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Communication Conduct in an Island Community

Erving Goffman

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with a new
introduction by
Yves Winkin



Erving Goffman

COMMUNICATION CONDUCT
IN AN ISLAND COMMUNITY

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COMMUNICATION CONDUCT
IN AN ISLAND COMMUNITY

*A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Division of
the Social Sciences in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor
of Philosophy*

Department of Sociology

By

Erving Goffman

Chicago, Illinois

December, 1953

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Chapter XXII: On Projected Selves

THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY IT has been suggested that when islanders participate together in an interplay, countless events become available for aptly expressing the attitudes of the participants, especially the attitudes they have towards themselves and towards fellow-participants. With every word and gesture, a participant can convey his conception of himself and his conception of the others present, and every one of his words and gestures may be taken by others as an expression of these conceptions. The individual may, of course, attempt to conceal this expression or actually may not (even unconsciously) make use of opportunities for it, but in any case the others will assume that his behavior expresses his valuation of himself and them. It will therefore be advisable for the individual to take account of the possible interpretations that might be placed upon his behavior, regardless of which, if any, interpretation he thinks is correct.

When persons come together for purposes of interplay, each brings expectations as to the rights and obligations he will enjoy, and, by implication, a conception of himself which he expects the interplay will sustain. He also brings a familiarity with the treatment that ought to be accorded certain categories of persons and sufficient familiarity with symbols of status to hurriedly place those he meets into such social categories. And if the participants happen to know, or know of, one another, then, as Bales suggests, each participant may become, for the others, someone whose "... past actions and identity are remembered, including what he 'has done' prior to his entrance into the group and what he 'is' outside the present in-group, and are attributed to him in the present as a part of his total significance."¹ In other words, each participant brings to the interplay a preliminary state of social information.

At the moment of coming together, each participant—by his initial conduct and appearance—is felt by others to "project" a self into the situation. Given the state of social information and given the availability of countless events for conveying expression, it seems

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¹ Robert F. Bales, *Interaction Process Analysis*, p. 71.

inevitable that even inaction on the part of an individual will be taken by others as a positive *t* on his part to say something. The participant may be non-committal and indefinite; he may be passive, and he may act unwittingly. None the less, others will feel that he has projected into the situation an assumption as to how he ought to be treated and hence, by implication, a conception of himself. If this project did not occur—if this initial social identification did not take place—then the participants could not begin to act in an orderly way to one another. As Simmel suggests, “The first condition of having to deal with somebody at all is to know with *whom* one has to deal.”²

² Simmel, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

In the ordinary course of events, it would seem that the selves projected into an interplay provide a significant part of the initial definition of the situation, for it is by these selves that each participant knows what to expect from others and what is expected from him. These projected selves provide the guide lines for action, determining important aspects of the working acceptance that is sooner or later achieved. Each person's projected self gives the other something to go by. Whether participants accept the projected self of another, or whether they tactfully attempt to bring it into line with their conception of him, they are likely to use it as a starting point and as a basis of orientation in their treatment of him. If the interaction is not to be dysphoric, then, apparently, the self that an individual presents to or projects into the situation must be sufficiently familiar and acceptable to the others not to disturb their unthinking involvement in the interplay.

The selves that are initially projected into the situation, and the expectations associated with them, become, then, a basic premise of what is to follow in the interplay. The activity that does follow is, in a sense, merely an elaboration and controlled modification of the initially accepted status quo. It would seem, then, that interplay is an inherently conservative thing, and that all participants have a vested interest in maintaining the validity of the initial understanding, for if communications are intimately based upon an initial definition of the situation, then any contradiction of this definition is likely to leave the participants up in the air, lodged in roles and in conversation no longer supported by a definition of the situation. If the interplay is not to be brought to a confused and embarrassed halt, then the guiding assumptions provided by the initially projected selves must not be fundamentally altered or discredited, regardless of how the participants actually feel about the assumptions they have temporarily accepted. If the minute social system formed by persons during interplay is to be maintained, the definition of the situation must not be destroyed.

The presence of potential disruptions to the working acceptance, and the constant necessity of avoiding or side-stepping these difficulties, or, if they occur, of correcting or compensating for them, seem to be crucial conditions under which participants must operate. (While it is true that in many interplays a particular participant will formally or informally take on the responsibility of seeing that peace and order are maintained, still it can be said that all the others present are sworn in as deputies.) These crucial conditions seem to provide a very useful perspective from which to classify and analyze interplay behavior, leading us to bring together into one type, behaviors which bear the same relation to the contingencies of maintaining a given definition of the situation. While a treatment of interplay behavior based on this point of reference is implicit in some of the previous parts of this study, an explicit effort along these lines will be made in this chapter.

SERIOUS DISRUPTIONS

It was suggested that when an individual enters interplay he does so in a particular capacity; whether he is aware of it or not, others feel he has presented himself in a certain guise or light, making certain demands, willing to satisfy certain others, and in general anticipating that a valuation of a given kind will be placed upon him.

Events may occur during an interplay which provide information about a particular participant that is patently incompatible with the information that has been accepted or assumed concerning him. A self he has openly accepted (before himself and others) as having, he proves not to have; his projected self is discredited. And since his initially projected self served to guide the interplay—and was meant to go on doing so—the interplay itself becomes disordered. Two types of discrediting resulting in dysphoria will be considered: “gaffes” and “pretensions.”

1. A gaffe may be defined as any event which precipitously and involuntarily discredits a projected self that has been acceptably integrated into a definition of the situation. A gaffe may be produced by the very participant whose projected self the gaffe embarrasses, or by another participant, or by an agency other than the participants.

