluded to it a few times in "Where the Action Is," the sixth chapter of *Interaction Ritual*. But nothing else. Even so, he prepared for the context very seriously, taking croupier training courses, and buying special pants with very deep pockets so as to always have chips on hand.[31] A journalist named Paul Jacobs apparently interceded on his behalf with Moe Dalitz, one of the Jewish Mafia bosses who controlled several casinos at the time. Jacobs reportedly told Goffman: "I have got you a position. But you better not write anything about Dalitz—or his casinos. The man has a lot of muscle in this town. He's head of the *schul*."[32] If Dalitz played the role of Goffman's protector, he must have worked at either the Desert Inn or the Stardust, two bastions of the Jewish Connection. He sometimes stayed in Las Vegas for several weeks, renting a studio with his son, whom he no longer dared leave with his mother for too long, given her deteriorating mental health.

Sky committed suicide in May 1964. Erving was totally devastated, although he did not let it show to visitors. Another way of keeping control was to write "The Insanity of Place," a third-person account of their last years together. This was Goffman's only autobiographical article, and the most moving, once you know who he was describing (1973, pp. 313–361).

That same year, 1964, Berkeley became the epicenter of the student revolt: student strikes, arrests, and the National Guard on campus. Goffman had little sympathy for the movement and showed little patience with his students. Remaining cloistered at home, he told one of his doctoral students "the university is a place to pick up your mail" (quoted in G. Marx, 1984, p. 659). Thus it came as no surprise when he left Berkeley in 1966. He was a visiting professor at the University of Manchester for a few weeks in the spring, then moved with his son to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he spent a year as a research fellow at Harvard's Center for International Af-

[30] Interview with Tom Goffman, August 24, 1991.

[31] Interview with Aaron Cicourel, April 18, 1985. Cicourel visited Goffman during one of his stays in Las Vegas.

[32] Letter from Ted Harwood to YW, December 30, 1991. "Schul" in Yiddish means "school."

fairs. The Center was founded in 1958 by two professors, Robert Bowie and Henry Kissinger. Kissinger, in his capacity as advisor to the US government, was certainly busy with other pressing matters in the autumn of 1966, but Goffman forged a working relationship with Thomas Schelling, the future Nobel Prize winner in Economics in 2005, whose work on strategic issues was to influence Goffman's thinking. Despite the mentorship he received there, strolling around the center was out of the question for Goffman, who mainly opted to work at home, escaping only from time to time, sometimes to dine with a few colleagues at Harvard's Faculty Club,[33] sometimes for an outing to Boston.[34] As a result, his year at Cambridge proved very productive: He published *Interaction Ritual* in 1967, wrote the manuscript for *Strategic Interaction*, which came out in 1969, and worked on *Frame Analysis*.

Goffman and Tom returned to Berkeley in 1967–1968, but he had to decide whether to stay or accept one of the offers made by various universities. The conditions offered by the University of Pennsylvania were particularly generous. As Benjamin Franklin Professor, he would only have to teach one seminar a year, and his salary would rise from $20,000 to $30,000,[35] so he moved to Philadelphia at the end of 1968. His office (and that of his private secretary) was located in the Anthropology Department, not the Sociology Department, to avoid any tension. The years at Penn were to be very serene. He bought and had renovated a beautiful house on Rittenhouse Square, in one of the city's most upscale neighborhoods. He protected himself by working and welcoming students into his home and having almost no presence on campus; it was rumored that his secretary met him on the sidewalk to deliver his mail. But this did not stop him from getting involved in several collective activities at the University of Pennsylvania, often in partnership with Dell Hymes, whom he had known since Berkeley: He was associate editor of the journal *Language in Society*, created and directed by Hymes, and together they edited the Communication and Conduct series launched by the University of Pennsylvania Press. They also joined forces with anthropologist and musicologist John Szwed to create the Center for Urban

[33] Colleagues included John Rawls, Robert Nozick, and Charles Fried (letter from Thomas Schelling to YW, April 30, 1991).

[34] This is how he met documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman, who was editing *Titicut Follies*. They didn't hit it off (interview with Wiseman, November 21, 2002). See Ricks (2010, p. 57).

[35] Translated into 2026 dollars, $20,000 dollars in 1968 would be $186,000, and $30,000 would be $279,000. A salary analysis from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* shows that the University of Pennsylvania paid its full professors an average annual salary of $223,000 in 2021–2022.

Ethnography, offering fellowships to doctoral students wishing to conduct ethnographic work in urban environments. He was undoubtedly caught up in the flood of creative energy that swept through the university in the 1970s. A new generation of professors in their thirties and forties arrived on campus; they attracted one other, created interdisciplinary alliances, and shared both students and invitations (Leeds-Hurwitz & Sigman, 2010). Hymes brought Goffman, and together they brought William Labov; then Goffman brought Birdwhistell, and so on (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2025).

Students were encouraged to take courses outside their own department, and to attend lectures by visiting foreign professors. Evenings often brought teachers and students together, though Goffman was not known to participate in these events; he seemed to be keeping his distance. His son was about to enter medicine. Goffman accepted invitations to travel abroad: Paris, Urbino, Rio de Janeiro, etc., and he often received colleagues in his home. In 1972, for example, he hosted Pierre Bourdieu while the latter was visiting the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study.[36] He enjoyed unearthing antiques with Henry Glassie, a good colleague in the Folklore department. To sneak into sales reserved for professionals, they printed a business card: "*Goffman & Glassie—English Oak. Folk Art.*"[37] Another hobby was unicycling, which Goffman practiced through the quiet streets of his neighborhood. Predictably, he fell and broke a leg. The story (as told by Gillian Sankoff) does not say whether he was listening on his walkman to Randy Newman's "Short People," one of his favorite songs. In 1977, he won a Guggenheim Fellowship to study casinos, not only in New Jersey, which had just authorized them, but elsewhere in the world.[38] At the same time, he met Gillian Sankoff, a Canadian sociolinguist who had come to Penn to work with Labov. She began by taking Goffman's seminar and ended up accompanying him to the American Sociological Association's conferences.[39] They married in 1981.

[36] Bourdieu had already had *Asylums* translated in the "Le Sens commun" collection he edited at Editions de Minuit; in the 1970s and 1980s, he translated no fewer than seven books by Goffman, making Goffman the most translated contemporary American sociologist in France. See Winkin (2023).

[37] This business card was given to me by Henry Glassie when we met on April 18, 1986.

[38] According to Lee Ann Draud, Goffman's secretary and editorial assistant at the University of Pennsylvania, Goffman rented an apartment in Nevada for nine months, in order to resume fieldwork in the state's casinos (interview with YW, April 29, 1991). It is unclear whether he stayed there that long, but in any case, he did not teach any courses in Philadelphia in 1977–1978.

[39] In August 1980, Goffman introduced Gillian as his "lifemate" to Mary Jo Deegan, then a young assistant professor at the University of Nebraska (Deegan, 2014, p. 77).

The years at Penn were especially productive: *Strategic Interaction* (1969), *Relations in Public* (1971), *Frame Analysis* (1974), *Gender Advertisements* (1979), and *Forms of Talk* (1981). The year 1982 should have been his year of triumph: He became father to little Alice; he spent May in Paris with Gillian at Bourdieu's invitation; he was elected thirty-seventh president of the American Sociological Association. But, early in the summer, his health took a sudden turn for the worse: He was diagnosed with cancer. He had to cancel his presidential address, the title of which, "The Interaction Order," was also the title of the last chapter of his doctoral thesis, as if he had come full circle. He died in Philadelphia on November 20, 1982.

*Reproduced with permission of American Sociological Association.*

Erving Goffman poses in his office for photographer Frederick Meyer (circa 1975). This photograph became his official portrait and has been reproduced in numerous publications.



The participants at the Fifth Conference on Group Processes, held in October 1958 in Princeton. Goffman is wearing a bow tie (first row, second from the right).

*Courtesy of the University Archives, University at Buffalo, the State University of New York.*

*Courtesy of the University Archives, University at Buffalo, the State University of New York.*

February 16, 1970: Goffman agrees to pose for the photographer for three minutes before beginning the first of his three Fenton Lectures at SUNY Buffalo in front of a packed auditorium.

*Courtesy of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.*

Participants at the Wenner-Gren Foundation symposium on secular rituals at Burg Wartenstein Castle, August 1974. Goffman is not posing like the others.

1st row from left to right: E. Goffman, E. Hunt, V. Turner (org.), C. Nakane, B. Myerhoff, E. Colson, E. Vogt / 2nd row: J. Kessler, J. Middleton, J. Goody, R. Da Matta, S. Moore (org.), B. Kapferer, M.J. Aronoff, L. Osmundsen / 3rd row: M. Gluckman (org.), M.N. Srinivas, T. Turner, J. Peacock, F. Manning.



In 1978, Goffman received the *In Medias Res* prize at the Schloss Hugenpoet, in the suburbs of Essen (Germany). This is the only known photograph of Goffman wearing glasses.

PART TWO

# Goffman on Stage

In US academia, invitations to give a talk, particularly as a keynote speaker, are highly valued and diligently listed on a CV. Such events include not only lectures within academia but also outside it—for example, at a Rotary Club. Talks of this type are typically listed as "community service," which refers to projects encouraged, if not required, by university administrators as a way to share knowledge with the surrounding communities. They are part of a tradition of public discourse dating back to the religious origins of the first universities in the US, which have always offered speaking courses to their students: The aim is not so much to study speeches as to write them and participate in oratorical jousts—a process that led to the creation of speech departments in the nineteenth century and communication departments in the twentieth (Winkin, 2004).

Goffman was a frequent public speaker, whether at conferences, symposia, or debates with colleagues. But he confined himself to the academic arena; he never entered the public lecture circuit and refused all media activity. He declined all requests for interviews, and almost all requests for photographs. Hence his aura of a secretive, home-bound hermit. Despite this, he actually moved around a lot, first within the United States, then in Europe. And he meticulously prepared his presentations. In 1985, when I interviewed Aaron Cicourel, who knew Goffman well, he told me the following: "He was a master of very theatrical, very prepared lectures. . . . He always gave a big performance, even for his graduate students at Berkeley. I went to so many colloquia with him. Always a powerful performance. And he was very careful about his preparation, very careful." [1]

[1] Interview in Paris, April 18, 1985.

One thing seems certain: Goffman hardly moved during his lectures; instead, he stood behind the desk and did not improvise. His "powerful performance," to use Cicourel's words, rather arose from his commitment to the subject, his vocal and visual intensity, his bodily tension—in a word: his presence.[2] The "power" of his lectures undoubtedly rested on the fact that they were long, dense, full of quotations and slides. But these same characteristics could have made them perfectly soporific. So how did Goffman hold his audience? We should not expect precise answers, as data are scarce. As mentioned previously, no audio or audiovisual recordings seem to have been made, or at least none have survived. On the basis of interviews and documents, I have only been able to reconstruct atmospheres, without ever succeeding in detailing the specific content of his lectures or grasping his oratorical techniques. That is, except for one: his distancing himself from photographers. Strangely enough, his presentations were not even listed on his CV.[3]

## *"He Trashed Me"*

Goffman's oral career began in Winnipeg at St. John's Technical High School, in the debate tournaments seemingly organized by every school on the North American continent. The aim was to train students in the art of argumentation in a practical way: The teacher asked a question, leading to two diametrically opposed responses. A pupil adopted a position, defended it, and attacked that of his classmate. This is how Brian Burke once faced Erving Goffman on the question: "Which is better: coffee or tea?" Brian took the position defending tea; Erving defended coffee. He was so fierce in his criticism of Brian's arguments in favor of tea that Brian preferred to admit defeat: "He trashed me."[4] This is one of Goffman's traits that all who knew him have emphasized: intensity and the will to win at all costs, whether in a contest of oratory, tennis, or cards.

## *"Don't Behave as if We Shouldn't Respect You"*

In October 1956, Goffman was invited to the prestigious Macy Conferences at Princeton University, at the suggestion of Ray Birdwhistell, his former

[2] On "presence" in the theater, see the anthology of definitions compiled by Josette Féral (2012, pp. 27–40.)

[3] At least in the one he sent me on April 3, 1980.

[4] Interview with Brian Burke in Winnipeg, May 30, 1991.

professor. This was a very closed circle, in which some twenty leading figures in the social sciences were invited to discuss a given theme with each other over several days (Winkin, 1984). Discussions were recorded, transcribed, reread by their authors, and published. Between 1954 and 1958, meetings were devoted to "group processes." Among the 1956 guests were Gregory Bateson, Margaret Mead, and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann. During his talk, Goffman used the word "disgorgement" to refer to the discharge of patients from psychiatric hospitals. Several psychiatrists were in the room, and they began to get agitated. Mead became their spokesperson: "Disgorgement means vomiting. Is that what you mean?" (Goffman, 1988, p. 119). At first, Goffman gave the impression of retreating, but with a few well-turned phrases, he then sent his opponents back on the ropes. Frank Fremont-Smith, the symposium director, pretended that everything was finally back to normal, but behind the scenes he chastised Goffman: "Mr. Goffman, you wouldn't be here if we didn't respect you. Now, don't behave as if we shouldn't respect you." [5]

What is less well-known is that, in the evenings, some of the participants got together to play poker. Goffman played very well, but very hard—with such intensity that Birdwhistell withdrew from the game. [6] Then Alex Bavelas proposed a game of his own invention: "Goodbye, sucker." [7] The aim was to form an alliance with a partner, then betray him or her. Goffman loved it.

The participants apparently didn't hold Goffman's raging behavior against him: Two years later, he was invited back to Princeton. In the group photo, he looks cute in his bow tie and suit pocket. [8]

## *"Mrs. Frederickson, Don't Be So Nostalgic"*

From the late 1950s onwards, Goffman had to give lectures and seminars. These are scenes that need to be mentioned, since he found himself performing in them as he did in his public lectures. The testimonies of his former Berkeley students are consistent. Goffman carefully prepared his lectures: notes, annotated readings, slides—no long, threadbare digressions to pass the time, nothing but facts, references, and projected images to comment

[5] Remarks reported by Ray Birdwhistell in an interview with YW on May 14, 1985.

[6] Interview with Ray Birdwhistell, May 14, 1985.

[7] In French, this could be translated as "Casse-toi, pauvre con." Any connection with a well-known personality is deliberate.

