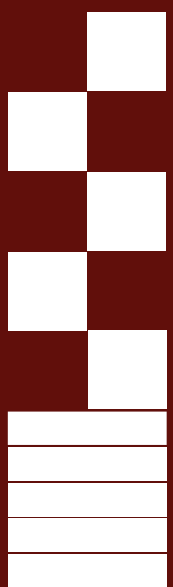
1953

Communication Conduct in an Island Community

Erving Goffman



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Erving Goffman

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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

Contents

Part Four: The Concrete Units of Conversational Communication

Part Five: Conduct During Interplay

The Cradle: Introduction to the mediastudies.press edition

Yves Winkin

doi

Erving Goffman's dissertation is the Rosetta stone for his entire work, which, as time goes by, appears to be more and more groundbreaking. Why was *Communication Conduct in an Island Community* not published earlier? Why did commentators not exploit it more systematically? Why did Goffman himself not try to have it published? All those questions are unanswerable today. But here is the gem. Not much of a frame is needed to appreciate it—only the circumstances of Goffman's fieldwork in the Shetlands, and then some highlighting. When Goffman defended his dissertation in the early summer of 1953, his committee members were none too pleased, according to legend. Seventy years later, the piece appears luminous, extraordinarily mature, as if Goffman were already a fully professional sociologist from day one.[1]

Maybe He Was a Spy: Goffman in Unst (1949–1951)[2]

"Out of the blue," mumbled Charlotte Mouat, when I asked her about Erving Goffman's arrival in Baltasound in December 1949.[3]

Baltasound is the main community on the island of Unst, all the way to the north end of the Shetland archipelago. Charlotte Mouat was the owner and the manager of the Springfield Hotel, which served as Goffman's headquarters during his fieldwork period, between 1949 and 1951. I spent nine days on the island in late August 1988, trying to meet as many people as possible who remembered him almost forty years later. Many did, actually, but they still could

[1] Special thanks to Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz for her graceful editing job.

[2] I am relying on data collected in Unst in 1988 (August 25–September 2), and the two papers derived from that brief stint of fieldwork: Winkin, "Goffman à Baltasound, 1949–1951," *Politix* 3–4 (1988): 66–70; Winkin, "Baltasound as the Symbolic Capital of Social Interaction," in *Erving Goffman*, ed. Gary A. Fine and Gregory W. H. Smith (London: Sage, 2000), 193–212. For a recent analysis of the dissertation, see Karl Lenz, "Dissertation: *Communication Conduct in an Island Community*," *Goffman Handbuch*, ed. Karl Lenz and Robert Hettlage (Berlin: J. B. Metzler, 2022), 257–65.

[3] Interview on August 31, 1988, with the help of her nephew, Tony Mouat, and a home nurse.

not figure out why he came and stayed for so long near them. Yes, near them, not with them.

There are plenty of small mysteries to unravel. Why would a foreign young man come to Unst in December and ask for a room at the hotel? There was absolutely nothing to do on the island at that time of the year. The weather was awful; the sun barely showed up between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. There were no birds to watch, and the newly revived "Up-Helly-Aa," the Viking-looking celebration, was not due before the end of February. Maybe he was a spy—so apparently suggested some people, according to Mary Priest, who was one of the waitresses at the Springfield Hotel.[4] After all, the island had been strategic during World War II, with thousands of soldiers in barracks, many boats and submarines in the harbor, and refugees from Norway.

[4] Mary Priest, interview by the author, August 26, 1988.

In addition, the young man, always in a khaki army jacket with many pockets and in boots laced up to the knees, just walked around a lot. What could he be doing all day? He lived for some time in the annex of the hotel and then bought a small cottage from Wally Priest, a few hundred yards from the Springfield. Priest was engaged to Mary and needed the money to buy a new house in time for the wedding. As Miss Sutherland, the eighty-something daughter of the former local policeman, wrote to me:

> He, as I remember, was not a very big person; somehow one felt that he was rather aloof, a kind of solitary figure in a world of his own. He was said to be an "anthropologist" who was writing a book on the subject. This was a kind of deterrent to those of us who weren't very well educated. One often wondered if he wasn't lonely, sitting by himself in that bare little cottage but his need for privacy would be respected.[5]

[5] L. J. Sutherland, email message to author, August 4, 1988.

Goffman was thus a mystery for many islanders. But this is also a mystery for the biographer: Why Unst, and more specifically, why Unst in December? There are partial answers, or at least plausible answers. One has to do with Lloyd Warner, who supervised Goffman's master's thesis in sociology at the University of Chicago. It happened that he had become friendly with anthropologist Ralph Piddington when they were both doing fieldwork in Australia in the late 1920s. Piddington moved to the University of Edinburgh in 1946 and envisaged the creation of a department of anthropology. By 1949 there was money available for a graduate student to do tutorials and to conduct fieldwork in the Shetland Islands. Warner suggested the job to Goffman, who applied and got it. But how to explain that Goffman decided to move beyond the United States for his dissertation, the only one of his cohort to do so? One may only conjecture that the idea of an island ethnography, à la Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands

or Radcliffe-Brown in the Andaman Islands, was seductive. There may also have been some pressure on Warner's part, who probably wanted to repeat a "community study" in Europe, a few years after the work of his students Solon Kimball and Conrad Arensberg in Ireland.[6] And a third possible reason: Goffman may have wanted some time away from Chicago, in spite of the fact he was engaged to Angelica Schuyler Choate, a master's student in human development at the University of Chicago. But she could visit him in Edinburgh—she certainly had enough money on her own to afford such a trip.[7]