In Dixon, anxiety over the possibility of committing a gaffe in interplay is often present. People in Dixon have fantasies of terrible gaffes occurring, these fantasies presumably serving to reinforce rules regarding proper conduct. Thus, in a favorite concert play, a “pesceet” [“stuck up”] outsider is portrayed as examining a crofter’s cottage for cleanliness and remarking that there is superfluous soot on the ceiling; she places improper syllabic stress on the word “su-

perfluous," showing that she does not have the education that use of a long word implies (and that the audience watching the play by implication does). The outsider's projection of a superior self is thereby punctured.

Occasions when a gaffe almost occurred are nervously talked about for a brief time after the occasion.

For a day after its occurrence, Dr. Wren tells of having gone into the hotel kitchen and upon seeing a new girl there, almost taking her for Mabel Crown, Mrs. Tate's niece, who was scheduled to come to help out for a few days. The young woman in the kitchen was actually someone from another island, hired for a few weeks as a replacement. Dr. Wren had been acting toward the Tates in the manner of someone who would obviously know which person ought to be associated with the name of Mabel Crown, and had he called the wrong girl Mabel, it would have been difficult to sustain this manner. Ten minutes after almost misnaming the girl, Dr. Wren came into the den where he and other guests were eating, and said in a tone of mixed relief, wonderment, and humor: "I almost made a terrible faux pas; I thought the girl in the kitchen was Mabel Crown."

Occasions when a gaffe has occurred seem to become cautionary tales and are retold for years as a source of humor and as a means of ensuring involvement of participants—and perhaps as a means of playing out a realization of anxieties. Some examples may be given.

The harbormaster, Jimmy Andrews, is recounting experiences he used to have in his drinking days when the county inspector would arrive unannounced to check up on Andrew's devotion to duty:

"I mind the time there were a good taw o three boats at the pier and I was sittin at home in me underwear and old pants. And the inspector he comes up in a taxi and comes to the door and asks for Jimmy Andrews. So I say, 'He's at the pier, I expect.' And the driver shouts out, 'Why there's the man himself.' I tell you I almost got the can that time."

On the island, as in Bergand in general, there is a tendency for the task of any one person to be defined as something any other person who happens to be near ought to lend a hand with. Also, one's body is defined as something that may be crowded next to another's in a lorry or in the cabin of a small boat. Congruent with this pattern, it is customary for the person serving food to help the person being served to a degree not sanctioned in the British middle classes. In the hotel dining room, however, the hotel staff attempts to maintain a middle-class definition of the situation, serving food not ordinarily eaten by crofters and stressing individual portions: individual butter balls are served instead of a single slab of butter, individual jam tarts are served instead of a single pie cut into segments; milk and sugar are served along with the tea, giving each guest an opportunity to express individual taste and self-determination, whereas crofters ordinarily put milk in all cups before serving tea. The scullery boy tells of the time he

was pressed into service as a waiter and put sugar into the tea of one of the guests and mixed it himself.

One Sunday afternoon in the hotel kitchen Mrs. Tate is reminiscing about previous ministers:

"We had this minister who was oh so fiery. He used to preach with his arms waiving around in the air trying to save the folk. And he used to read his sermon from sheets. One time I was sitting in the front and I saw him wave with one hand and turn over the page with the other. I kint then that he was just puttin it on."

Some examples are given below of gaffes that occurred during the research.

During her first few months on the island, the new doctor's wife, Mrs. Wren, was asked to join the Women's Rural Institute and to grace the organization's semi-annual flower show, awarding prizes for the winners in the several competitions. Being in favor of lower-middle class pursuits for the commoners, she consented. In accordance with the established pattern for these matters, a member of the organization who had a good command of standard English read off the name of each winner, and the character of her prize, and then passed the prize to the current president of the organization. The president would then pass the prize to the guest of honor—in this case Mrs. Wren—and she would pass it to the winner, who by then would have come up to the front of the hall in order to receive it. As each winner came up to the front of the hall, Mrs. Wren, following what was expected of her, would smile to the winner in a manner suggesting that she knew the winner by name, and would congratulate her. Since each winner would have to first rise from her chair, and then walk up to the front of the hall, before receiving her prize, it was possible for Mrs. Wren to spot the person to whom she was going to have to smile graciously before the person had come close, and in this way an illusion could be given that the winner was actually known to Mrs. Wren, and that the greeting was a spontaneous consequence of interaction with the winner. One prize, however, was won by the president of the organization, with whom Mrs. Wren, up to that moment, had been carrying on what appeared to be very friendly and informal intercourse. Not knowing the name of the president, Mrs. Wren got her smile ready and looked into the audience to find the person she was to direct it upon. The president tried to save the situation by tugging at Mrs. Wren's arm, but before she could do this everyone was given a glimpse into the fact that the friendliness and familiarity that Mrs. Wren had been showing to the president and to each successive winner was to some extent merely a show. A painful moment of embarrassment followed.

Mr. and Mrs. Tate are away for the evening and the staff is in the hotel kitchen. An elderly male guest knocks at the kitchen door.

Guest: "Can I have a cup of tea, newly infused and hot, and a piece of ginger cake."

Jean: "Yes." (She projects a customary tone of accommodative obedience.)

The guest then closes the door. The staff has been courteous but feels that the old man is over-demanding as well as foolish. They burst out laughing at him when they see that the door is closed, and someone mimics the guest. The guest pops his head back into the kitchen; he has a look of having heard and having understood. He says, "I see you are all happy tonight." The staff becomes completely flustered. The guest's tea is delivered in pained silence. By the next day the staff can retell the incident as a joke.