[8] See photo in insert after p. 19. Recognized, among others, are: Margaret Mead (first row, third from left), Konrad Lorenz (first row, fourth from right), Erving Goffman (first row, second from right), and Ray Birdwhistell (third row, third from right).

on. Goffman was a true professional, serious and dedicated to his science. He would arrive at the podium with his arms full of books, from which he would read excerpts. There were few gestures, no long and wide movements, no informality or casual conversations with students. In fact, he was not "Erving" to anyone, despite the relaxed, informal air of the times; rather, he was "Mr. Goffman" to everyone. Despite all his poise, however, there were occasions when his moodiness broke through. For instance, when a student attending his 1962 post-graduate seminar on "social contracts" dared to point out that he had just contradicted himself, Goffman stopped. The students froze. He remained silent for a few moments, then responded to the student: "Mrs. Frederickson, don't be so nostalgic."[9] Much later, at the University of Pennsylvania, at the very start of the fall 1976 seminar, he asked students whose names were not listed on the door to leave the room. In other words, they were not being admitted to the course. The result was silence and stares, and no one was sure how serious he was. Goffman told them: "Look, I have a queen, I know what the law is and I obey orders." None of the students, me included, immediately understood what a queen had to do with his admonition. It was only later that I understood that he was referring to the Queen of England, still the supreme authority in Canada, and he was still her subject. His sense of humor is the measure of the distance he always kept from his students. According to Dean MacCannell, who attended a Goffman seminar at Penn in 1970, he could go so far as to make fun of his students without them even realizing it:

> As the students shifted back and forth between actually learning something and total incomprehension, Goffman would drop a few hints about what they should have read but obviously hadn't. Then he would engage in often outrageous behavior that went straight over their heads. Fancifully false attributions they should have easily caught, etc. He and I entered into a silent conspiracy not to mark or in any way reveal his frame shifting. Sometimes the jokes were so funny it was difficult to suppress laughing out loud. Once afterwards I told him that I was "appalled" at his behavior, but even more appalled at the ignorance and/or timidity of his graduate students that enabled him. He gave me one of the biggest smiles I ever got from anyone.[10]

But it is possible that Goffman took advantage of the exceptional presence of a young colleague to indulge in these antics that year, and that his attitude

[9] Interview with Dave and Vera Frederickson, March 14, 1987.

[10] Email from Dean MacCannell, December 29, 2021.

toward his students was otherwise more benign. The memories of other students who took part in his seminars in the 1970s reveal a much different picture: that of a teacher who was certainly very demanding (with a huge list of compulsory readings), but also very respectful, very professional. Stuart Sigman, who attended his seminar on "Social Interaction" in the spring of 1979, recalls: "I always felt that, for Goffman, the classroom was a rehearsal for his writing. He generally had a manuscript in front of him, though he didn't read it out loud so much as choose particular paragraphs to recite and then either illustrate with video or other data, or in some other way flesh out."[11] But he did welcome questions at the end of class, and invited students to continue discussion either in his office or at a meeting in his home. He took them very seriously as future colleagues.

Thus, we have two very different portraits of Professor Goffman.

## *"Mr. Harwood, My Member May be Old"*

When Ted Harwood heard Goffman's formulation on the phone, he did not understand its double meaning, which was later explained to him by a colleague: "Mr. Harwood, although my member may be old, my filiation has not withered."[12] It was in these terms that Goffman agreed to give a lecture in the early 1960s to students in the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago, at the invitation of Ted Harwood, a doctoral student in sociology. Every year, a colloquium was organized by the students; it was tradition at Chicago. Goffman presented "Symbols of Class Status" there in 1949, and so it was expected that he would give the opening lecture a few years later. What was less standard was his request to the organizers: no journalists in the room. The organizers understood the reason for this when they discovered that, under the title "A Random Walk Through a Social Organization," Goffman wanted to talk about his fieldwork in Nevada casinos. The expression "random walk" comes directly from the world of casinos: This is the moment when everything can change—the player can lose everything as well as win everything. He just has to keep on playing, as if walking on a tightrope, and hope that luck will finally be on his side. Goffman explains this oscillation in detail in "Where the Action Is" (Goffman, 1967,

[11] Email from Stuart Sigman, December 30, 2021.

[12] All the information comes from a letter from Ted Harwood to YW, dated December 30, 1991, and an interview with him in Boston on January 14, 1992. It was David Riesman who suggested I get in touch with his former student, a professor at Boston University who specializes in casinos.

pp. 149–270). But in his talk to students in Chicago, he was less interested in explaining probability than in offering an ethnographic description of the atmosphere in casinos, which was based on contempt for gamblers, whom the staff regarded as "degenerates." Casinos, Goffman suggested, are based on "the administration of deprivations to their clientele," which he went on to compare to "the deprivations . . . of other institutions, such as Buchenwald or Dachau."[13] Goffman could have proposed that casinos are total institutions, like psychiatric hospitals. Instead, he compared them directly to concentration camps. That is an example of how much leeway he allowed himself, when he felt confident, in expressing himself brutally. It is true that Goffman cultivated strong formulations in his writings. But he did not take any risks other than rhetorical ones; he titillated his readers, and they loved it. Nevertheless, one can imagine the serious trouble he might have faced if any of his comments from this talk had been channeled back to the Mafia bosses who controlled the casinos at the time.

In this one example, we see the emergence of a pattern that would be confirmed over the years: If he felt in no way threatened by his audience, Goffman could be charming, humorous, even daring in what he said. At his Chicago lecture, he was surrounded by students who must have soaked up his words; and so, he let loose. Whereas when he spoke at Princeton, he was confronted by mostly hostile colleagues; as a result, he reared back. But beware: One Goffman can always hide another.

## *"Can We Get Erving to Make a Magnificent Peroration and Then Have a Discussion?"*[14]

In 1964, the organizers of a three-day colloquium at the Institute of International Studies of the University of California at Berkeley were more political scientists than sociologists, but they did incorporate into the title a formulation that Goffman had provided to them as a member of the preparatory committee: "Strategic Interaction and Conflict" (Archibald, 1966). All the contributors were heavyweights, including a future Nobel Prize winner, Thomas Schelling; a future hero of the fight against the war in Vietnam, Daniel Ellsberg—who would go on to reveal the "Pentagon Papers" to the

[13] The items in quotation marks are also in quotation marks in the letter cited in note 12, meaning that they are phrases formulated by Goffman and noted on the fly by Ted Harwood.

[14] Sentence pronounced by the session chairman, Frederick Balderston, who was trying to get Goffman to end his speech quickly (quoted in Jaworski, 2023, p. 98n59).

world—and one of the discreet high priests of American nuclear philosophy, Albert Wohlstetter. Goffman embarked on a lengthy analysis of the relevance of the notion of communication for thinking about strategy and conflict. He was interrupted by both Ellsberg and Wohlstetter, who felt that he was discussing the sex of angels (while they were coordinating with military strategists on the best way to use an atomic bomb). While the chairman sought to move on to a more general discussion ("Can we get Erving. . ."), Goffman continued to debate his critics, unimpressed by their status. It was as if Goffman was still facing his high-school classmate, defending the virtues of coffee against those of tea.

## *"What Do You Want Me to Do, Max, Fall on My Knees and Pray?"*

In 1966, Goffman accepted an invitation from Manchester University to give the Simon Lectures to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The visit lasted six weeks. He arrived with his son Tom, age 13.[15] Anthropologist Max Gluckman, the department's tutelary figure, greeted him with a standard welcome: "Well, Erving, we're very glad you're coming to work with us." Goffman's response: "What do you want me to do, Max, fall on my knees and pray?"[16] The collective narrative that would be passed around the department was that Goffman was unpleasant to everyone: aloof, ostentatiously reading *The Financial Times* to check the stock market, spending his time at the Salford casino, arguing with waitresses in restaurants. He gave four three-hour lectures, insisting on the importance of fieldwork, not hesitating to shock the students from time to time: "If you have to sleep with them, sleep with them." Despite this tense atmosphere, he had a huge impact on the intellectual evolution of the department. At the time, he was still collaborating with Harold Garfinkel, who would publish *Studies in Ethnomethodology* the following year. He was also very familiar with Harvey Sacks, whose thesis he had supervised for many years at Berkeley. He introduced the department's young sociologists (Wes Sharrock, John Lee, Rod Watson) to ethnomethodology and recommended them to Garfinkel, who visited Manchester in 1972–1973. The testimony of Wes Sharrock—a historical pillar of the department who remained there for over fifty years—is interesting to quote in this respect:

[15] Interview with Rod Watson, January 10, 1993.

[16] Interview with Wes Sharrock, January 10, 1993.

> Shortly after I went to the Manchester University in the mid-1960s to do post-graduate work, Goffman visited the department for several weeks. One of the papers he presented was an introduction to what was to become *Frame Analysis* (1974). In the course of those fascinating talks, Goffman made complimentary mention of the work of Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks. I had previously encountered Garfinkel's work but had never heard of Sacks. The latter sounded interesting because, according to Goffman, he was developing an account of interactional sequencing. . . . Goffman's recommendation I felt had to be taken seriously. . . . Whoever Sacks was, I was certainly going to find out what he was doing. (Sharrock, 1999, p. 120)

It is therefore safe to say that Goffman's visit to the Sociology Department at the University of Manchester in 1966 was integral to the department's emergence as the heart of ethnomethodological and conversational analysis research in the 1970s and 1980s, however dysphoric Goffman proved to be during that stay. In terms of its impact on Goffman's career, this first stay in Europe can be credited with establishing his double-sided reputation: powerfully original intellectually, but personally off-putting. It was undoubtedly after this stay in Manchester that the rumor of an unmanageable Goffman began to spread throughout the international sociological community. Whereas, in fact, Goffman was (almost) always kind to those who invited him. Almost always.

## *"After This, There Will Be No More Photos"* [17]

In early 1970, Goffman agreed to give—for an honorarium of $4,000 [18]—the Fenton Lectures at the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNY Buffalo). These lectures were widely recognized and well attended by the university community in and around the city. As Goffman explained in a letter to his hosts, he would give "three lectures on the rules employed to produce different senses of reality, the transformation of one sense into

[17] Information supplied by Rod Watson in an email on January 14, 2022.

[18] It should be pointed out that Goffman paid his own way. But the fact remains that $4,000 in 1970 would be equal to $33,400 in 2026. In 1968, the University of Pennsylvania paid Goffman an annual salary of $30,000. The $4,000 figure was specified in a letter from the university's director of cultural affairs, addressed to Goffman on September 26, 1969. A copy was kindly sent to me by William Offhaus, reference archivist at the University at Buffalo, along with six photos taken on February 16, 1970, at the start of Goffman's first lecture.

another, and the alienating consequences of these organizational features."[19] He also specified the theme of each lecture: "Codes, modes and fabrications"; "Techniques of production"; "Limits of frames and vulnerabilities of framing."

The three presentations were held on February 16, 17, and 23 at 8:30 p.m. At the first lecture, the room was packed. Several press photographers approached Goffman as he took his place at the lectern. He gave them a stern look and said: "Okay, you've got three minutes to take all the photos you want. After that, there will be no more photos." His tone made it clear that he was not joking. Flashbulbs popped as Goffman posed, both hands on the lectern. He was wearing an impeccable suit, complete with pocket handkerchief, tie, and button-down shirt.[20] Very chic. But then a photographer arrived a few moments late and tried to take a picture of Goffman just as he was about to launch into his talk. Goffman interrupted himself, stepped down from the podium and ran straight at the photographer: "I can either give a talk or pose for pictures. I can't do both at the same time." The photographer was so upset that he dropped his flash, which shattered on the floor.[21] After this, Goffman returned to the stage and began his long lecture, which lasted almost two hours. No one moved. And no photographer showed up for the other two lectures. There were also slightly fewer people in attendance.

## *"Today, I Can Organize Symposiums with Wenner-Gren Funds"*

From August 31 to September 4, 1970, Goffman was co-chairman, with Thomas Sebeok, the big boss of American semiotics, of a highly international colloquium in Amsterdam on the "ethology of interactions," financed by the prestigious Wenner-Gren Foundation.[22] This was a serious endeavor. The list of participants reads like a who's who of the field at the time: Gregory Bateson, Irenaüs Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Paul Ekman, Adam Kendon, Desmond

[19] Letter from EG to the Cultural Affairs Department of SUNY Buffalo, dated October 2, 1969.

[20] See photo in insert after p. 19.

[21] Incident reported on January 16, 2022, by Tom Weinberg to Rod Watson, with whom he attended all three conferences. Tom Weinberg has vivid memories of the flash crashing to the ground.

[22] The Wenner-Gren Foundation, named after its founder, a Swedish industrialist who made his fortune in door-to-door Electrolux vacuum cleaner sales, has been funding research in anthropology and archaeology since 1941. Established in New York, it had a European base between 1958 and 1980 at Burg Wartenstein Castle in Austria. For further details, see Susan Lindee and Joanna Radin (2016, pp. 218–301).

Morris, Kenneth Pike, Harvey Sacks, etc. (Sherzer, 1971). Ray Birdwhistell, the founder of kinesics, was not present, but W. John Smith, a relatively unknown ethologist from the University of Pennsylvania, was there, and he was one of Goffman's main sources of information on ethology.[23] As co-chairman, Goffman was asked to summarize the discussions on the final day. He proposed a research program for the ethology of interactions, close to the themes that would appear a year later in *Relations in Public* (Goffman, 1971). He moved away from classical sociology, calling on anthropology, linguistics, and ethology, but without adopting a visionary stance, simply assuming a very concrete empirical approach.

Goffman must have already understood that his international stature was on the rise. In a conversation with him in April 1980, I mentioned his participation in the 1956 Macy Conferences at Princeton with Bateson, Mead, and Birdwhistell. But he immediately replied, without raising his voice: "Those were cowboys, freaks, stray dogs talking to stray dogs." The phrasing was harsh; perhaps he still remembered his heated discussion with Mead and certain psychiatrists. But what he really meant was that the participants in the Macy Conferences were disciplinary exiles, whereas he had always gotten positions in the heart of the discipline. The result was that he could now organize colloquia with Sebeok, funded by Wenner-Gren. In other words, he was in a position of power, or at least had entered certain academic circles of power.[24]

One of these circles revolves around Burg Wartenstein, the twelfth-century Austrian castle that the Wenner-Gren Foundation bought and renovated in the late 1950s to hold residential symposia lasting at least a week (in a spirit reminiscent of those held at Cerisy in Normandy). Between 1958 and 1980, eighty "symposia" were held there under the guidance of Lita Osmundsen, a New Yorker with great social skills, who loved to create a refined atmosphere in "her" château: elegant meals, musical evenings, walks in the park. She watched over every interactional detail:

> She was watching who directed comments to whom, paying attention to the rate of exchange, and particularly noticing the danger signs when someone was becoming marginalized. One of her observations was that a person who said

[23] Goffman suggested that I audit Smith's course at the Philadelphia Zoo, to learn how to observe monkeys in order to establish their ethogram.