The fact that he arrived in Unst at a bad time of the year, if there is any good one on that rough island, may well have to do with his duties as an instructor in Edinburgh. He completed his term before taking the boat from Aberdeen. Between December 1949 and May 1951, a stretch of eighteen months, he totaled twelve months on the island. The remaining six months were probably spent in Edinburgh for his classes, and in London, where he visited his old partner Liz Bott, who was then completing her doctorate at the London School of Economics.

There are more mysteries, but there are at least partial answers available to solve them. Could we suggest that Goffman arrived on the island with a clear mandate from Warner to undertake a community study? We can answer positively on the basis of three leads. First, the psychological toolkit: As Goffman became comfortable with the hotel's two maids, he often asked them to look at "drawing sets and tell him what we saw in them," as Mary Priest told me.[8] At first, she hesitated, because she did not know what he would write about the answers, but finally she went ahead. ("I was told it came from Germany. Do you think it is true?") Clair Auty (*née* Anderson) was even more explicit: "All too often" Goffman would give her "these stupid cards" with blots and spots of colors and ask her to tell him what she saw. "He told me I had a vivid imagination." There were also "triangles and circles," and he would ask her what the odd one was. "He said I had a fair brain if I was not so idle."[9] Clearly, Goffman was applying what he had learned for his master's thesis, during which he had asked fifty upper-middle-class women to take the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). He worked under the supervision of Warner, who always considered psychological tests an integral part of the anthropologist's tool kit.

Then there were constant queries about social class. According to my informants, Goffman was "obsessed" with social class on the island, and kept asking them questions about the "gentry" and the differences they perceived between the gentry and themselves—that is, the commoners, especially the "crofters" (small farmers). He wanted to know everything about the Saxbys and the Spences,

[6] Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940). In the preface, Warner wrote: "The book that has grown out of their experience there is an excellent contribution to our ever-growing body of knowledge of the communities of the world. From such a knowledge we may sometimes expect a comparative science of the social life of man" (ix).

[7] Yves Winkin, "Life and Work of Goffman," in *Goffman Handbuch,* ed. Karl Lenz and Robert Hettlage (Berlin: J. B. Metzler, 2022), 3–11.

[8] Priest, interview.

[9] Clair Auty, interviews by the author, August 1988. The administration of the psychology tests was a recurrent theme in the many conversations I had with Clair Auty.

the two upper-class families of the island. "He made you talk more than he did," as Claire Auty put it. Goffman was clearly adopting Warner's approach to society, although he apparently never developed strong ties with members of the gentry, except for the Guthries, the new doctor and his wife. As Tony Mouat, Charlotte's nephew, drove me by the Saxby house, he noticed the older Saxby on his bike and stopped to ask him about Goffman. I wrote in my diary: "But Saxby, apparently, only met him at New Year's Eve and had nothing more to say. See how a filter appears: people I can/I can't see."

Finally, although this is anecdotal, Warner delivered the Munro Lectures (ten of them!) at the University of Edinburgh in April–May 1950, on "The Application of Social Anthropology to Contemporary Life."[10] In the memoir that his widow, Mildred Hall Warner, published many years later, there is no mention of Goffman being in the audience.[11] But maybe he was, and maybe he met and discussed with Warner his fieldwork in progress. It is, at least, certain that Goffman did not meet Radcliffe-Brown (who may also have been in the audience). Recall his famous dedication of *Relations in Public*: "Dedicated to the memory of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown whom on his visit to the University of Edinburgh in 1950 I almost met."[12]

Now where do we go from here? Clearly, Goffman's dissertation is not another community study à la Warner, despite hints that his original intention was to write in that vein. So, we must ask: What happened? An interpretation may be offered: Goffman made necessity a virtue—and in the process provided the groundwork for a new subfield in sociology.

In 1984, the American sociologist Michael Schudson scrutinized *Communication Conduct* and stressed the fact that Goffman spent most of his observational efforts on three sites: the hotel, the billiards, and the "socials." Those were selective places: Few local people would ever visit the hotel, the pool room was restricted to men, and the activities of the socials were either "by invitation only" (as with whist) or by age only (as with a dance). So Schudson concluded:

> So far as one can tell from Goffman's dissertation, he had no intimate contact with crofter family life. There is no indication that he made any friends; there is no special "informant" that anthropologists have often discussed with such feeling. Indeed, Goffman is intentionally anti-anthropological. He claims that he was not doing a study "of a community" but a study "in a community." But putting aside a concern for the macrosociological features of the community he studied and putting aside any interest in features that distinguished this community from others, he inadvertently wound up examining primarily the social interactions that most resembled interactions in the most detached and impersonal settings of modern life.[13]

[10] The lectures were turned into a book, *Structure of American Life*, published in 1952 by University of Edinburgh Press and republished in 1953 in an augmented version by University of Chicago Press under the title *American Life: Dream and Reality*.