During billiards one evening twelve persons appear, this being several more than usual and necessarily lowering the total number of games played by each person during the evening. Two men, Tom Clark and Kenneth Burns, both keen lovers of the game, have played two games each and neither has played for three quarters of an hour. Three players who have only played one game apiece and who are persons other players like to play with are about to begin a game. By rules of fairness, either Clark or Burns ought to be the fourth to complete the match. As customary, Clark and Burns each claims that he does not particularly want to play and that the other should go ahead. Three circuits of offers and counteroffers are made by the two men, so that at last the others present are almost convinced that Clark and Burns really don't want to play. Burns finally decides that it will now be safe to accept and picks up a cue in readiness for play. Most of the others present see this action and it is assumed that Burns has now become the fourth for the game and that Clark was not interested in playing or was too polite to play. However Clark apparently does not see Burns' silent act that defined the situation and, picking up a cue, he takes on the air of someone entering the spirit of a game, of someone "talking it up," and he says jokingly, "Well, Jimmy [the player he expects to be partnered with], let's show them." Immediately Clark sees that the situation has been defined with him as a member of the audience, not as a player; he loses countenance and smothers his act as quickly as possible, stepping back from the table and out of the view of most of those present.

In the hotel kitchen during staff lunch, talk turns to the fact that writers and motion picture people always come to Bergand in quest of the most newsworthy lore, i.e., romantic backward peasant customs, and that a false picture of the islands has consequently been created. [The complaint seems quite justified.] Mr. Tate, especially, shows great antagonism to these practices, to the point where the maids and the scullery boy feel he is carrying things too far. Finally Mr. Tate says, "How many folk have running water and electricity even though they have to make their own water." This seems to discredit the standards of propriety that have been assumed in the interplay, albeit the discrediting was patently accidental, and one of the maids and the scullery boy drop their eyes and bend their heads downward in an effort to stop from bursting out laughing.

During socials the practice is sometimes followed of announcing prizewinners and performers by formal naming, e.g., "The second prize has been won by Mr. John Smith" (or Mrs. or Miss Smith). This

custom is especially followed during occasions run by the Women's Rural Institute and during prize-giving at flower and produce shows, for it is at these times that members of the community most selfconsciously practice middle-class roles. Along with formal naming, little speeches of acceptance are given in standard English, and everyone, of course, is dressed "well." Perhaps the chief difference between the kind of middle-class show put on at these times and similar shows that occur in British urban centers is that except for a few outsiders who occasionally attend, all persons present will have previously interacted with one another on the basis of first-naming, work clothes, the Bergand dialect, and crofter tasks, and will do so again when the social occasion is terminated. At one social the master of ceremonies was (as was often the case) Tom Clark, a clerk in the Allens' shop, a young man of crofting origins who is already widely accepted as a community leader and is a central figure in the rising middle class. When the time came to announce the winners of the flower show he left a knot of friends, mounted the stage, and successfully called out the first two winners, who were women, by their formal names. Their dress, his dress, and the manner of all of them properly sustained the air of middle-class respectability that these competitions always project into the situation. The third winner was Jimmy-Andrew Simon, a commoner employed as a baker in the Allen Bakery. Tom Clark and Jimmy-Andrew Simon are neighbors, work in the same building, and are great friends. Clark, like almost all the commoners on the island, calls Simon by his double name. Simon, who was in the knot of friends that Clark had left when he went up to the stage, had worn a formal dark blue suit and was ready to appear on the stage with middle-class dignity. When the time came for his formal name to be announced, Clark could not think of it; he knew who had won the third prize and where the winner was standing but he could not think of the winner as other than Jimmy-Andrew. It was impossible for him to say "Mr. Simon." After a confused pause, Clark finally announced in a stutter, "Jimmy-Andrew Simon." A few minutes later, when Clark returned to his knot of friends, his face was still red from embarrassment, and he said, "I was never so embarrassed, Jimmy-Andrew, I just could not think of thy name."

Mrs. Tate has been testing the staff on a mathematical puzzle printed in the newspaper, introducing a kind of competition in which she is almost certain to excel and in which the cook is almost certain to fail. He does not succeed in solving the problem and Mrs. Tate says, "You're not very good in mathumatics [*sic*], are you?" She does not notice that she has mispronounced "mathematics" and that this mispronunciation belies her assumed familiarity with the discipline. The two maids look at each other collusively behind Mrs. Tate's back, furtively conveying a mocking smile to each other.

The minister of the established Church in Dixon is a man of humble birth from the mainland of Britain. University training has not covered his "common" accent. As is the pattern in Britain, he is given a kind of ceremonial rank of equality by the gentry; he is invited to their larger and more official gatherings. However, for the gentry he is a faulty

person; the person they must treat him as is too far removed from the person they really think he is. He is given to drink and Mrs. Wren has whispered jokingly to her friends that he smells a little for want of a bath. When not in his presence, the gentry use a nickname for referring to him, taking the first syllable of his last name. Sometimes on a Sunday he would come to the hotel for dinner, which he would take with the Wrens. At these times, the gentry would begin by treating him politely but often end the meal by baiting him and almost treating him in an unserious way. Attempts on his part to sanction them for not attending church and thereby maintain some kind of hold over them would not meet with polite apologies but with clear counter-rebukes, expressing the fact that it was not his place to tell them anything. On one occasion, conversation turned to a humorous matter on which the four persons at table (the minister, the Wrens, and the writer) could equally join. Things became merrier and merrier, with everyone accepting the self projected by each of the others. Suddenly the minister got carried away by a joke—carried away a little more than is defined as proper at a middle-class table—and leaned over and lightly slapped Mrs. Wren's back, a slap of goodfellowship. As the blow of familiarity fell, he and the others present realized that the minister's earthier past had presented itself, to the embarrassment of his present self. He withdrew his hand limply, attempting, and failing, to maintain a note of spontaneous involvement, then settling back into customary discomfort for the remainder of the meal.