[24] Pierre Bourdieu had discovered to his amazement that Goffman, whose name he had suggested for an invitation to join the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where he himself was a fellow in 1972, was still considered a marginal figure by many of the leading lights of American sociology (letter to YW, ca. 1980).

> nothing for the first day of the conference was unlikely to speak much for the rest of it, so Osmundsen introduced protocols that required everyone to speak on the first day. She also learned to watch for signs of an incipient rebellion and to intervene when necessary. (Lindee & Radin, 2016, p. 261)

The château had only forty rooms, so guests were hand-picked. Goffman was invited twice, in September 1970 and August 1974. Apart from a mention of his name in the list of participants, there is no trace of his presentation at the first colloquium, organized by George De Vos and Theodore Schwartz under the title "Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuity and Change." It sounds like Margaret Mead's style—and, indeed, she was present. Only the castle walls could tell whether Lita had to mediate her exchanges with Goffman. By contrast, for the second colloquium, "Secular Rituals," organized by Max Gluckman, Sally Moore, and Victor Turner (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977), we have the group photo, at the château entrance.[25] Goffman is in the front row, far left; he's not looking at the photographer but at the other participants. He has his hands in his pockets, appearing very relaxed. He's wearing a light-colored suit made of a lightweight fabric, with a dark pocket square to match his polo shirt. Twenty years have passed between the stilted attitude in the Princeton photograph and this one. He is clearly not the same man.

## *"His Notes Would Shake as He Talked"*

The arena in which Goffman was to perform most regularly from the 1950s to the 1970s was that of the great annual professional conventions of North American sociologists (American Sociological Association) and anthropologists (American Anthropological Association). On an almost fixed date, thousands of professors and doctoral students converge on a huge hotel in one of the major cities of the United States or Canada. There's something Durkheimian about these highly ritualized gatherings, with their solemn opening speeches; their hundreds of timed presentations in rooms that are sometimes too large, sometimes too small, but often too cold and windowless; their noisy cocktail parties every evening; their basement book sales; and so on. Participants wear ribbons indicating their status within the association, search for each other all day long, and chat in front of the elevators, looking over their interlocutor's shoulder to make sure they don't miss anyone they know.

[25] See photo in the insert after p. 19.

It would undoubtedly be possible to locate in the archives of these two associations documentation for all of Goffman's participation and presentations, year after year. But that is not the point. Rather, we need to try to understand how Goffman "performed" there, in the sense that his persona as a mysterious sociologist increased. Even for Dan Rose, one of his former students and a colleague at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Architecture: "It was the only time of year when most of us could see him. The rest of the time, he was in seclusion."[26] As a result, his passages in the corridors were noticed and commented upon, especially if Goffman suddenly addressed a group of colleagues, as when he was heard saying: "If I can't find anybody more important to talk with, I will come back and talk with you" (Berger, 1973, p. 354). He was just as theatrical in a room or in the corridors as on the stage: He appeared, disappeared, was sought after, popped up, then left again. His persona was based on discretion. No hugs, no exclamations of reunion. A tap on the shoulder and he would be gone. This was his way of letting an old comrade know that he had recognized him. But Goffman did not go to annual conventions to socialize, to see his colleagues, do a bit of urban tourism and eat well.[27] He was there to participate in a scientific meeting, and he did so intensely—as he always did when he found himself behind a lectern: "His notes would shake as he talked; he was very serious about the professional business," says Dan Rose.[28]

This can be discerned between the lines in his only surviving lecture, which exists in the form of a bootleg recording turned into a transcript published after his death (after approval by Gillian Sankoff): "On Fieldwork," which Goffman presented at the Pacific Sociological Association in 1974, at the invitation of John Lofland, one of his most loyal admirers (Goffman, 1989). Lofland had asked four colleagues (in addition to Goffman, they were Sherri Cavan, Fred Davis, and Jackie Wiseman) to speak spontaneously about their field experience in the first person. Did Goffman speak that day off

[26] Interview with Dan Rose in Philadelphia, April 22, 1991.

[27] That said, Goffman did not spend his evenings in his hotel room. Some of the people I spoke to mentioned his unpleasant behavior at convention parties, which must have contributed to his reputation as a strange character. In an interview in Philadelphia on January 21, 1998, Sam Kaplan remembered an ASA meeting in New Orleans at the end of August 1972, where sociologist Charles Page organized a party in his suite and invited Goffman, whom he didn't know personally. A knock at the door prompted Page to open. A small man stood in the doorway. "You must be Erving Goffman. Good evening, I'm Charles Page." Goffman: "I don't care who you are, I just want a drink." Page, who is tall and athletic, grabbed him by the sleeve: "Get out, you're not welcome here," and closed the door on Goffman.

[28] Interview with Dan Rose in Philadelphia, April 22, 1991.

the top of his head, letting ideas flow as they came? Probably not. Unlike his colleagues, who would illustrate their remarks with examples from their own fieldwork, Goffman would never mention Unst, St. Elizabeths, or Las Vegas. Instead, he set out general principles as he does in his writings, by enunciating the steps beforehand and then following them, which implies most likely having had notes in front of him. So Goffman did not speak in a ruffled manner. But he did nevertheless indulge in a few well-chosen formulations, which no doubt came to him in the moment: "Now the next thing you have to do is cut your life to the bone, as much as you can afford to cut it down" (Goffman, 1989, p. 127). In the same spirit, he became very concrete when describing integration into the community under study:

> One thing is, you should feel you could settle down and forget about being a sociologist. The members of the opposite sex should become attractive to you. You should be able to engage in the same body rhythms, rate of movement, tapping of the feet, that sort of thing, as the people around you. Those are the real tests of penetrating a group. (p. 129)

Finally, there was his deadpan humor, found throughout his work. But in this context it was at times situated, considering, for example, the fact that his speech took place in California: "You have to stop making points to show how 'smart ass' you are. And that's extremely difficult for graduate students (especially on the East Coast, especially in the East!)" (Goffman, 1989, p. 128). When Goffman uttered this phrase, the audience must have laughed; mockery is permanent between the two coasts, in all walks of life. We can see how, as an effective speaker, he built a complicity with an audience mostly coming from the West Coast, who knew that he lived on the East Coast, but also that he himself had lived on the West Coast for a long time. All speakers produce this kind of localized joke; even Goffman bent to the rule of the genre.

## *"We Don't Eat Lunch at the Faculty Club"*

While he began to draw crowds with his appearances at annual sociology and anthropology meetings, and was increasingly invited to Europe, Goffman still accepted numerous local invitations, many of which left no trace. For example, he gave three talks at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

In 1971, two professors, a sociologist and a philosopher, discovered a common interest in Goffman's work, and decided to set up a double course

of annotated readings and to invite the author, who accepted,[29] quite simply. What's more surprising is that neither the sociologist, Tom Hood, nor the philosopher, Dwight Van de Vate, had a personal relationship with Goffman. Their university was one of the country's oldest (founded in 1794), but it was not well-known or particularly recognized. Yet Goffman flew to Knoxville and spoke to the students for several hours about *Frame Analysis*, his book-in-progress. His only request to his hosts was: not to have lunch at the university's Faculty Club.

The second visit, in the mid-1970s, was already more formal: a public lecture, in a room that can hold 180 people. The chairs were full, and people were standing. Goffman came with the slides that would soon become part of *Gender Advertisements*. Tom Hood then recounts an incident that had happened before (in Buffalo, among other places) and will happen again (in Rio de Janeiro, among other places):

> Near the beginning of the lecture but before the slides of advertisement had started, a photographer for the student paper had the temerity to walk into the hall and began to take Goffman's picture without his permission. All of us remember Goffman stopping his presentation and sharply dismissing the photographer from the room without a picture. (Hood, 2017, p. 293)

Was Goffman creating extreme tension deliberately, to capture his audience's attention? Was he at the peak of his performance? Or was he simply trying to maintain a homogeneous frame for his lecture, while resisting the interference that would be induced by a photo shoot? Both interpretations are possible. But whatever his motivation, the cost of these interruptions was heavy: The conference had to be put back on track before it could proceed as planned.

For his third visit to Knoxville in the late 1970s, several departments mobilized to welcome Goffman. But a late plane was to disrupt the day's schedule. Goffman barely had time to swallow a sandwich before he found himself in a large, crowded amphitheater. His title: "The Social Psychology of the Conference." No incidents to report. Goffman won over his audience at the University of Tennessee's College of Liberal Arts and returned to Philadelphia.

[29] All my information comes from Tom Hood's afterword in Hood & Van de Vate (2017, pp. 291–294). I thank Greg Smith for bringing this work to my attention.

## *"Erving Let Everyone Know That I Should Be Promoted Soon"*

The situation was much the same when Goffman visited the University of California, Davis, in 1975. He didn't go to meet famous colleagues as he did at Burg Wartenstein; he quite simply went to do his "job" as an academic.

At the San Francisco airport, he rented a car to drive to Davis, only an hour and a half away. As usual, he took a VW Beetle, the only rental car he liked to drive. He hated American land yachts; he loved the nervous dryness of his Morgan. He went to stay with his host, Dean MacCannell, whom he had met at Berkeley as a student and then reconnected with in Philadelphia as a postdoc.[30] Dean was far from the tourism studies specialist he would become a few years later with his book *The Tourist*. He had just been hired by the University of California, Davis, but in the Faculty of Agriculture, not Sociology, a position at the bottom of the ladder in terms of prestige. He had yet to be tenured. So he was walking on eggshells. Goffman came to help him, but he did not want a big public event. Instead, he requested a small room holding no more than thirty people. He accepted a reduced fee of around $500.[31] The title he proposed was "Primary and Secondary Frames," which is predictable given that he had published *Frame Analysis* the year before.

Before the conference, MacCannell informed Goffman that he had already passed on the message that recording would not be allowed. When they arrived at the room, they found not only students but also colleagues there, some of them from far away. Goffman said nothing: He let MacCannell introduce him, thanked him, and announced that he would be speaking for at least two hours, and that he would understand perfectly if some of them had to leave the room before the end. Goffman did not specify that he would not allow recordings. He then spoke for over two hours from his notes, regularly making eye contact with the audience. "I believe he scanned the room searching for at least one person in the audience who was actually understanding what he was talking about. If he found even just one person who was 'getting' what he was saying, he delivered a straightforward lecture with helpful asides and clarifications."[32] The lecture over, MacCannell took

[30] All information on Goffman's two lectures at the University of California, Davis, comes from testimonials provided by Dean MacCannell (interview with YW, May 13, 1987; email correspondence with YW on December 28 and 29, 2021) and from the Erving Goffman Archives website curated by Dmitri Shalin (interview with Dean MacCannell, July 7, 2009). See note 3 in the Epilogue, p. 65.

[31] In 2026 dollars, $500 would be $3,000.

[32] Email from Dean MacCannell, December 29, 2021.

a dozen colleagues out for dinner at a local restaurant for the basics: pizza and beer. Half a dozen of them then met up at the department chair's house to continue chatting:

> Everyone who was there after dinner knew Erving very well. The conversation was relaxed, spontaneous, no one dominating, no one hanging back, lots of topic switching, lots of laughs. Without banging the drum too hard, Erving let everyone know that I should be moved to tenure quickly. I don't know how much impact his words had, but I was granted tenure in the second year of my appointment.[33]

At no time during his stay did Goffman express the slightest irritation or make any demands. He was surrounded by friends, not celebrities. His behavior was not unlike that of Michel Foucault at the Claremont Colleges, near Los Angeles, when he was invited in May 1975 by Simeon Wade, a young professor accompanied by his pianist friend, Michael Stoneman (Wade, 2021). With Wade's students and companions, he was perfectly approachable; with the teachers, he closed up and ran away.

Why did Goffman go to Davis in 1975? To discreetly support MacCannell, and to do a bit of promotion for *Frame Analysis*, of course, but what else? For the fee? Not likely: He had one of the highest salaries at the University of Pennsylvania, not to mention his stock market revenues. To test new ideas? Possibly. But in the absence of any written record of his presentation, that is very difficult to confirm or deny. For the pleasure of being on stage, feeling the attention of his audience, tasting once again the rush described by so many performing artists? That seems doubtful. Unlike his sister Frances, who made a career as a stage and screen actress, Erving had no love of the spotlight. So then we are left with one more possible motivation, which may seem surprisingly naive in the case of Goffman: that he believed in his discipline, that he had a crusader's faith in the scientific breakthrough represented by his approach to sociology, that he wanted to talk about it, defend it, get feedback. And for this "mission," he was ready to travel around the US and the world. This suggestion may not mesh with Goffman's reputation as a cynic, but that is precisely where Goffman the performer enters: He had this ability to split himself in two, sometimes appearing as an insufferable grouch, sometimes revealing himself as a dedicated researcher. The difficulty is that he remained unpredictable. Just because he was invited to a major international conference did not necessarily mean he would be pleasant.

[33] *Ibid.*

Nor did the fact that he might be put on a very small panel mean he would not spoil the mood. Germany provides a good case in point.

## *"He Read His Paper with Utmost Speed and Without Any Eye Contact with the Audience"*

Goffman was invited to Germany on several occasions: to Bielefeld in 1973, Constance in 1975,[34] Essen in 1978,[35] and Nuremberg in 1980.[36] A comparison of these four visits to the same country reveals a number of patterns in Goffman's performances as a lecturer.

From April 5 to 8, 1973, Goffman was invited to an "international workshop" organized by a group of young professors at the brand new University of Bielefeld. They succeeded in attracting some forty-five well-known speakers, including Harold Garfinkel, Harvey Sacks, and John Gumperz, to present on the theme of "speech act theory and the ethnography of communication." The university's Center for Interdisciplinary Research funded the entire operation, even providing drivers for the speakers. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was pretty heavy. One of the participants, sociologist Ralph Bohnsack, recalls that Harvey Sacks's presentation was difficult to understand, both because his terminology was so new and because the acoustics in the room were poor.[37] In addition, the stars were not very courteous to each other:

> I am absolutely sure that Goffman's talk was about *Frame Analysis* [more specifically] the frame analysis of talk (because the Bielefeld Conference was about sociology of language). We were especially curious because the book was not yet published. Goffman and Garfinkel were not so harmonious with each other (their former common doctoral student Harvey Sacks was also present), but they allied oneselves [*sic*] with caustic comments when [Thomas] Luckmann was talking. Garfinkel for instance commented as a reply that he himself just would be busy with a research [*sic*] about children's talk and Luckmann's way of talking would remind him to that [*sic*].[38]

[34] Emails from Andrea Ploder, January 1 and 3, 2021.

[35] Emails from Jörg Bergmann, March 16 and August 5, 2021, and February 1 and 3, 2022.

[36] Emails from René Salomon, September 9 and 19, 2021.

[37] Emails from Ralf Bohnsack, March 17 and August 5, 2021.

[38] *Ibid.*

Bohnsack's overall impression of the event was that Goffman and Garfinkel were "aloof and somewhat arrogant."[39] This perception is not unlike that retained by many witnesses to Goffman's stay in Manchester. It was as if Goffman wanted to shake off the public's devotion by presenting himself in an unpleasant light. But as soon as he was no longer being observed, he once again donned the garb of a humble, pleasant person. Fritz Schütze, one of the organizers of the Bielefeld meeting, drew laughter when he recalled his encounter with Goffman in an interview with a colleague:

> All these famous professors of qualitative research were very friendly and understanding to us, young German researchers. Goffman would come to Evi's and my little flat; he was extremely witty and at the same time very modest. He looked more like an American barkeeper (as far as I had an image on [*sic*] such an occupational type of person from American movies), and you would never imagine that this would be a very, very prominent professor of sociology. Being then a professor of [*sic*] the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, he had an old beetle car with an impaired heating, and in Winter times [*sic*], he put a *Steinhager flask* with hot water, this kind of earthenware bottle, under his beetle seat in order not to get too icy. (Kazmierska, 2014, p. 307)

When you consider that Goffman also owned a Morgan, one of the rarest and most anachronistically sophisticated English sports cars on the market, you can see that he literally "played it modest" at Fritz Schütze's place. It has to be said, too, that Morgans are convertibles, not really suited to winter on the American East Coast.

Two years later, from June 23 to 26, 1975, Thomas Luckmann (who was very famous in Germany) and Richard Grathoff organized a seminar at the University of Konstanz. They invited an array of prestigious US sociologists to the Hotel Drachenburg: Aaron Cicourel, Erving Goffman, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Anselm Strauss (presented here in alphabetical order, not in order of appearance). The audience consisted of some thirty colleagues.[40] Goffman presented elements of his ongoing work on radio conversations.[41] This time, the bad Goffman was the one who appeared:

> He read his paper with utmost speed and without any eye contact with the audience. He made critical remarks after the presentation of others (especially after

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Email from Jörg Bergmann, March 16, 2021.

[41] This is "Radio Talk: A Study of the Ways of Our Errors," which would appear in *Forms of Talk* (pp. 197–327).

> Schegloff) and seemingly had some knowledge of German sociology. His impression was that German sociology is bookish and remote from everyday life . . . [42]

According to another participant, Alexandre Métraux, Goffman had made no effort to dress up. Shaggy, dressed in a rumpled T-shirt, "[he] looked like he'd just come out of a gym where he'd just finished a two-hour workout." [43] This rebellious Goffman is the version we sometimes find when he was competing with colleagues whose research themes overlapped with his own. This was especially the case with Schegloff, whose analysis of "turn taking" in ordinary conversations has the gift of making Goffman tense, because he had recently become interested in the same topic yet approached it without the creativity of his younger colleague.

Despite his somewhat rocky relationship with his German (and North American) colleagues, Goffman was invited to Germany twice more. In 1978, he made a very discreet visit to Essen to receive the Prize for Research in Communication *In Medias Res*, funded by the Burda Group, one of Germany's largest publishers (with six hundred titles at the time). [44] The prize consists of a cheque for twenty-five thousand marks, presented during a very formal ceremony at the Schloss Hugenpoet restaurant near Essen. A private publication was issued by the Burda Group, with two photos of Goffman in full regalia (Prince-de-Galles jacket, black tie, and heavy-rimmed glasses). [45] But he smiles as he shakes hands with the master of ceremonies. His talk, set against a backdrop of bouquets of flowers, is entitled "Picture Frames," no doubt an adaptation of a chapter in *Gender Advertisements,* which was published in book form the following year. No details have been released about his attitude during the conference, but it seems likely he did not read his text at full speed with downcast eyes.

In February 1980, Goffman was again in Germany, this time at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg for a symposium on biographical research, organized by Joachim Matthes, Arno Pfeifenberger, and Manfred Stosberg. In view of Goffman's own reluctance to be the subject of a biography, [46] it

[42] Email from Jörg Bergmann, March 16, 2021.

[43] Email from Alexandre Métraux, February 6, 2022.

[44] The prize appears to have been awarded only five times. Other recipients include Elihu Katz (1977), Karl Deutsch (1979), Serge Moscovici (1980), and Irenaüs Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1981).

[45] I would like to thank Jörg Bergmann for scanning several pages of this impossible-to-find album for me. See the last two photographs in the insert after p. 19.

[46] See his letter to Irving Horowitz, dated July 2, 1976, as analyzed in the Epilogue (pp. 63–64).

may come as a surprise that he agreed to address this issue at a colloquium. But he had already discussed it in Constance in 1975 with colleagues whose work was essentially based on biographical reconstructions. He reuinted with them in Erlangen, where the dialogue continued. Here we find Goffman totally committed to research for research's sake.[47] His talk was strangely entitled "Recognition." Of course, his text did not appear in the colloquium proceedings and, as if a devilish angel were watching, the recorder malfunctioned during his talk. All that remains is a fragment of recollection from one of the participants: "He only criticized the idea of biographical reconstruction for not taking into account the influence of the order of interaction in situation."[48] Sounds like Goffman.

## *"It's Fun, It's Cheap and You Can Drink Good Wine"*

Pier Paolo Giglioli is a sociolinguist who studied with Goffman at Berkeley in 1967–1968. Paolo Fabbri is a semiologist who worked closely with Umberto Eco. The two Paolos invited Goffman to the International Center for Semiotics and Linguistics in Urbino, Italy, in July 1975. The center was founded in 1971 by Pino Paioni, one of Italy's first professors of semiotics. It soon became a summer meeting place for many Italian, French, and American intellectuals, from Louis Marin to Eliseo Veron, from Jean-François Lyotard to Michel de Certeau. Eco was a frequent visitor in the early 1970s. For the many post-graduate students who attended the lectures and seminars, it was a rather unique opportunity to rub shoulders with famous academics, who often proved to be open and relaxed, particularly at the "Semiotic Bar" at the foot of the road leading to the university, perched on the hill.

Goffman arrived with Joel Sherzer and his French-born wife, Dina Sherzer, who had a good grasp of local expectations.[49] He did not seem very comfortable in the happy hubbub of the center. He first presented a version of "Replies and Responses," which became the first chapter of *Forms of Talk* in 1981.[50] He read his text at full speed, maintaining his concentration, while

[47] It is perhaps worth noting that Goffman left an unfinished text on the notion of "personhood" (personal communication from Gillian Sankoff, April 1, 1986).

[48] Email from René Salomon, September 19, 2021.

[49] My two main sources of information are Paolo Fabbri (numerous informal discussions over the years since 1976) and Pier Paolo Giglioli (interview on May 8, 1992; informal exchanges in 2020–2021).

[50] "Replies and Responses" was pre-published in 1975 by the International Center for Semiotics and Linguistics at the University of Urbino in the form of a forty-two-page booklet. The center published such pre-publications every year, always in the same format

many listeners, or rather spectators, came and went as was customary in Urbino. But he did answer questions, taking care not to stray into unfamiliar linguistic or semiotic territory. He also attended other workshops, regularly asking questions, a bit like a good student, and not at all like a star trying to capture the spotlight. His second presentation was a classic: the slide carousel of images from *Gender Advertisements*, his "road show."

Goffman did not take part in the center's many parallel events. He was not seen at the Semiotic Bar; instead, he was seen wandering the streets of Urbino alone. In fact, he took an instant liking to the town, to the point of considering buying a house there: "It's nice, it doesn't cost much, and you can drink good wine."[51] This didn't stop him from keeping an eye on the stock market; no sooner had he settled in Urbino than he wanted to know how to access the day's figures. This was a constant for him. He had asked the same question in Manchester and would ask it again in Rio.

## *"He Said It Was an Invasion of His Privacy"*

Goffman always traveled from west to east, with one exception of north to south, for a few days in Rio de Janeiro in October 1978. At the express request of Howard Becker, his fellow Chicagoan, and perhaps Thomas Szasz, also an old acquaintance,[52] Goffman took part in the First International Symposium of the Brazilian Institute of Psychoanalysis, which was to launch an "anti-psychiatry" movement in Brazil through the combined efforts of representatives of the social sciences and psychoanalysts. Sitting around a large table were: Robert Castel, Félix Guattari, Franco Basaglia, Gilberto Velho, Erving Goffman, and Shere Hite, who became a feminist icon after her report on female sexuality, published in 1976 in the United States. Velho, whose sociological influence was immense in Brazil, recounts with amusement the incidents that punctuated Goffman's talk, starting with the interruption of his lecture when a student tried to take a photo. According to Velho, Goffman claimed this was an invasion of his privacy. Howard Becker had to intervene to convince his old friend to resume his talk (Velho, 2002, p. 11). His colleagues were clearly intrigued by Goffman, with his frequent requests to be kept abreast of New York Stock Exchange prices. Velho would have liked him to give other lectures during his stay.

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and layout.

[51] Sentence reported by Pier Paolo Giglioli in an interview with YW on May 8, 1992.

[52] Together, they had founded the Association for the Abolition of Involuntary Psychiatric Hospitalization in 1970.

Goffman, however, had other ideas, and fled before the symposium was over. Even so, Velho would talk for years about Goffman's visit to Rio,[53] helping to give it mythical status in Brazil.

## *"Let's Get Closer to the Tables, Otherwise We'll Get Screwed"*

From the 1950s onwards, Goffman regularly visited London.[54] He saw Liz Bott again, sometimes alone, sometimes with Sky. He became a familiar face at the Tavistock Institute, where Liz worked. But his visit in September 1979, at the invitation of facial expression psychologist Paul Ekman, to take part in the NATO Advanced Study Institute on Nonverbal Behavior Research Methods, a massive convening held over two weeks at the University of London's Birkbeck College (Scherer & Ekman, 1982), was undoubtedly a professional first for him—and a huge challenge. Dozens of researchers and PhD students had come to attend seminars given by all the hallowed figures in the field, from Robert Rosenthal to Adam Kendon. Birdwhistell was the only one to miss out: He was very wary of Ekman's work and NATO's involvement in this sector.[55] Goffman, for his part, played the game: Not only did he give a highly technical lecture entitled "Participation Frameworks," but he also took part in various methodological discussions, during which he reiterated his refusal to work with interviews.[56] He did agree to be consulted by students, myself among them. We found him to be relaxed, but serious and committed, aware of the importance of the theoretical and methodological stakes involved in the encounter.

One memory that emerges from that time: While we were chatting among students after one of his talks, he spotted us heading for the exit. He came back to us, bag slung over his shoulder, and slipped into our group to repeat what he considered to be his essential message: Social interactions must not be confused with social relations; either you study one or the other, but you can't study one in order to study the other. And off he went again.

A second memory: I was chatting with him while waiting for the buffet to arrive; suddenly, he interrupted me and said: "Let's get closer to the

[53] In fact, we talked a lot about Goffman during our dinner in Rio on April 25, 1995.

[54] Goffman spoke at the University of Edinburgh in 1978, on the occasion of Tom Burns's retirement (email from Greg Smith, January 26, 2022). However, as information on his talk is too fragmentary, I have decided not to devote a segment to it.

[55] It was only with great reluctance that he agreed to write a letter of recommendation in support of Stuart Sigman's and my application to the institute.

[56] Goffman forbade Carole Gardner from conducting interviews as part of her thesis (Gardner, 1999, p. 63).

tables, otherwise we'll get screwed." It was practical Goffman as formulated by Goffman.

At the final party, he arrived well-dressed in a dark jacket and pressed pants, without a tie. He gently declined a student's request to take a photo of him, but nothing more. He strolled from group to group with a drink in hand. This is the confident Goffman spotted on several occasions in dialogue with students, from Davis to Knoxville. He even took part in the big group photo. But he was not in the middle of the front row with his colleagues. Instead, he stood at the far left, half in shadow, his head turned towards his neighbor, as if he wanted to blend in with the huge group.

## *"Although the Titles of Some of the Lectures May Appear a Bit Esoteric to the Uninitiated"*

Under the broad title of "Space, Sign, Subject in Literature, the Arts, and the Social Sciences," a group of professors from the French and Italian Departments at the University of California, Davis, invited an international line-up of academic celebrities to three "workshops" on March 7 and 8, 1980: from Rosalind Krauss to Paul de Man, from Michel de Certeau to Paolo Fabbri, from Goffman to Thomas Sebeok. Speakers were free to choose their topics, but their lectures were not to exceed forty-five minutes, including questions. In compensation, the fees were generous.[57] Lecturers from Europe represented "French Theory," which was then spreading to American universities with a mysterious air. Speakers from across the US represented the cutting edge of American social science. Indeed, the organizers took the precaution of specifying in the *California Aggie*, the weekly paper distributed on campus: "Although the titles of some of the lectures may appear a bit esoteric to the uninitiated, the organizers of the conference are ready to vouch that anybody with a keen interest in the assumptions underlying human cultural expressions will find this conference fascinating and stimulating."[58]

Such an argument might not convince students today to take part in a colloquium, but the fact remains that on March 8, there were two hundred people in the room, including a few students from Berkeley, who decided

[57] I could not locate the compensation. It seems that the lectures were recorded by the Department of French and Italian, but they have not been found. This is according to Dean MacCannell.