A common strategy by which individuals dealt with gaffes was suddenly to define the whole situation as unserious and burst into mirth. This seemed to be a way of suddenly introducing new projected selves into the situation, so that it would be possible to treat the discredited ones as a joking matter and still have something to build interaction upon.³ Frequently this line of adjustment would be initiated by the person who had made the gaffe, especially if he had made it against himself. Only certain gaffes, of course, could be handled in this way. Some examples of the use, successful or unsuccessful, of this strategy may be given.

It is evening in the hotel kitchen and the managers, the Tates, are away. The maids are polishing the guests' shoes and the cook is sweeping the kitchen. The maids have been at the hotel all winter but the cook just started his summer's employments month ago. The maids have been friends since childhood and are on swearing terms with each other, but taboos regarding such matters have not yet (as they will come to be) broken down with the male members of the kitchen staff. Alice drops some polish, gets angry, forgets herself, and says "fuck" out loud. The relation of intimacy signified by premising to-use this word has not yet been established and socially speaking there is no place for the word to fall. There is a hushed moment in the kitchen, and then Alice bursts out laughing. Jean, the other maid, blushes deeply, looks at Alice, and then looks down.

³ Bergson, in a well-known contribution to the theory of laughter—*Laughter* (London: Macmillan, 1911)—suggests that we laugh when a person behaves as if he were a mechanical object. Freud, in another well-known contribution to an understanding of laughter—"Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious," reprinted in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Random House-Modern Library, 1938)—suggests that we laugh when the occurrence of an event obviates the necessity of suppressing our inclination to have the event occur. From the point of view of this study, both theories seem to be saying the same thing. In the first case, we have an individual who presents himself as someone who is a person and then discredits this projected self by behaving like an object. In the second case we have an individual who presents himself as a person of a given moral status and then inadvertently.

Two men are on a Sunday visit to the home of a third. Their host is returning from across a loch where he has gone to see how his lambs are progressing. He pulls his boat partway up on the shore and looks for a rock to lay on top of the painter. His guests, thirty feet away, watch him looking for such a rock. He finds a large one, weighing about seventy pounds. It is expected that some strain will be expressed as the man, who is of slight build, leans down to pick up the rock. A self under strain is projected for him by the pair who watch him. Instead he lifts the rock up with no apparent strain whatsoever. Both watchers simultaneously and involuntarily look at each other and laugh. While they knew that the man lifting the rock was reputed to be one of the strongest men of the island, they had still projected normal expectations as to how he would appear.

On Wednesday night at eight there is to be a community concert at which John Landor, the local orator, is to give one of his famous extemporaneous speeches. As he is wont to say, he merely gets up on the platform and says whatever comes into his mind. [He has, incidentally, great stage presence and can handle an audience in a very professional way.] So well known are these speeches that the name he uses on the stage is a name often given him off the stage. On the morning after the concert Alice Simon, Landor's niece, tells the following story to a few friends gathered in the hotel kitchen: "Last night I was walkin up the road past Lakeview [her house] about six o'clock and there was Johnny walkin ahead of me, not seein me, givin his speech into the night. Bairns, I thought I'd die."

In the temporary sleeping quarters in the barn behind the hotel the scullery boy is napping. It is late on his afternoon off. Mrs. Tate has to ask him something and wakes him up. Apparently he has been dreaming, for he wakes up startled, expecting to find a world quite different from the one around him. Mrs. Tate expects to see someone whose face expresses the fact that he is in an employee relationship to her, someone ready to engage in the interaction he will find himself in as he awakens. Instead she momentarily sees, by the look in his eyes, a person who has been startled out of a more dignified role. She bursts out laughing and immediately afterward recounts the incident to those in the kitchen.

At a community concert, Tom Clark is reading the names of raffle winners, and Ted Allen, in his customary effort to remain out of the limelight in these matters, is hidden from the audience behind the stage curtain in the role of curtain-puller. Clark receives a ballot from the young girl drawing ballots from a barrel and attempts to read the name on it. The name is badly written, and he fails. In an unthinking effort to keep the show going, Ted Allen comes from his hiding place and tries to read it for him. He suddenly realizes that his effort to show that he is not helping to run the social has been exposed. He turns to the audience, blushes, and gives the audience a broad smile of admission.

2. A gaffe has been defined as a sudden involuntary event which patently discredits a projected self that has already been accepted by

shows that this is not the case. No doubt part of the laughter that is found in such situations arises from the fact that maintenance of a role requires a degree of nervous tension and that sudden breaking of the role acts as a release for this tension—hence the characteristically "nervous" quality of some laughter. However it would seem that sometimes laughter in these situations represents an effort to assimilate the self that has been discredited to an unserious self, one whose discrediting is of little moment. The two roles of laughter are frequently separated in situations where the self that has been discredited is too important to be assimilated to an unserious one. In such cases, nervous laughter on the part of participants may be rigorously repressed and only conveyed by means or collusive looks or by waiting for the offender to leave first. The position could be taken that nervous or spontaneous laughter was a means of saying that the whole situation, and not merely the self of the offender, ought to be defined as unserious.

others and built into the interplay. A pretension may be defined as the more or less voluntary projection of a self which from the very beginning is unacceptable to others and which continues, for the period during which the individual is a participant, to inject a false note into the situation. The pretentious projection is unassimilable in the interplay because there is too much variance between the role the actor assumes and what is already known about the actor or what he comes unwittingly to reveal about himself. As Cooley suggests, "If we divine a discrepancy between a man's words and his character, the whole impression of him becomes broken and painful . . ."⁴ Other participants may exercise forbearance, so that the offender may never realize he has behaved in an impossible way. Sometimes the offended persons cannot tolerate the discrepancy and refuse to allow the offender to proceed, leaving him in a position of blustering.⁵ Examples of both kinds of situations follow.