[58] From the March 6, 1980, edition of *California Aggie*. I would like to thank the team of librarians at the University of California, Davis, in particular David Michalski, for their help.

to heckle Goffman's speech to protest his departure for the University of Pennsylvania. But Goffman remained unperturbed. His talk was entitled "Representational Space: A Frame Analysis"[59] and offered a frame-analysis of European cartoons, relying in particular on a technique called the "game of seven errors," which asks: What are the seven differences between two apparently identical drawings? It was his own way of doing semiotics and responding to the semioticians present. He read his notes and commented on his slides without ever asking the students to calm down. He could have interrupted himself and said something like "I can't talk over such a hubbub," but recognizing the high stakes of the colloquium, especially for Dean MacCannell, it appears Goffman did not want to give any importance to a few provocations. After his speech, he listened to the other speakers, went for lunch with them, blending in, never drawing attention to himself.

As in Urbino or London, Goffman offered a perfectly smooth presentation. Does this mean that, as the years went by, he presented himself as more toned-down? That would be too simple an interpretation. In fact, we might well ask whether he ever behaved like a "bad boy" during his presentations. Certainly, he disliked photographers. Certainly, he always forbade recordings. Certainly, he acted out—putting on a "clown show," as MacCannell put it—when he perceived that the audience had just come to see him, not listen to him.[60] But how often did this offbeat behavior truly occur? Is it not rather the rumor mill that has multiplied and amplified a few examples? We know that Goffman was the subject of anecdotes, which were told on campus, almost underground, to show complicity with the interlocutor or to let them believe in a privileged relationship with the master. These "Goffman stories," which emerged long before his death, gave him an aura of a strange but fascinating sociologist, whose every public appearance was scrutinized.

## *"It Looks Like a Stalag"*

In 1981, André Helbo was a young and ambitious professor of semiotics at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). He had the idea of launching an International Association for the Semiology of the Spectacle (Association internationale pour la sémiologie du spectacle [AISS]) by organizing an international colloquium that would welcome several prestigious speakers: Henri Laborit, Eugenio Barba, Annie Ubersfeld, and Goffman. André Helbo

[59] See the presentation in Manfred Kusch's symposium report (1980).

[60] Email from Dean MacCannell, December 29, 2021.

invited Goffman without knowing him personally, but Goffman immediately accepted. The AISS paid for his plane, hotel, and fees.[61]

The symposium took place from April 23 to 25, 1981. The guests stayed at the Sheraton, a newly opened luxury hotel that was offering promotional prices. Every morning, Helbo sent an "Orange Cab" (the company's name) to pick them up, and Barba enjoyed the Belgian surrealism in the fact that "cab orange" was written on the orange cab.

The colloquium was held in an amphitheater at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB), ULB's Dutch-speaking counterpart, which had just moved to a former military field. The buildings were brand new, but grim. There was not a tree in sight. Goffman remarked to Helbo: "It looks like a stalag."

The title of Goffman's talk was "The Lecture as Performance."[62] He apparently dramatized his talk by arriving ten minutes behind schedule. Everyone was waiting for him with a certain amount of anxiety, and then he emerged from the restrooms—and opened his talk on the ritual of conference timing. Between 150 and 200 people took their places in the room, many of them from outside the ULB. This included journalists, who would later manage to corner Goffman. He answered their questions, but no photos were published.

For the French-speaking Belgian public, Laborit and Barba were "monsters" of the field, and Goffman found himself somewhat overshadowed. He apparently made no attempt to get in touch with his colleagues, and even less so with ULB sociologists, who have no memory of him. Helbo would say: "He was distant, he had a withdrawn side, but not to the point of being unpleasant." He didn't visit Brussels; he only shuttled between his hotel and the colloquium. Low profile from beginning to end, once again.

## *"Hi Buddy"*

Invited to Lyon, France, on May 13, 1982, by a group of family therapists, I met my colleague and friend Jacques Cosnier, who told me that Goffman was in town and would be giving a lecture the following day, at the Université Lyon II. Did I want to go with him? Of course!

The next day, we squeezed into the back row of a small, crowded room. Goffman was due to close a colloquium entitled "Microsociologie et histoire," organized by Philippe Fritsch and Isaac Joseph. The latter was one of France's best-known experts on the Chicago School. He introduced and

[61] Zoom interview with André Helbo, February 11, 2021.

[62] A summary of his contribution appeared under this title in 1982 in *Degrés* (no. 31), the magazine founded by André Helbo in 1973 (and which he still edits today).

thanked Goffman, who took the floor, declaring: "Due to an event beyond my control, the birth of my daughter, I have not prepared a paper." This sparked laughter in the room. But then a curious incident occurred: The translator was so moved that she explained to Joseph that she could not continue. As a result, Joseph asked if someone in the audience could come to the front and take over the translation. Cosnier took and raised my arm. That was how I found myself sitting next to Goffman, who did not seem the least bit surprised to see me: "Hi buddy." Goffman's impromptu talk went well. Not once did he ask not to be recorded or photographed.[63] There was no dramatic effort on his part, just a conversation between colleagues.

After the session, we did chat for a few minutes. We discovered that we were both due to participate in the same symposium in Italy a few weeks later. But, in the end, neither he nor I could make it. And we never saw each other again.

## *The Presentation that Did Not Occur*

As president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), Goffman was meant to read his "Presidential Address" to all the participants at the annual meeting, held that year at the San Francisco Hilton Hotel, from September 6 to 10, 1982. But he was already too ill to travel. No one would read the speech for him. However, Goffman had carefully written his text over the preceding months. All he had to write after the missed presidential address was a "prefatory note" with a view to publication (Goffman, 1983). Without going into the content of this important speech, one can note its formal similarities to the text "The Lecture," read in public in 1976 and published in *Forms of Talk*: He used the same deadpan humor, the same interlocking frames, the same attempt to surprise through sudden breaks in register. One paragraph of "The Lecture" seems strangely prescient:

> One can become aware of the situational work of overlayed keyings, text bracketing, and parenthetical utterances by examining the disphoric [*sic*] effects which result when circumstances require someone other than its author to read the author's talk. . . . A nonauthorial speaker, that is, someone filling in, can preface his reading with an account of why he is doing it, avow at the beginning that the "I" of the text is obviously not himself (but that he will use it anyway), and

[63] Goffman's impromptu talk was published in 1984, with a note explaining that "this text was written on the basis of the simultaneous French translation of Erving Goffman's presentation" (Goffman, 1984).

> even during the reading, break frame and parenthetically add a comment of his own, as does an editor of printed text in an editor's footnote. But to speak a passage with irony or passion would be confusing. Whose irony? Whose passion? (Goffman, 1981, p. 180)

What the exegetes failed to notice was that two days later, on Friday, September 8 at 8:30 a.m., Goffman was to chair a "didactic seminar" on the theme of fieldwork, with Robert Emerson, Gary Alan Fine, Carol Stack, and Jason Ditton.[64] That an ASA president should want to lead a meeting for students on a Friday morning at the end of the annual meeting speaks volumes about Goffman's faith in fieldwork. His presidential address has often been referred to as his last testament. True, but we have forgotten his very last message: the field, again and again.

[64] Information available in the 1982 annual meeting program, available online at the American Sociological Association website.

PART THREE

# The Lecture as Performance

## *But Why Do Academics Give Lectures?*

Academics accept lecture invitations because part of their mission is to disseminate knowledge, over and above formal courses and seminars. But in reality, there is more to it than that, and it can be complicated to explain. The invitation, wherever it comes from, is always flattering, and the desire to be the hero for an evening is almost irrepressible. It has to be said, too, that few academics refuse a little extra income if a fee is involved. They may also see the lecture as an opportunity to see a lot of the country and meet some interesting people. One can find many ways to rationalize such a trip, yet that will not stop them from wondering after the fact why they traveled so many miles for a few students typing away on their phones, a few senior citizens listening with their eyes closed and their mouths open, and a few colleagues who did not take time to read anything relevant in advance. Even so, a certain optimism endures; the next time an invitation comes their way, they will probably accept, hoping it will go better.

In the academic world, we can distinguish at least three categories of speakers: the laborer, the rentier, and the banker. The vast majority of academics fall into the first category, being only occasional speakers. They rarely present outside their national academic milieu; very few will go beyond this to address peers abroad, or even the "general public." To reach such audiences, they will need to have been previously spotted by the media when a

book is released or thanks to an interview on some promising topic. Some will manage to land the Grail, but this is usually a one-off opportunity: for example, a lecture tour of the French Institutes. A Grail not only because it is pleasant to go abroad, to be welcomed, catered to in a diplomatic environment, but also because there is no need to negotiate fees: You just accept what is offered. When you have to bargain while maintaining your academic dignity, that is another story. If you have no secretary to act as intermediary (an increasingly rare privilege these days), you have to negotiate your fees while the head of the inviting organization explains on the phone that subsidies were lowered the previous year. As you listen, the angel on your right shoulder whispers in your ear: "You're a civil servant, aren't you?," while the devil on your left shoulder retorts: "Do you think X [insert the name of a well-known colleague here] would mind being paid so much?"

X belongs to the second category, that of symbolic rentiers, who live on a well-managed fund of notoriety. We have all noticed the names that move tirelessly from city to city, far beyond the academic arena. The same photo of their face appears regularly in cultural magazines, on posters, on the internet. They are in fact managed by a specialized firm, which places them in conference cycles, think tanks, and professional associations. Their speaking fees rival those of successful authors and media personalities. Some last a very long time, but in general, the full cycle doesn't go beyond twenty years or so. I won't name names—that would be cruel. So just imagine that I am speaking about the prominent names in your area.

Finally, there are the symbolic bankers, very few in number, who are much in demand but respond relatively infrequently to invitations. They come first and foremost to help a younger colleague, to affirm their solidarity, to express their friendship. By offering a little of their symbolic capital, they lose none; on the contrary, they gain even more. Just as prestigious publishing houses welcome a young author, or famous art galleries showcase a still-unknown artist, these speakers operate in a very special economy, in which the gift of their time, their presence, and their knowledge is not billed as an ordinary service and is not even balanced by an immediate counter-gift. In fact, their services are part of a cycle from which they will benefit in the long term, but which is rarely revealed. In fact, the less the bankers and their protégés say, the better the return. Pierre Bourdieu, who was one of these symbolic bankers, has described the mechanisms in several of his writings (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Lebaron, 2020).

## *Goffman: Rentier or Banker?*

Goffman certainly was not a casual speaker. He clearly was a professional speaker, but he never left the academic field. He never gave a corporate talk, for example. But should we see him more as a rentier, exploiting a stock of well-established lectures, or as a symbolic banker, lending support to a younger colleague? The answer is quite clear: He was a rentier who did not hesitate to produce the same lecture repeatedly. Three talks Goffman presented often were the one on *Frame Analysis*, the one on "The Lecture," and the one on *Gender Advertisements*. However, it is worth mentioning that this last one—his "road show" with a carousel of slides—was often offered to feminist groups, and in this sense he played the role of a symbolic banker, if not an activist. His three visits to the University of Tennessee earned him nothing in symbolic terms, and while he was certainly also drawing on his stock as a rentier, he was above all a banker giving his capital to two little-known sociologists. The same could be said of his first trip to Davis to support MacCannell.

In this way, Goffman evades simple classification. We need to take a closer look. Goffman as lecturer cannot be reduced to rentier or banker. When he gave a lecture, it can be said that he performed it, as a musician performing his score. But in another sense, it was the lecture that performed Goffman—that is, the lecture helped him to emerge as Goffman, the increasingly well-known, increasingly mythical sociologist. By dint of producing lectures, Goffman produced Goffman, in a performative operation that is quite exceptional in the history of Western social sciences in the twentieth century.

## *The 1977 University of Michigan Lecture on the Lecture*

On April 22, 1977, Goffman delivered the annual Katz-Newcomb Memorial Lecture at the University of Michigan.[1] His lecture was titled "The Lecture." He actually read a paper he had meticulously prepared. Only a few spontaneous elements, probably annotated in the margins or between the lines, made this performance unique. In the publication which ensued, he inserted a paragraph or two into the text and explained in a preface that he had not changed the format in order to reveal "certain framing problems." He did not go so far as to propose an "unedited transcription of an oral

[1] While Goffman mentions the year 1976 in *Forms of Talk* (1981, p. 160), the conference program sent by the University of Michigan proves that it was 1977. I would like to thank Jacob Nugent of the Bentley Historical Library for his research.

recording, accompanied by a continuous indication of gestures, tempo and elisions" (1981, p. 160). This hybrid version is found in *Forms of Talk*, Goffman's only lecture published during his lifetime. Goffman's talk was a rather exceptional exercise in reflexivity on the part of a social scientist, which proves that he took a close interest in what the lecture did to its author (its performer). Goffman's lecture mentions a fellow anthropologist, Charles O. Frake (1977), author of a text quite similar in intent (a lecture on the exercise of presenting). But Goffman's analysis is more in-depth than Frake's, even dizzying at times. Yet Goffman sought to keep his audience engaged: He addressed them directly ("You will note that"), used the first person, and did not hesitate to make short, overtly humorous digressions—at least at the beginning. It seems he may have been deploying the well-known rhetorical device of *captatio benevolentiae* (seizing the kindness) through playful banter, as North American orators very often do. Clearly, this was a real lecture, not an article in disguise. But it was a demanding lecture nonetheless, and it is not certain that the Ann Arbor audience followed it all the way through. In the following, I will analyze the six sections of Goffman's text, to see exactly what he was doing.

In the first section, he tries to establish his authority as a speaker by talking about his situation on stage, saying he is not "another self-appointed cut-up, optimistically attempting a podium shuck" (Goffman, 1981, p. 162). He is doing frame analysis, and he is going to draw on the resources offered by the situation to demonstrate some notions in this field. For example, Goffman posits from the outset that there is a boundary between the situation the lecture is about and the situation in which it takes place, but that this boundary is particularly fragile when the presentation is precisely about the properties of presentations: All you have to do is talk about this boundary and it vanishes.

The second section sets out the various constituent elements of a lecture, which Goffman begins by defining as "an institutionalized extended holding of the floor in which a speaker imparts his views on a subject, these thoughts comprising what can be called his 'text'" (p. 165). So, there is a speaker and a text. Then, there is also a stage (Goffman does not mention the presence of a table; he speaks of a speaker "ordinarily standing," which must have been true in his case), and an audience, "ordinarily seated," who cannot react verbally. The audience is supposed to be captivated by the speaker's ideas, not by his performance. And yet, we speak of performance ("in the theatrical sense of the term," says Goffman) and accept that the lecture is part of

a "social *fuss*," which presupposes organization, other players (sponsors, committee members, presenters), and a tacit alliance between the speaker and the inviting bodies. The eminent guest will be encouraged to calibrate his remarks for the "general public," making concessions at the expense of his subject in order to transmit knowledge. To deliver a successful talk, he must also respect the limitation of his speaking time and the presence of actors other than himself. What Goffman writes at this point necessarily echoes real-life experiences:

> And he is encouraged to accept all manner of rampant intrusion from interviewers, photographers, recording specialists, and the like—intrusions that often take place right in the middle of the heat of the occasion. (If at any moment you should get the notion that a speaker really is fully caught up in talking to you, take note of his capacity to treat photographers as though they weren't interrupting his talk. Such apparent obliviousness can, of course, come from his involvement with you, as opposed to his commitment to publicity, but don't count on it. (pp. 170–171)

This passage also echoes his entire oeuvre. The vocabulary may have changed, but the same themes recur, sometimes as far back as his doctoral thesis. Once again, there is a question of impression management and commitment (the speaker must succeed in making it seem as if he's totally invested in his relationship with his audience), of the self as a performed character to which one adds faith or not (does the audience trust the speaker when he shows them that he is not interested in the photographer?). All this is said between the lines, without explicit reference to his previous works. This subtext emerges with careful reading, and by that same token, it would have been difficult for Goffman's original, listening audience to grasp.

The third section is very short. It takes up the question of the illusion of spontaneity produced by the speaker and the credit given to him or her based on the three modes of speech production: memorization, reading aloud, and spontaneous speech. Spontaneous speech is the ideal: Texts read or memorized must give the illusion of spontaneous speech. But spontaneous speech is never totally spontaneous because the speaker produces one sentence while already formulating the next in his head. Spontaneous speech is therefore short-term memorized speech, a reading aloud of a mental text. Again and again, the question of credible illusion is at the heart of Goffman's thinking, as evidenced by his description of the skills that speakers eventually acquire:

> And they mark a natural turning point in fresh talking *or* aloud reading a lecture when they realize they can give thought to how they seem to be doing, where they stand in terms of finishing too soon or too late, and what they plan to do after the talk—without these backstage considerations becoming evident as their concern; for should such preoccupation become evident, the illusion that they are properly involved in communicating will be threatened. (p. 172)

Only a seasoned lecturer could write a sentence like that. This shows just how much experience Goffman had in this field. Although he always delivered highly scripted lectures, giving no illusion of spontaneous speech because, as he puts it bluntly, "of [his] incompetence," he demonstrates a real mastery of the oratorical ropes. For example, when he asks in the conclusion of the third section what distinguishes a lecture from the text that might be distributed instead, he provides a classic a priori answer: A lecture cannot be reduced to its content or to the gestures accompanying the enunciation. A subtle balance needs to be struck: Too few gestures and the audience's attention risks fading away; too many gestures and the audience's attention risks focusing on effects to the detriment of content. To explain this "score," Goffman (p. 173) uses a formal rhetorical approach in his writing which is not reflected in the French translation of the text: He repeats the same verbal attack twice consecutively ("*At best . . . At best . . .*"), he repeats the same phrase twice in a long sentence ("*if, because of what I say . . ., if, because of what I refer to . . .*"), he provides three equivalent words where one would suffice ("This partition, this membrane, this boundary, is the tickler"). And let us not forget that this text was intended to be read in public. The passage that evokes the balance, but also the boundary to be found between content and form, is precisely the one in which Goffman shows a specificity of oral discourse at work. It's hard to prove that he was conducting these repetitions with a finger or a hand. But we can imagine it.

This rhetorical outburst subsides at the start of the fourth section, which is the longest and most technical. Goffman opens it with a short, dry sentence, as if to illustrate what he is about to discuss: "Now consider footing and its changes" (p. 173). The notion of *footing* is part of the apparatus that Goffman develops in the last chapter of *Frame Analysis*, entitled "Frames of Conversation" (1974, pp. 496–559). *Footing* means to have one's foot well stabilized on the ground. Analogously, we can change "position" several times in a lecture, take a step to the side, open a parenthesis, while landing back on our feet, in balance, each time. This is what Goffman analyzes in terms of the

"textual self," the self that emanates from the written text, possibly read by a third party if the speaker cannot physically be present. He proposes four "places where position changes": keyings, text brackets, text-parenthetical remarks, and performance contingencies. In each case, the aim is to distance oneself from the initial text, or to draw emotionally closer to it, by means of a gesture or a variation in tone. Goffman gracefully refers to the competent lecturer able to read with "a twinkle in his voice" while "slightly raising his vocal eyebrows" (1981, p. 175). For text framing, he chooses the image of the speaker who "backs down from his horse" at the moment of his conclusions and goes "back to the audience as merely another member of it" (p. 175). In particularly concrete terms, he evokes the "bracket rituals such as lighting a cigarette, changing from a standing to a sitting position, drinking a glass of water, etc." (p. 176). Behind each example, we sense the experienced speaker who has mastered his register to the point of easily making use of it as he speaks. Thus, when he mentions the third change of position, parentheses, he asks: "May I digress for a moment?" and concludes with a "To return" (pp. 178–179). The concrete demonstration of the theoretical concept is clear.

Goffman ends this section with a return to the classical model of communication, which applies particularly well to the lecture, with its sender (the speaker) and receiver (the audience). But other elements are also involved: most critically, noise—that is, any obstacle to a perfect transmission of the message between speaker and audience. Goffman evokes a series of performance contingencies, from sniffling to denture whistling. If the lecturer notices an issue, he or she may make a comment or "repairing remark," resulting in a split between the role of facilitator and that of author. This "reflexive frame-breaking" is very common in friendly conversation, but extremely rare on live television, for example. Lectures fall somewhere in between: Listeners are usually tolerant. But Goffman concludes by warning us not to exploit the vein too much. Once again, the high-flying lecturer speaks:

> Reaching for the book he planned to quote from, he may assay a little quip, confiding that he hopes he brought the right one. I believe that once the show has seriously begun, these efforts to frankly project oneself exclusively in one's capacity as an animator are not likely to come off—at least not as frequently as speakers believe. Nonetheless the liberty is often taken. (pp. 185–186)

In the fifth section, he attempts to "put the pieces together." Just as a lecture cannot be reduced to a text that can be read at home, neither can it be reduced to listening to a recording. There are two reasons for this, linked to the very

fact of attending an event. Goffman speaks of access and celebration. Direct visual and aural access to a speaker whom the audience may already know from his or her publications or from the news leads to the formation of a "one-sided social relationship with him or her." What's more, "in thus gaining access to an authority, the audience also gains ritual access to the subject matter over which the speaker has command." But Goffman qualifies this, adding in parentheses: "Substantive access is quite another matter" (p. 187).

Celebration is the set of markers that will give the impression that a lecture has been produced exclusively for a particular occasion and audience: He mentions little local phrases, a feeling of freshness in the reading thanks to a "hyper smooth" effect as on the radio. But watch out for the mess if the speaker gets lost in a sentence and has to read it all over again. Illusion and vulnerability go hand in hand: Goffman always comes back to this issue, which runs through all his work, from the "safe supplies" (refuge activities) described in his doctoral dissertation to the "tripping over the carpet" (p. 183) of the lecture podium.

Finally, in the sixth section, Goffman once again takes up the question: What does the speaker bring along to the podium? The answer is twofold. As in any interaction, he brings with him the "wider world of structures and positions" (p. 193). Here we find both the Goffman of the "fuzzy coupling" between micro and macro, and the Bourdieu who wrote in 1972 that "the truth of interaction never resides entirely in interaction" (1972, p. 184). But Goffman goes further: What the speaker finally brings with him to the podium is confirmation that there is "structure in the world [and] that this structure can be perceived and reported." A contract is thus established between the lecturer and the audience:

> The lecturer and the audience join in affirming a single proposition. They join in affirming that organized talking can reflect, express, delineate, portray—if not come to grips with—the real world, and that, finally, there is a real, structured, somewhat unitary world out there to comprehend. (1981, p. 194)

Far from being a public entertainer, the lecturer is a "functionary of the cognitive establishment":

> Whatever his substantive domain, whatever his school of thought, and whatever his inclination to piety or impiety, he signs the same agreement and he serves the same cause: to protect us from the wind, to stand up and seriously project the assumption that through lecturing, a meaningful picture of some part of the

> world can be conveyed, and that the talker can have access to a picture worth conveying. (pp. 194–195)

Goffman thus ends his lecture in a very emphatic manner, but this final solemnity is undoubtedly not reducible to a display of rhetorical pomp. It seems clear that the reason he gave so many lectures in his career was not to supplement his income. Rather, it was because he believed in this ministry of cognitive power. For him, the lecture was clearly more than just a friendly chat, as evidenced by the repeated expulsion of photographers. He gave it his all, feeling, as already discussed, vested with a mission. This mission was not one of popularization—while not outright obscure, his lectures made few concessions to ease—but of introduction to an understanding of the world.

## *From Performed Work to Performative Work*

We have now heard Goffman talk about his conception of the lecture—and he saw it as noble, unquestionably. This mission is perfectly illustrated by his lectures on the ritualization of femininity, which he apparently agreed to give free of charge on numerous occasions for feminist groups.[2] In revealing the relations of domination underlying advertising photographs, Goffman is very much in the position of the functionary of cognitive power who shares a "meaningful picture of some part of the world" (1981, pp. 194–195).

This vision did not exclude others, which Goffman did not mention explicitly, but which can be inferred from the information we have gleaned on his journey through the United States and Europe. To begin with the least noble: money. It is true that Goffman always asked for fees, and high ones at that. But it should be remembered that US academics are always paid for their lectures, and that they are part of a competitive arena among speakers from a wide variety of backgrounds, including the arts, politics, and sports. By charging the equivalent of $10,000 per lecture at SUNY Buffalo in today's dollar, Goffman was consolidating his authority vis-à-vis academic and non-academic competitors—even if, for some of them, he was only a low stakes player.

More noble is the function of symbolic banker, as mentioned above. On a number of occasions, Goffman agreed to support a young colleague, or to visit a lesser-known university with completely unknown colleagues. His role as lecturer-banker can be linked to other operations of symbolic transfer.

[2] Information provided by Gillian Sankoff in a converstation on April 1, 1986.

For example, certain highly capitalized academics agree to serve on thesis committees to reinforce the stature of their graduate students. Generally speaking—unlike Bourdieu, for example, he played this role sparingly. He directed or co-directed a few theses, but always sought to limit their number. We know of no prefaces or afterwords authored by him, perhaps because he realized before his colleagues that this all-too-frequently-used practice yields very little in exchange for the time required.

A classic function of academic lectures is to prowl for an article or book in the process of being written. One might assume that Goffman made great use of the lecture's ability to pull rabbits out of a hat, considering the number of talks he gave on the ritualization of femininity or frame analysis, for example. But it is important to remember that Goffman read very few written texts. So he did not put himself in the position of partially improvising to "elaborate upon" an idea in gestation. Insofar as the texts of his lectures are not available, with the exception of "The Lecture," it is difficult to measure the gaps between his presentations and his publications. He did not read chapters from his books in public, yet he was careful to deliver dense, totally mastered lectures, often without the slightest flourish. It is possible to venture the hypothesis that, alongside Goffman's written work, which is well-known and available today, there is an oral body of work, one which is still poorly known and almost totally unavailable. The contrast with the fate reserved for Bourdieu's or Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France is striking: Thick volumes of transcriptions of the two scholars' lectures, supplemented by copious notes and commentaries, regularly appear in bookshops. These posthumous works very rarely deliver new elements, but they complement, reinforce, and refine the written work, sometimes in spectacular fashion (for example, Bourdieu's *Manet*, published in 2013). In Goffman's case, we can imagine a similar corpus, given the number of lectures he prepared, but there is very little chance that we will ever uncover it. So we must turn our attention elsewhere. No matter how impossible it is to locate the printed versions of Goffman's lectures (if any such versions exist), it is worth exploring his oral work, since that was not only performed work but performative work.

Although Goffman probably did not use his lectures to test out works in progress on different audiences, we cannot rule out the idea that his lectures were like so many micro-terrains for observation or experimentation. The *breaching experiments* of Garfinkel and Milgram are well known. They were based on the principle of deviating from or breaking an implicit "rule" of

behavior. In this respect, Goffman's moves against photographers, repeated on numerous occasions, have all the air of destabilization experiments. The same applies to his (strange) requests for constant contact with the New York Stock Exchange. Or his late arrival in Brussels for the podium. However, these are only suppositions, or rather attributions of intent. It may simply be that Goffman could not bear the intrusion of photographers just as he was beginning to concentrate on the text of his lecture. It may be that he needed to be in regular contact with his broker. It may be that he needed to go to the bathroom before starting his speech. But this possibility, if not plausibility, of putting his sociology into practice in his lectures opens the way to an interpretation in terms of a performed work. Without seeking to systematically correlate his work with his lectures—there are books for which no antecedent public lecture can be found, such as *Stigma*—it is possible to see his presentations as performative formulations of his writings. Not illustrations, and not didactic aids, like the slides in his lectures on the ritualization of femininity, but low-key notional performances, only grasped by a few in the audience. It was only with "The Lecture" that this turning of the work on itself can be understood explicitly. Yet we can go one step further and consider Goffman's lectures as contributions to his intellectual maturation. We can then consider his lectures as his performative work.

How to do things with words: Austin's formula about performative verbs, which produce what they enunciate, such as "I baptize you," has undoubtedly been abused. No need to detail the twists and turns of the debates on "performativity" that run from Derrida to Butler to Searle. It will suffice to quote Aaron Cicourel in an interview he gave me on April 18, 1985. After describing Goffman's investment in the preparation of his lectures,[3] he added a somewhat cryptic comment:

> He could talk to people who weren't in academia—or even academics who weren't too intellectual. He used a lot of American slang. He was very good at that [pause]. There's a huge academic audience that's not very intellectually active. That includes students as well as teachers. I don't know if he addressed non-academic audiences. But within the academic world . . . if you want to win a prize, you have to popularize. Otherwise, it's very difficult, very difficult. Garfinkel would have liked to go there, but he didn't know how.