The laird's house, "Alexander Hall," a historic landmark in Dixon, is built near the shore of the inlet, and the laird has a stone pier from which the annual boat races are run and off which the laird moors his rowboat. A local thirty-foot fishing boat which an old crofter, Henry Johnson, and his two sons operate during the summer months is usually moored between this pier and the main Dixon pier, some three hundred yards away. The Johnsons decided to moor their boat closer inshore this summer, hence closer than usual to the laird's pier. A few nights after they moored their boat where they wanted to, Henry Johnson, somewhat in his cups at a social, told the following story—a story told and retold many times since then.

"We put the boat there and the other night I'm walking up to the shop and the laird stops me and says, 'Henry, you've got your boat in the place that you know has always traditionally been the mooring place for Alexander Hall. Would you move it, please.' [Mr. Alexander still has a little of the manner of a laird even though he now has little land left, and little power over the land he possesses. Traditionally it would never have been necessary for an Alexander to raise the question about mooring rights.] So I says to him, 'Do you own the rights to that piece of water; do you have the legal right to make me move my boat?' Wit dat he got sore and red as a beetroot and says, 'Well, if we can't discuss it sensibly there's nothing more to be said,' and he stalks off. He's not back in India ordering niggers around; he can't get away wit that sort of ting now."

This story is partly confirmed by members the gentry, who say that Mr. Alexander had a scene with old Johnson and that Johnson had refused to remove his boat.

At a concert in Southend a young man from that community, well known throughout the island, gives a rendition of the song "Quick-silver." He affects a cowboy manner, wearing no tie and strumming a guitar. He attempts to carry off an informal manner and an American accent. After his song he waves his hand and says, "Cheerio, folks. I'll be back." The audience feels that in addition to a song, the performer

⁴ Cooley, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

⁵ A clear example of blustering is given in W. Lloyd Warner and J. O. Low, *The Social System of the Modern Factory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 145, with an analysis on p. 154. "Fred Jackson, one of the firm of Jones and Jackson, on the other hand, over-participated in the strike with disastrous results to himself and interruptions to the negotiations in progress between the manufacturers and striking employees. Here is the story as Nixon, president of the union, told it to an interviewer (later verified from interviews with management): 'One of the manufacturers, Fred Jackson, a "snappy" young fellow, came into a meeting and slapped a piece of paper down in front of me with a list of things Jones and Jackson proposed as an independent settlement. Jackson said, "I'm going to make you eat that, Nixon." And I said, "Well, I don't happen to like paper, Mr. Jackson." Jackson got very red and pulled a fifty dollar bill out of his pocket and slammed it down on the desk and said, "You cover that, Nixon, and we'll go downstairs in the mayor's office and whoever comes out first wins." I said, "Don't be so childish, Mr. Jackson." I only had about forty cents in my pocket at the time. The story got to New York and Jackson was called down the next day and fired.' Jackson damaged the cause of management when he tried to fight the head of the union. Everyone said he blustered, and everyone said he acted badly when he challenged union leadership. Jackson was under the control of higher management and occupied an inferior managerial position where he had little freedom to assume command and take leadership. Yet he had learned

was trying to stage a manner as well. It is felt that whatever he was trying, he has not carried it off. Many members of the audience feel embarrassed. Some feel that the performer in question has always put on too many airs. The applause is relatively light. Later in the concert when he comes back to lead the audience in a sing-song, they resist and only fitfully enter the singing. Next morning at the post mortem in the hotel kitchen Jean Andrews says, "When he said, 'I'll be back,' my face just turned red."

The minister of the established Church is having trouble getting enough people to attend church. Many factors are apparently involved. There has been a long history of collaboration between established clergy and the gentry in Bergand, and both groups were originally recruited, a few hundred years ago, from the mainland of Britain and are in some sense still outsiders. Further, the local gentry have not sufficiently supported the established Church in Dixon, tending to attend only on ceremonial occasions such as Christmas, and the church has failed in its traditional role of being a place of meeting and a place of integration of commoner and gentry. (The community hall and the Allens' shop are the real centers of the community.) On some occasions, as few as six persons attend a Sunday service. The minister is then required to deliver a sermon that takes its tone and form from an institutionalized mode of discourse appropriately designed for an audience larger than forty. The minister finds himself projecting a self that would be appropriate for an orator to present before a sizable audience. The few persons actually present sense the discrepancy and feel embarrassed.

A wedding is being held. The groom is a man in his thirties who lost his first wife through sickness. The bride is a young woman who is the unmarried mother of a sixteen-year-old boy. Both persons are highly esteemed in the community. At the ceremony the bride is dressed in full wedding apparel, of the kind that would do credit to a middle-class wedding anywhere in Britain. She wears a white dress and veil, traditional symbols of virginity. For some persons at the wedding this is a presumption and causes them some embarrassment.

Alice Simon's boy friend, John Neil, is away on an eight-month voyage. During his absence, they confirm, by correspondence, their intention of getting married [which they have since done]. Alice is an attractive girl, and during John's absence two difficult situations arise.

The previous year a man who had come to the island to watch birds, and who had stayed his two weeks at the hotel, had escorted Alice to the community hall during evenings, had spent some time in the kitchen when the Tates were away, and had shown other innocent interest in Alice's company. The day he arrived for his second annual visit was the day Alice was scheduled to receive a long distance call from John, and the staff had been oriented all day toward the coming call and its implications. Immediately upon his arrival at the hotel, the bird-watcher came into the kitchen and asked the cook where Alice was (she was out at the moment). His tone signified an eager expectation that his relation with Alice would be the same, or more

from William Pierce when he worked for him how his kind of man should act, and he knew that an owner and manager should assume control. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that the conflict between his beliefs about how a man should act (how Mr. Pierce would do it) and what he was remitted to do by his status greatly contributed to causing his unfortunate act, an act which materially aided the union. He tried to take command in a situation where it was impossible, and he could only 'bluster.'"

intimate, than the year before. The staff felt embarrassed. As the cook said the next day, "Dus du kin, I was embarrassed, for I do like that boy. I just did not know what to say."