Goffman knew how: difference and repetition. He produced powerful lectures, both in content and vocabulary, with their mix of seriousness and

[3] See p. 20–21 in this book.

deadpan humor, and he performed on stage very often—but only within the academic world, be it universities, colloquia, or conferences. His performances performed him, in the sense that they gradually led him to become Goffman, with all his aura, all his mystery, all his power, right up to the presidency of the American Sociological Association. Of course, this final step in his career was the result of intense lobbying by a small group of unconditional admirers. But their work could not have succeeded had it not been based on the enormous reserve of capital Goffman had accumulated over the years.

This is where we must be wary of retrospective interpretations. Goffman's career should not be reduced to that of a sociologist who realized at a very young age that, to make a name for himself in the academic world, it was advisable to make frequent public appearances, parallel to numerous publications. The process of symbolic accumulation that produced Goffman was first and foremost the result of a vision of the sociologist's craft that he himself enunciated, based on the ministry of cognitive power: sharing with audiences a sensible image of a certain part of the world. But in doing so, a performative dynamic was set in motion over the years, leading Erving to become Goffman.

## *Goffman Between Cage and Duyckaerts*

It would be tempting to slip Goffman into the world of performance art, in particular the lecture-performance as it developed a few years ago in the field of contemporary art.[4] If Goffman were still alive, he would undoubtedly be in great demand in art schools, playing the role of awakener-performer in the manner of Bruno Latour.

We can note here that Goffman was familiar with the work of John Cage, whom he mentioned in his third lecture in Buffalo in 1970. (He refers to "Imaginary Landscape No. 4" from 1951, which features twelve "musicians" turning the knobs of radio sets.) Goffman spoke of it seemingly ironically: "People sat and laughed softly, but they took it well," according to the quote from a journalist who attended the lecture (Anonymous, 1970).[5] Years later, he would joke again about Cage in "The Lecture," speaking of "the John Cage school of performance rip-offs," a humorous touch to warm up his audience at the start of the lecture (Goffman, 1981, p. 162). There is no reason

[4] In this section, I draw on a number of works, without claiming to be either exhaustive or representative: Roselee Goldberg (2001), Josette Féra (2012), Aurore Després (2016), Vangelis Athanassopoulos (2018), and Laurence Corbel and Christophe Viart (2021).

[5] Cf. Anonymous (1970, p. 24).

to think that he took Cage's work seriously, but he was clearly familiar with it. Moreover, he and Cage shared the same theoretical underpinnings: All public behavior is a performance; all you have to do to perform is to be on stage without saying anything (allusion to Cage's silent piece, *4'33"*, 1952).

It doesn't matter whether they knew each other personally or intellectually. The important part is that Goffman's work can be compared with the work of various contemporary artists who have been part of the performance movement in visual art and in dance. "Hotel Palenque," the lecture given by Robert Smithson at the University of Utah on January 24, 1972 (now in the collections of the Guggenheim in New York), can be compared with Goffman's slide lectures. Smithson is the great figure of American land art, known for works inscribed in the landscape, which slowly unravel over the years. His lecture is a stroll through a dilapidated Mexican hotel, left to the passage of time. Common to both Goffman and Smithson was the use of a slide projector, which became an integral part of their lectures:

> The slide-illustrated lecture calls for a device that involves several elements. Unlike cinema, the projector occupies the same space as the spectators. It is thus affirmed as the agent who presides over the exhibition of photography. . . . By placing the experience of images in a semi-darkened space, projection assigns a place to the photograph, the speaker, and the audience. To these elements is added a sound material in its own right: the dry noise of the camera marking each slide change is combined with the hum of the projector's blower and the fluctuations of the commentator's voice. (Boulouch & Corbel, 2021, p. 39–40)

It may well be that neither Smithson nor Goffman intentionally played with all the performative registers of the slide apparatus, that they just used it because it was the apparatus available at the time. But the fact is that they both set up this simple yet cumbersome device, that they literally staged it, plunging the audience into darkness and making their voices emerge from the gloom, mingled with the noise of the fan and the dust particles dancing in the light of the projector. The difference between Smithson and Goffman is that the latter used this device on many, many occasions, whereas only a few of Smithson's lectures are known. This brings Goffman even closer to the contemporary art world, where one of the strongest approaches is that of the three R's: Reconstruction, Replication, and Re-enactment.[6]

[6] Two books have recently identified this movement in various fields: Sven Dupré et al. (2020) and Marion Colas-Blaise and Gian Maria Tore (2021).

Re-enacting a performance, reassembling an exhibition, restoring behavior,[7] are all gestures that run through the history of contemporary art. For example, Goffman's series of lectures on the ritualization of femininity, using the same set of slides, could be seen as the "re-enactment" of an initial performance. Dare we go so far as to compare him to Robert Cantarella, whose lecture-performance *Faire le Gilles* consisted in repeating word for word Gilles Deleuze's lectures at Vincennes and Paris-8, with the same intonations, hesitations, and coughing fits (Cantarella, 2021)? It would be Goffman performing Goffman, which may be a bit far-fetched. And then there is Eric Duyckaerts, who also demanded that his lectures—performances—be neither filmed nor recorded, another point of similarity with Goffman.

Duyckaerts gave an impression of unfailing scientific seriousness: a sober suit, a stern countenance, constantly inscribing learned names and words on large sheets of flipchart paper with a black felt-tip pen; the Belgian performer was constantly oscillating between posture and imposture, as he liked to say (Corbel, 2021). Goffman, on the other hand, was neither posture nor imposture. He was legitimately in earnest, offering genuine scholarly lectures. But when he interrupted himself to chase away a photographer, did he not produce a rupture in the frame much as an artist seeking to break the code with an unexpected gesture?[8] A bit like Duyckaerts, who could start talking faster and faster, or producing a face increasingly ravaged by tics?

Conversely, when Goffman read his text with little expression, without raising his head too much, was he perhaps being Guillaume Désanges *avant la lettre*? Désanges, now head of the Palais de Tokyo, who gave a lecture entitled *Signs and Wonders* in the 2010s without making a gesture, without raising his voice, in the half-light of a shadow theater. When Éric Valette says that "where scientific communication implies a clear and univocal apprehension of discourse, performance, like any artistic form, is marked by a

[7] The allusion here is to a famous article by anthropologist and theater specialist Richard Schechner, "The Restoration of Behavior" (1985).

[8] In April 1975, Goffman participated in the Amsterdam Festival of Social Sciences, organized by his friend Alvin Gouldner. He showed his four hundred slides about gender advertisements. There were more than one thousand people in attendance. Among them was Amsterdam-based sociologist Paul Brennan, who had brought along a tape recorder. In a write-up of the event, Brennan documents yet another outburst from Goffman: "During his performance, a photographer moved to center stage and snapped Goffman's picture. He stopped the show. 'I'm here speaking to this audience. I'm not speaking to the press of any kind and I prefer that there be no taping or photographing or anything of that kind. All these things detract from such little that can go on between myself and yourselves. I'm offended by being photographed. I'm conducting a campaign against the press. The stage is dirty enough as it is without further contamination.' Less than a minute later a member of the festival committee came and switched off my tape recorder" (1975, p. 55).

certain complexity, opacity and polysemy" (2018, p. 163), we might wonder whether Goffman's lectures don't better meet the criteria of artistic performance, and Désanges's the codes of scientific communication.

Let me stop here. The answer I want to give to my initial question is finally taking shape. When I began this work, I wondered how and why Goffman's work never ages. At least part of the answer is that few sociologists born in 1922 could be invited to maintain a dialogue with the management of the Palais de Tokyo in 2022. Goffman's contemporaneity lies in the fact that, yesterday, he had already found ways of asking today's questions.

EPILOGUE

# How (Not) to Complete a Biography?

I summoned my courage at the end of the last session of his course and went to tell Pierre Bourdieu, whose seminar I had been attending since the beginning of the 1975–1976 academic year, that I would be studying at the University of Pennsylvania for the next two years, notably to take Erving Goffman's courses. He was immediately enthusiastic and suggested that I call Goffman on his behalf as soon as I arrived in Philadelphia. And so, I dared to call Goffman, immediately name dropping my professor. "How is Pierre?" he immediately asked, as if I were an old Bourdieu acquaintance. I soon found myself at his place, summoned to tell him when the French translation of *Frame Analysis* would come out. It was clear Goffman took me for a young colleague of Bourdieu's rather than his student: A delicate reframing was necessary. But as the months and years went by, Goffman was always charming to me, giving me permission to take his seminar whenever I had the chance and granting me multiple interviews: one about his career, another about my thesis, a third about his differences with Bourdieu on the notion of social class (Winkin, 2022a). All the while, I reported back to Bourdieu about my interactions with Goffman. So it was that, on my return to Europe in 1978, I began contributing short texts to *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the journal Bourdieu had just founded, and acting as a relay between Paris and Philadelphia.

When I set out in 1982 to collect data on the life of Erving Goffman, I was totally unaware of the field of biographical studies, whether in literature, history, or science. I had published *La Nouvelle Communication* one year earlier. The book included profiles, several pages long, of each member of the "invisible college" whose outline I had traced. I wanted to take a closer look at one of them: Erving Goffman. Several of his works had already been published in translation by Editions de Minuit as part of the series Le Sens Commun, edited by Bourdieu. I had in mind the US model of the Viking Portable Library—for example, *The Portable Veblen*, which offered everything a student needs to know about Thorstein Veblen in one compact volume: life, work (with excerpts), bibliography. When Goffman died suddenly in November 1982, I postponed the project I had just started.

A year later, as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, I met Hans Mauksch, who was a visiting professor there. He had known Goffman during his sociology studies at the University of Chicago. I recorded the long conversations we had. And I went to Philadelphia to see Gillian Sankoff, Goffman's widow and executor, to ask her permission for a more in-depth biographical work than I had initially envisaged. Following on from the interviews with Mauksch, I aimed at collecting testimonies about Goffman at different stages of his life. I also hoped that Sankoff would entrust me with various documents, in particular the manuscript of the unfinished book on casinos. But, while not forbidding me to meet anyone, Sankoff preferred to respect Goffman's wish that his work should be understood by and for itself. So, she would not tell me anything or give me access to any materials. She would remind me of this agreement in 1986, when I visited her with Bourdieu, who I hoped might persuade her to reverse her decision. I visited her again in 1991 during a very kind, but hopeless, meeting at the Linguistics Department of the University of Pennsylvania, which she was then chairing. Even a request from Goffman's son Tom didn't persuade her. Despite our disagreement on this point, we remain on very good terms.

## *A Letter from Goffman*

It was only very recently that I discovered a letter from Goffman which Sankoff probably did not know about, but which reinforces her position. In 1976, the sociologist Irving Horowitz, the founder of the Transaction Publishers publishing house in New Jersey, asked Goffman if he would

agree to a meeting with a young researcher who wanted to embark on a biographical project about him. Goffman replied to his colleague and friend:

> I would be willing to send your student a standard c.v., but I guess that's all. If I teach a course this upcoming term, I would be ready to accept anybody you recommended . . . but only if their concern was in the subject matter solely, and not myself. . . . Biography strikes me as a way of reifying something that isn't worth that kind of candle. It is one thing to exploit one's social niche for all the material rewards one can draw from it. Biography strikes me by way of trying to make a virtue of this kind of opportunism, affecting piety where self-respect should dictate chagrin. [1]

Goffman's refusal is unequivocal. Had I had the opportunity to read this letter when I was sjtarting my research, I am not sure I would have continued. But the push back I received from Sankoff at the time was not enough to stop me in my tracks. After all, she was not forbidding me from conducting my research; she simply would not help me. So, I started meeting Goffman's colleagues and friends. I also tried to do some fieldwork, visiting all the places that must have been significant for him. And of course, I collected all the documents I could find useful.

## *Three Methods*

In those bygone pre-internet days, I would write a nice letter, usually receive a written reply, and an appointment would be made. I often took advantage of colloquia, teaching opportunities, and research stays in the United States to meet as many people as possible in a short period of time. This is how I collected quite a few interviews in Berkeley in 1987 and in Pennsylvania in 1991 and 1997. Very often, one interview led to another: "You should go and see so-and-so." This is the famous "snowball" method of research. But there were also times when, by sheer chance, I came across a relevant person. Here is an anecdote describing such a case.

In January 1987, I arrived in Berkeley for a semester of teaching, invited by the Sociology Department on the recommendation of Bourdieu. I called around looking for an apartment. I started chatting with a charming woman who asked me what department I would be in. She told me her name was Pearl Terail and that she once knew a sociologist called Erving Goffman. She

[1] Goffman's letter to Horowitz, dated July 2, 1976, is in the Transaction Publishers Archives, HCLA 5676, Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.

explained that she had earned a degree in sociology at Montreal's McGill University in 1937, under the supervision of Everett Hughes (Goffman's patron saint). When we met, she invited a friend of hers, Edith Kasin, who had completed her doctoral studies in human development at the University of Chicago in 1946 and who knew Liz Bott well, Goffman's first great friend. She did not have a current address for Bott, but she asked Ruth Ramsoy, another Chicago alumna, who was living in Oslo. Not long after, I received Liz Bott's London address, and in November 1987, I went to see her. The icing on the cake: When I explained to Pearl Terail that Goffman had worked at the Canadian Film Board during the Second World War, she suggested that if I had any film-related questions, I should contact her nephew, William Shatner, better known as Captain Kirk from the legendary Star Trek series.

During interviews, I took copious notes and left the recorder running when I was allowed to. Whenever possible, I wrote a long report of the meeting, but I never transcribed the interviews. The tapes have been digitized to ensure their longevity, and I still sometimes listen to parts of them.[2] But I've always felt that, at my level of "granularity," transcription was unnecessary. On the other hand, I have systematically favored face-to-face meetings, only conducting telephone or video conferencing interviews when necessary.[3]

My second approach was more akin to participant observation, but it did not exclude gathering valuable information from sometimes unexpected interviews. I spent time (usually a week) in the small town of Dauphin, where Goffman spent his early childhood; in Winnipeg, where he lived for ten years; at the University of Chicago, where he studied; and in Baltasound, on the island of Unst, where he conducted his first fieldwork. I twice visited St. Elizabeths Psychiatric Hospital, the site of his second fieldwork. The only setback was the location of his third fieldwork, the Las Vegas casinos, which have changed so much in recent years that any attempt at historical

[2] Thanks to Greg Smith, who was able to digitize all the interviews, as well as the photos from *Gender Advertisements,* the originals of which had been given to Pierre Bourdieu by Gillian Sankoff.