The other incident was perhaps more serious. For years a local commoner had been enamored of Alice and desirous of marrying her, a fact that was rather widely known. At a time when Alice's relation to John had been confirmed, the disappointed suitor misread the signals and on the occasion of a Christmas visit presented Alice with a wrist watch as a Christmas present. On the island, an investment of that kind is a ratified symbol of engagement. Alice was forced to refuse the gift, although she could do nothing about the giver's having publicly committed himself to the expectation of engagement to her. The disappointed suitor could do nothing but take himself unseriously for the remainder of the evening, playing the fool over a matter that was felt to be too serious for anybody to attempt to resolve in this way. As the participants later agreed, it was a painful evening.

An engineering company has sent a man to direct test drilling on the island for chromate ore. He is a very hard worker, his wife is very much liked, and he has no "side." However, from the islander's point of view he is a very faulty person. Time after time during informal interplay he will immediately charge in with a recital of how the drilling is going. He projects an assumption that those present are aware of the state of drilling reached the previous day, of the vocabulary of drilling, and of the contingencies of the job. Talk that would be meaningful and perhaps interesting to his crew, were they already engaged in shoptalk, he employs as a first message with persons who know nothing about the job. He gives a constant impression of presumptuous self-concern. The islanders handle the situation by tactfully attempting to act as if they are interested, answering his statements with terminal echos such as "Yea, yea." They felt that he felt they ought to be interested in the development of the island's resources, but they were shocked at his undue preoccupation with his own task.

John Adamson, a man of about forty-two, is a regular billiards player. He is not a member of the rising middle class to the degree that almost all the other players are, nor does he associate informally with the other players at other times to the degree that the others do. When non-players learn that Adamson is a regular player they sometime ask, "What's he doing there?" Whatever his position, the regular players feel that he shows too much eagerness in play, and while other players are also guilty of this offense he, perhaps more than others, attempts to maintain a show of not being overly-involved. The impression his expressive behavior gives is inconsistent with his linguistic behavior, and the discrepancy causes some tension among the others and brings some dysphoria to the interplay. Thus, when the question arises as to who'll play the next game, he follows the polite rules and disclaims any desire to play, but there is a feeling that he is patently insincere and that he too willingly allows himself to be pushed into playing next. When he hits a ball he makes the customary claim that it is a poor shot, but he keeps on watching the ball until it has come to a dead stop,

instead of expressing unconcern by turning away from the table if the shot is fairly certain not to score. He loudly disclaims the possibility of making a shot for which he is known to have sufficient skill, thus seeming to build up a situation in which credit will come to him. The gentleman's agreement rule in billiards not to directly sink the opponent's ball is broken by him before the tension and definition of the situation has reached a point where this aggressive act is thoroughly acceptable; or he makes too much of not exercising an opportunity to sink an opponent's ball, giving the impression that he has refrained from sinking it merely to demonstrate that he is playing in the proper spirit. In general, it is felt that close behind the self he projects of someone who is taking the game in the right spirit is a self that is too eager.

It is to be understood, of course, that the same act on the part of a particular sender may be quite acceptable to one set of recipients and yet another set of recipients may feel that the actor has been pretentious. Thus, during community concerts, a local spinster gives a solo singing performance that islanders take seriously and think highly of. By city standards, however, the woman's voice is so bad and her manner of delivery is so "old-fashioned" that visitors to the island either mistake the performance for a conscious satire or find it difficult not to laugh. For the outsiders, the woman's full-throated dramatic rendition is a pretension to, and a presumption of, talent which outsiders feel she does not possess.

Another example may be cited. While islanders seem to be no more superstitious than many members of the working classes in British cities, still there are occasions when adults will discuss with full seriousness the arguments for and against the existence of "second sight," that is, the capacity to know in advance that an event will take place (especially dire events), or to know at a distance that a given event has taken place. Sometimes the exploits of islanders known for their capacity in this regard will be cited as positive evidence. There is among the current adolescents of the community, especially among some of the boys, a wholly rationalistic orientation to such matters as "second sight." These persons assume that no full-fledged adult could hold superstitious beliefs, and in talking to anyone they seem to talk on the assumption that the person they are speaking to is not a superstitious person. When the question of supernatural powers is seriously discussed in the presence of these young people, they often find it hard to "keep a straight face" and behave politely. They give each other sly, furtive looks conveying their attitude on these matters; sometimes they cannot trust themselves to do this and carefully cast their eyes down. For them, an individual who talks in a serious fashion about supernatural powers is not a person at all, and the failure of the superstitious speaker

to realize that he is not behaving as a full-fledged person is, for the unbelievers, a laughable rigidity and a self-delusion.

* * * * *

During interplay among commoners in Dixon, unacceptable projections seem to be limited by two factors. First, all residents of the island possessed a great deal of information about one another, so that it was quite impractical for individuals to make verbal claims for themselves which their life apart from the interplay did not support. It would seem that the more difficult it is for an individual to "get away" with a falsehood about himself, the less likely he is to attempt to do so, and the less frequently these falsehoods are attempted, the less opportunity, presumably, there is for gaffes or pretensions to occur. Secondly, there is a strong tendency for all commoners to define themselves first and foremost as Bergand crofters and to be ready at any time to show loyalty to this grouping. Allegiance is shown in the main by not putting on airs—by not being "pesceet," as the islanders call it. Since crofters are recognized to be a low and humble group, those who avow this status have no place to fall.

Perhaps the most frequent kind of unacceptable projection was one produced by outsiders during interplay with islanders—one that the producer usually remained unaware of having produced. Islanders as a whole possessed much information about the physical layout of the island⁶ and about the administrative routine by which it was operated. And there is current in both sexes a wide familiarity with croft tools and croft techniques. Furthermore, as islanders themselves claim, nearly every man has a wide range of specialized skills, such as carpentry, garage mechanics, and seamanship. This information and training has come for the islanders to be an expected attribute of man as such. An individual—especially a male adult—who enters interplay is automatically assumed to enter with a self qualified in these ways. Thus, outsiders who ask questions about the island, or show lack of familiarity with its routine of activity, or make an effort to perform an island task, or touch a boat of any kind, inevitably discredit the self that has been implicitly imputed to them by the islanders. When outsiders display these shortcomings and at the same time express an air of urban assurance and superiority to islanders, they become especially laughable to the islanders, although of course they are rarely laughed at out loud.

⁶ This seems to be rapidly declining today. Fifty years ago, when the population was more scattered throughout the island, proper names were current for many small landmarks, knolls, hills, crags, and inlets. Today even the generic terms for some of these identifiable formations are passing out of use.

UNSERIOUS DISRUPTIONS

It has been suggested that gaffes are sometimes handled by defining the situation in an unserious way, so that the self that is discredited can in some way be dissociated from the person whose self it was. In Dixon much use seemed to be made of this possibility as a source of fun. Instead of resolving an embarrassing situation by introducing an unserious definition of the situation, disruptive events are purposely engineered so that an embarrassing situation will arise, but care is taken to ensure that an unserious view of it will be taken. Three varieties of this behavior may be mentioned.

1. In Dixon many households have a member who is recognized for his ability to "take off," as they say, on others. This refers to the practice of mimicking an individual or "taking" his role in circumstances where his response can be taken as characteristic of him and especially of his failings. Mimics in Dixon seem to be very skilled and frequently succeed in copying the physical posture, the facial expressions, and the accent and intonation of another, as well as the linguistic content of his response at a characteristic moment. The amount of laughter that a mimic evokes from his audience appears to vary according to the accuracy of his gestural copy and the number of behavior levels that he is able to bring into the gestural portrait. Certain mimics become famous in a neighborhood circle for their treatment of a given individual, and at small gatherings they will be coaxed to perform their specialties. Mimics and their audience clearly recognize that a mere linguistic repetition of a person's statement will not evoke laughter. Obviously, the self projected in this way into the interaction is neither one's own nor that of the person being mimicked and is necessarily unsustainable.

2. Another favorite source of humor on the island is what is called "leg-pulling." The typical pattern is for an individual who is to be the butt or goat of the joke to be given information which others present know to be false or unsound. The butt is then led into projecting attitudes, responses, and actions which would be acceptable and creditable were the information true. Sooner or later during the interplay the butt learns that the information has been false and that, consequentially, the self he has projected into the interplay is necessarily untenable and ludicrous. It is a crucial feature of the game that the butt does catch on or that a truthful disclosure is finally made to him. As previously suggested, the person responsible for building up the false impression in the first place usually makes sure that someone else is present who can be let in on the joke, thus ensuring that the butt will have to define the situation, after he sees through the game, as only a game. The spirit of the game requires the butt

to do a big take of confusion and shock upon learning that he has been "had," and persons who almost get seriously angered are the best and favorite subjects. The moment of chagrin when the butt "catches on" is the high point of the game. Presumably spontaneous involvement of those in the know derives from the fact that were the unsustainable projection done in serious life, great embarrassment and chagrin would result.

Leg-pulling is of sociological interest not merely because it illustrates the effects of projecting a self that is patently inconsistent with reality but for two additional reasons. First, men of full adult status in the community, who had a wife, children, and no peculiarities, were considered too dignified to have their leg pulled, except on April First, even though many would have liked to make fun of them in this way. Persons below the age of about twelve are considered too easy to dupe, and apparently have too little to lose by the loss of their dignity to make the game worthwhile; they are not fair game. Persons entering adult status, and, especially, persons who are old enough to have achieved adult status but have for some reason failed to do so, are favorite butts for the game. Secondly, in order to make a prospective butt fall into the trap of belief, it was sometimes necessary for players of the joke to exercise very impressive skill in the control of what are usually thought of as the purely involuntary expressive components of behavior. So skilled are some islanders in doing this that one feels they do not feign expressive behavior during serious occasions because there would be a strong negative sanction for being caught doing it, not because of incapacity to do so. Apparently the fear of being caught out acts as an involuntary disturbance in the art of feigning, and when things have been arranged so that the sanction against false communication does not apply unexpected ability at feigning is shown.

One variety of leg-pull on the island is what has sometimes been called "sending persons on a fool's errand." Thus, the shops being closed Wednesdays, a favorite pastime is to ask someone in the house to run down to the shop to pick something up. If the person asked does not immediately "catch on," he usually either projects a self that is willing and happy to be accommodative or projects a self that has other immediate objections and can't oblige; in either case, sociological disaster is inevitable, since he conveys to those present a self that has accepted and adjusted to the right and obligation of doing a favor or a chore, and then finds that there was no basis for the projection. Every household seems to have a store of tales, often retold, of classic leg-pulls. A few examples follow:

One afternoon in the hotel kitchen talk turns to famous leg-pulls. Mrs. Tate says: "I remember once we decided to get one on Mary [a

former maid at the hotel]. So once when two men [hotel guests] had been on the o'erland early [early-morning overland transportation] we set the clocks back and made up the bed clothes to look like they were still there and then roused her and told her if they didn't hurry they'd sure be late, and she went and knocked and got no answer so she went in, saw the figure and come out and knocked agin—went and shook the figure. My we laughed."