[3] A researcher at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Dmitri Shalin, has opted for the opposite approach: From 2007 to 2017, he conducted numerous telephone interviews with Goffman's relatives and colleagues, which he transcribed verbatim. He then had his interviewees proofread the documents and uploaded them on a site, freely open to consultation, named the Erving Goffman Archives (cdclv.unlv.edu/ega). Shalin has also uploaded numerous documents relating to Goffman. This site has often enabled me to supplement my information or confirm it through cross-referencing. But Shalin's "biocritical hermeneutic" approach is very different from mine, as is his basic position. Because of the moral contract that continues to bind me to Gillian Sankoff and my informants, my archives are totally closed.

identification is impossible. For me, it was a matter of accumulating mental images, rather than photographs, to form a backdrop: the permanent rain on Unst Island, the immense trees in the park of St. Elizabeths Hospital, the patrician atmosphere of Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square, etc. I kept many diaries, diligently recording my observations every night, as good sociology textbooks dictate. I never assumed that I was seeing and experiencing what Goffman had seen and experienced; that would be too simple and too complex at the same time. Even though he must have been drenched more than twice in Baltasound, nothing would ever give me the means to reconstruct his experience, unless he mentioned the rain in his thesis, which he did not. In fact, my immersions and visits more often underlined an absence in Goffman's work: How is it that Goffman was so detached from his environment? He never mentions the climate on the island of Unst, nor the beauty of the grounds of St. Elizabeths Hospital, and so on. The field remains a laboratory for observing interactions, while the laboratory itself remains unobserved.

Finally, like any social science researcher, I collected and filed documents, whether I sought them out or gathered them at random from encounters and visits. Some treasures have accumulated over the years: a thirty-page letter sent in confidence by friends of Angelica Choate, even though we never met; dozens of photos of Tom Goffman with his mother in Washington, entrusted to me by a colleague of Goffman's without the slightest hesitation. My only regret is that I have not found the photographs Goffman must have taken on the island of Unst with his Leica. But I may yet see them re-emerge one day.

The documents in my file include hundreds of photocopies, now greasy and gray, of articles of all kinds. Sometimes, it is not so much the article as the surrounding advertisements that become historically interesting. In the 1969 issue of *Time Magazine*, for example, where Goffman's first public profile appeared, we discover a coffee advertisement featuring a middle-aged lady in a nightgown and curlers. Behind her, a long corridor with doors on either side. She greets the reader with a slightly embarrassed air. The text simply says: "So Mom has moved across the hallway. Now you'd better think it over . . . have a cup of coffee." It says it all about the independence of young people in the late 1960s, and the inability of parents, still entrenched in their old-fashioned ways, to let them go. It was in this Zeitgeist that Goffman emerged. All the more reason to appreciate his modernity.

From this mass of raw data, I extracted nothing, in the sense that I did not carry out any systematic encoding leading to content analysis by dates, themes, or keywords. I simply read and reread my interview notes and dia-

ries, bookmarked, and highlighted certain passages. In fact, I tried to keep everything in my head and let my brain make the connections, in the manner of gesture specialist Adam Kendon, who explains that he watched his films hundreds of times rather than run them through the computer mill (1979). An eminently fragile procedure, since memory can play tricks on you. But memory can also be astonishingly faithful, allowing us to retrieve a detail from a note twenty or forty years later.

## *A First Draft*

In the summer of 1987, with my head full of my Berkeley interviews, I set about writing the *portable Goffman* for which I'd been contracted by Editions du Seuil—and they wanted to release the book early the following year. Thus, I was faced with a decision. On the one hand, I did not want to fill my head with all the commentaries published in French and English on Goffman and his work, of which there were a few dozen at the time (today there are several hundred); on the other hand, I did not want to let the biographical elements dictate the text: I wanted to "construct" the biography, vigilantly guarding against the false evidence of common sense. Readers of Bourdieu will immediately recognize this paraphrase, inspired by *Le Métier de sociologue*, which was the epistemological bible of a generation of social scientists trained in the 1970s.[4] In this spirit, I did not want a purely descriptive biography, recounting everything that happened in the hero's life, from year to year, if not day to day, simply because it happened (or rather, because the biographer tracked it down). I was amazed that Richard Ellmann, James Joyce's great biographer, would mention Joyce's visits to the dentist. I was also careful not to be taken in by "influences," a vaguely causal explanation used to explain everything while explaining nothing. Not because I was against any relationship between a life and a work—otherwise why embark on an intellectual biography? But I refused to draw simple, straightforward connections, as we still too often read and hear, such as "his writing is fluid because he always liked to play in water." By refusing to enter this logic, I was obviously complicating my task. In addition, in 1986, Bourdieu had published a short text entitled "The Biographical Illusion," in which he

[4] The exact phrase is as follows: "The sociologist is never finished with spontaneous sociology, and he must impose on himself an incessant polemic against the blinding obviousness that too cheaply procures the illusion of immediate knowledge and its unsurpassable richness" (Bourdieu et al., 1973, p. 27).

denounced the naiveté of linear biographies using a very powerful image, that of the subway system:

> To try to understand a life as a single, self-sufficient series of successive events with no other link than association with a "subject" whose constancy is no more than that of a proper name, is about as absurd as trying to account for a journey on the metro without taking into account the structure of the network, i.e., the matrix of objective relations between the different stations. (p. 71)

This image was often used by those who criticized Bourdieu for his "determinism" (in a word: with Bourdieu, once you are on the tracks, you never change). Personally, this image spoke to me because it illustrated the notion of "trajectory" that Bourdieu defined in his text as "a series of positions successively occupied by the same agent . . . in a space that is itself in the process of becoming" (1986, p. 71). Bourdieu saw these displacements as "placements." I could see Goffman moving from one university to another. But where Bourdieu's text became complicated not just to understand but to operationalize was when he proposed moving from an individual biography to a collective one:

> In other words, we can only understand a trajectory . . . if we have first constructed the successive states of the field in which it took place, i.e., the set of objective relations that linked the agent in question—at least, in a certain number of relevant states—to all the other agents engaged in the same field and confronted with the same space of possibilities. (1986, p. 72)

This might imply attempting to relate all the members of the doctoral cohort that graduated from the Chicago sociology department in the late 1940s to understand how they positioned themselves in the US academic space from the 1950s to the 1980s, and how just one of them became Goffman, yet that would have been an undertaking beyond what I was willing to attempt. Only Bourdieu himself managed to do so in his *Manet* (2013). I therefore fell back on an approach much more focused on the genesis of the dispositions of Goffman alone, based on a suggestion by Luc Boltanski, who proposed to "go back, in the genesis of the work, upstream of the relatively arbitrary instant when it objectifies itself in writing and even upstream of the time when, through rational apprenticeship to the craft, its author acquires the scientific habitus, in order to access the prior social experiences that are constitutive of the class habitus" (1973, p. 129).

Thus, I concentrated on Goffman's youth and early professional years. The resulting introduction to the book, "Erving Goffman: Portrait du sociologue en jeune homme" ["Erving Goffman: Portrait of the Sociologist as a Young Man"], made a virtue of necessity. The full manuscript had to be completed by September 1987. I was still in the process of presenting Goffman arriving at Berkeley. But according to my interpretative scheme, the essential thing was to set up the intellectual matrix that would enable Goffman to produce ten books in twenty years. That way, I could pick up the pace and present the second half of his life in a few pages. The book came out by the deadline imposed by the publisher (Goffman, 1988).

However, I have never forgiven myself for this sleight of hand. The fact was, I had omitted the second part of the biography. So, I continued to gather data for a complete biography. I continued to reflect on the biographical approach in the history of the social sciences (Winkin, 1999). Above all, I tried to find a middle way between the theoretical position I had adopted from the outset—a biography that resisted "the illusion of immediate knowledge"—and the demands of Bourdieu's program, which were beyond me. I also wanted to maintain a high level of readability, while ensuring a certain narrative fluidity. That is why I took an interest in the concept of the fragment, as it exists in many artistic and literary fields. There is no need for a complete picture; the mind fills in the gaps between the pieces. I had always been struck by the evocative power of the plates in *Balinese Character*, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's great book of several hundred juxtaposed photographs (1942). Sequencing from one photo to the next is effortless, whether in chronological, thematic, or interpretative order. In another register, I was very impressed by François Girard's documentary *Trente-deux films brefs sur Glenn Gould* (1993), which presents the pianist's life and work in segments of one to six minutes (for a total of ninety-eight minutes). That is how I started inserting short vignettes (or "snapshots") into my texts on Goffman. They concentrate a mass of tiny facts, described in the present tense; a freestanding story is set in motion, then fades away as quickly as it appeared. The next story does not necessarily follow chronologically or thematically, but the reader perceives that threads are being tightened, that a web is being woven. I felt like I finally had an appropriate way to render biographical data.

## *A Second Draft*

And so, I (re)launched myself: I asked the University of Liège to suspend my salary for the 1997–1998 school year, and I left with my girlfriend for Philadelphia, determined to finish writing (in English) my biography of Goffman. Thanks to the kindness of Renée Fox, head of the Sociology Department at the University of Pennsylvania, we moved into the house of a colleague on sabbatical. I took all my boxes of documentation with me and began writing again, while actively resuming my interviews with Goffman's friends, relatives, and colleagues. But a year later, I had to admit that the writing wasn't finished, and probably was not going to be for a long time. So I asked my colleague and friend Greg Smith, the leading English specialist on Simmel and Goffman, to continue the work with me.

Smith and I went on to write papers together (such as Smith & Winkin, 2012), and we exchanged and shared a lot over the years. We also each produced our own little books on Goffman (Smith, 2006; Winkin & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2013). But we were both caught up in other professional emergencies and made little progress in our joint project for many years. That is, until the day when we both found ourselves retired and, aside from a few projects still underway, plenty of time to ourselves.[5] It was at this point that I had a strange realization: The writing of Goffman's biography was beginning to look more and more like Penelope's web. As I write this, I have to face up to the reality of this undertaking, which will end up lasting as long as the life of its hero: I am already at an age that Goffman never reached; his son Tom, born the same year I was, died a few years ago.

## *How Not to Complete a Biography*

Fortunately, not all biographers suffer from the Penelope syndrome. They complete one (thick) biography and move on to the next. I think with admiration of Pierre Assouline, Benoît Peeters, and François Dosse, for example. But in my almost forty years of circling this Goffman biography, I have come to claim a certain expertise in how to fend off the kiss of death. So, in conclusion, here are my recommendations to all those who would like to embark on the same adventure:

[5] Greg Smith, together with Michael Hviid Jacobsen, edited the *International Handbook of Goffman Studies,* which was published by Routledge in 2022.

1. Select a (deceased) personality for whom no authorized archive exists.
2. Put an ocean (the Atlantic, for example) between this personality and yourself.
3. Make sure that many of those who knew this personality would prefer either to write this biography themselves, or to invite you to write their biography instead.
4. Let years go by between interviews, until one day you realize that most of your informants will have trouble answering you from beyond the grave.
5. Select a complex interpretative framework that will prove almost impossible to operationalize.
6. But stick with it no matter what, despite the advice of your readers.
7. Spend weeks on minor details, e.g., a date to confirm, a photo to find, a quote to check.
8. Leave your archives in a cheerful mess, to create a romantic atmosphere.
9. Embark on a "meta" study of the status of biography in literary, historical, and scientific studies, so as to "situate" yourself.
10. Regularly embark on various projects, on completely different subjects, in order to clear the table before getting down to business once and for all.
11. Agree to write the same biographical article over and over again (for dictionaries, for example) or small, focused articles in collective works, so that you can get over the urge to go back to the main work.
12. Write in a foreign language that you are familiar with orally, giving you the illusion that you have mastered it as well in writing.

Many more recommendations could be made, but twelve will suffice to get matters started. Or perhaps just a thirteenth, for the magic of the number: When the day comes, do not forget to put your nose in the freshly published work and take a deep breath. The scent will wash away any frustrations.

## *Thanks*

You hold this book in your hand, and I did not fail to smell the first copy that came my way. Thus, I have finally faltered in my own recommendations,

completing a (small) biography of Goffman, focused on a single issue—that of conferences, with a single interpretive framework—that offered by the polysemy of the notion of performance. It's not *the* biography—not yet. But it is getting close.

My thanks go to Michaël Bourgatte, my editor at MkF, for his trust and his exacting standards. Without him, I would still be adding to my list of recommendations. My thanks also go to my three sparring partners in Goffmanology: Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, Greg Smith, and Rod Watson, who have been with me for decades on this insane quest, never ceasing to encourage me. Lastly, I would like to extend my thanks to Emily Alexander, who painstakingly copyedited the present English-speaking version of the book.

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## From Erving to Goffman

**A Work in Performance?**

**by Yves Winkin**

Erving Goffman was among the most prominent sociologists of the twentieth century. An unmatched observer of everyday human interaction, he has only grown in influence since his untimely death in 1980. Yet, sustained biographical accounts of Goffman remain sparse.

Translated from the French (*D'Erving à Goffman: Une œuvre performée?*, 2022, MkF éditions), this biography by Yves Winkin—one of the world's leading Goffman scholars—is an elegantly written and deeply informed account of the sociologist's life. *From Erving to Goffman* offers a reading of Goffman through his performances on stage, at the lectern, before an audience. Winkin treats the lecture—Goffman's own conference talks and writings on the lecture form—as a reflexive device to draw out how the Canadian-born Erving became Goffman the American sociologist.

*From Erving to Goffman* is a biography in miniature, joining an account of the scholar's life with a collection of conference vignettes from his travels. It is a story of a sociologist made in performance, with photographers banned and appearances—on and off-stage—orchestrated. *From Erving to Goffman*, the latest installment in the Goffman in the Open series, is an unusually perceptive portrait-in-fragments of the sociologist who became Goffman.

Yves Winkin was trained in Communication at the University of Liège (Belgium) and at the University of Pennsylvania. He has taught in Belgium, France, and elsewhere in the world, from Africa to China. He has written extensively on the history of recent American social sciences with a focus on the life and work of Erving Goffman, whom he got to know from 1976 to 1982. Thanks to Goffman, he spent a semester observing monkeys at the Philadelphia zoo.

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