Later in the conversation Mrs. Tate says, "Once we had a girl from Torin [another island in the Bergand group] to help and my she was slow. Finally, I could stand it no longer and I asked her to go to James [Mr. Tate] in the garage and get some elbow grease. He said his was all dirty and sent her to the shop."

Alice comments: "Like the time they sent Willi [one of the community's brasher young men] to the shop for short circuits and John [a mild-mannered clerk] asked Alex [the manager] if they had any."

It may be noted that the practice of leg-pulling also appeared in an organized form during games held at large house parties. As previously suggested, the form of the game required that a butt (or sequence of butts) be chosen, and that the remainder of those present be in on the joke. Ordinarily a half dozen or so young persons would be kept outside a room while the joke was being explained to persons in the room. As each butt learned the secret by having the joke played on him, he would be added to the audience, and another butt would take his place from those chosen to wait outside. In general, the game consisted of involving the butt in what felt like one line of action while in fact it was another. At the crisis or peak of the game, the butt discovers that he has been projecting a self fitted to one set of facts and that in reality another set holds. The more chagrin and embarrassment he shows, the greater becomes the spontaneous involvement of the audience. Interestingly enough, persons upon whom such games were played often saw through the game, or did not feel it funny, and yet would affect a show of doing a big take when the proper time came.

3. When persons gather for interplay in Dixon, it is assumed that each participant is deserving of certain kinds of approval and protection by the other participants and that acts which aptly express disrespect for him will be inhibited or avoided. Thus, at the crudest level, one participant does not shove or push another unless there is a clearly honorable reason for doing so. When the situation has been defined unseriously, participants have an opportunity to engage in horseplay; they have an opportunity to commit just those acts of disrespect against each other that would ordinarily be cause for great offense. Presumably the strong feeling such acts would create in serious interplay is a source of spontaneous involvement during

unserious interplay.⁷ In any case, we have a practice of what might be called ritual profanation. The image of himself that a participant projects as someone deserving of fundamental respect is purposely and playfully discredited. At billiards, when the time is right for it, a player's cue is pushed from behind by someone he cannot see so that the stroke by which his skill was to have been expressed is made to look ludicrously clumsy, in much the same sense that a boy who is tripped by another is made to discredit the expectation that he can carry himself like a person. Or, at billiards, the player is purposely "put in balk" by the player before him, so that his expectations of having his playing self treated with consideration are sharply disappointed. At a community dance, an eight-year-old would venture closer and closer to an elderly drunk man until he finally tweaked the man's hair and ran away in excitement. In the kitchen of the hotel, the employees on occasion tease each other in all manner of ways. For example, the cook would be kidded about not having a girl, the scullery boy about having one. The maids would kick the cook; jump on him from behind; tweak his legs; put buttons, salt, and cookies in his tea; smear him with lipstick and bath salts; flick their fingers at his ears; put soapy hands down his neck; twirl a wet boiler lid at him; throw his cap away; turn his back pockets out; pull him out of bed; and put their hands into his front pockets. They would also tell him that his cooking was bad. He, in his turn, would chase the maids, slap them across the neck with a fresh piece of meat, look through their purses and pull out cosmetics, grab them and soundly kiss them.

Interestingly enough, islanders sometimes acted towards themselves during interplay in such a way as unseriously to discredit their own claims to respect. At certain times a participant would act in such a way as to make himself rather than anyone else look foolish; he would play the buffoon. In missing an easy shot, a billiard player would loudly curse himself, until other players started to laugh. In being teased, a person would do an almost serious take, showing violent loss of composure. And when it was known that an individual had "had a few drams," he would wildly act the fool for the amusement others. It seemed, in effect, that persons would at times sacrifice their own dignity in an unconscious desire to keep amusement and interest in the interplay from lagging.

Ritual profanation, like leg-pulling, seemed to find an organized form in party games. In one game, for example, a person in the center of a large circle of persons spins a pan and once the pan has started spinning calls out a number which corresponds to some one of the players. The player must rush from the outside of the circle and grab the pan before it stops spinning or pay a forfeit. To get to

⁷ See chapter xix for a discussion of strategies ensuring sufficient involvement.

the pan in time, the person whose number is called has to drop his dignity and scramble as fast as he can. The more he disobeys the rules of acting in an orderly fashion, the more laughter is created in the audience. In another game a young unmarried man and woman are blindfolded and each is given a spoon and a bowl of jello and instructed to feed the other. In consequence, the faces of both and the breasts of the girl are ritually profaned to a surprising degree. The butts' assumptions of cleanliness and modesty are wonderfully discredited. This game is extremely successful, and if the players go through their part with some seriousness, the audience can become extremely involved in a joking way. In another game, called "Beetle," a high score and a chance for a prize is achieved by shouting out "beetle" as soon as a certain sequence of numbers has been reached by the roll of a pair of dice, there being two teams of two for each pair of dice. To win the game one must seize the dice-cup as soon as one's opponent has laid it down and shout "beetle" as soon as the sequence is attained. To win the game persons forget themselves and blindly grasp the cup as soon as possible. A climax is reached when the first person to achieve the proper sequence shouts "beetle" in a completely uncontrolled, unseemly way. Thus the players discredit in a joking context the assumption that they are in control of their passions

During community dances a pattern of ritual profanation was also employed as a means of ensuring involvement. In Lancers and Quadrilles the "swing your partner" figure always managed push some of the female dancers past the limit of seemly involvement, into a scene where they and others would take an unserious view of their loss of equilibrium and self-control. In another dance, the last figure is danced to an ever-increasing tempo until all the dancers lose their balance and self-direction.