[11] Mildred Hall Warner, *W. Lloyd Warner Social Anthropologist* (New York: Publishing Center for Cultural Resources, 1988). Chapter XII (pp. 163–74) is devoted to the Munro Lectures.

[12] Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

[13] Michael Schudson, "Embarrassment and Erving Goffman's Idea of Human Nature," *Theory and Society* 13 (1984): 640.

Schudson could not have known that Goffman cultivated a close relationship with one "special informant," the postman James (Jimmy) Johnson, who was sixty-six in 1950. He was Claire Auntie's uncle. According to his nephew Bob Anderson, Claire's brother, he was well-travelled and well-read; he knew local dialects and folklore. He was often seen walking around the island with Goffman.[14]

[14] Bob Anderson, interview by the author, August 30, 1988.

But Schudson is right about Goffman having "no intimate contact with crofter family life." Indeed, he never lived with a family; he lived by himself in a tiny cottage and took his meals at the nearby hotel. But could he have done otherwise? Schudson suggests that Goffman selected those three observational sites. In response, I would like to suggest that these were the only three semi-public places that were open to him, along with the local store, the church, and the reading room (adjacent to the billiards room). He could also hang around the harbor and a few other public places. But private houses were off limits, except for an occasional meal, and people were most taciturn. He was stuck. Goffman explained at the very beginning of his dissertation that he tried to participate in as many situations and social occasions as possible. He also explained that he did not conduct formal interviews, did not employ questionnaires, and did not use tape-recorders or "motion-picture cameras," all methods which would have been out of place. As he put it: "In order to observe people off their guard, you must first win their trust."[15] This is all quite fine and respectable, but one could be forgiven for suspecting that this was a rationalization of an impossible situation. There was no way he could have deployed a Warner-inspired community study, which would have involved home visits, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. So, instead, he turned to the one thing available: "conversational interaction," as the first sentence of the dissertation says. For this, he "just" needed to look and listen nearby, and to write notes down once back at the cottage. The islanders' taciturnity led him to make the best out of skimpy materials. Ultimately, the results turned out to be, quite simply, revolutionary. The dissertation is incredibly innovative. Goffman's entire oeuvre cannot be properly understood if one does not read the dissertation first. It provides the matrix for the following ten books.

[15] Goffman, *Communication Conduct in an Island Community*, 5. Hereafter *CC*. Page numbers refer to the original manuscript.

Birth of a Sociology

The radical nature of Goffman's dissertation begins with the title. There is no subtitle, and no reference to a theoretical frame or methodology. It was likely the first time ever that "communication" was used for a dissertation title in sociology, and probably one of the first times the term was used in the singular in a dissertation in

any discipline. Moreover, "communication," which was often used as a modifier in those days, was here associated with "conduct." "Conduct" was not regularly used in the social sciences in the early 1950s—and still isn't today. What is most remarkable in the association between "communication" and "conduct" is that the very meaning of communication is transformed from a means to an activity. At the time, the dominant usage of "communication" (again, most often used in the plural) referred to means, first to physical facilities, such as roads and railways, and later to media, especially the press and broadcasting. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, this use (of "media") "is not settled before mC20 [mid-twentieth century]."[16] But the singularization of the term was not completed until the early 1970s[17] and may be related, in parallel with notions such as "society," "culture," or "language," to a progressive conceptualization.[18] In any case, "communication conduct" sets the tone: Goffman intends to break with then-current vocabulary and ways of thinking. A source of inspiration must have been the 1951 book by Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson, *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*, explicitly mentioned in Chapter II.[19] Ruesch and Bateson used "communication" to refer to "interpersonal" and "intrapersonal" exchanges of messages. That was congruent with Goffman's approach to communication as interaction practice.[20]

The redeployment of "interaction" is certainly the major theoretical breakthrough of the dissertation. At the time, the notion of interaction was frequently used in social psychology, especially in small group research, with the underlying assumption that it was somehow the equivalent of "mild, short-term, mutual impact." Papers were full of "feedbacks" and "effects."[21] Goffman rejected all that from page one of his dissertation:

> The research was not designed to determine thoroughly or precisely the history of any interaction practice, the frequency and place of its occurrence, the social function which it performed, or even the range of persons among whom it occurred.

Many years later, he would return to his rejection of social psychology and its use of "interaction":

> My belief is that the way to study something is to start by taking a shot at treating the matter as a system in its own right, at its own level, and, although this bias is also found in contemporary structuralism, there is an unrelated source, the one I drew on, in the functionalism of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown. It is that bias which led me to try to treat face-to-face interaction as a domain in its own right in my dissertation, and to try to rescue the term "interaction" from the place where the great social psychologists and their avowed followers seemed prepare to leave it.[22]

[16] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 72.

[17] Elvira M. Arcenas, " 'Communication' in the Making of Academic Communication" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI9543043.

[18] George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 195–233.

[19] Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson, *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1951). See *CC*, 40.

[20] See Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz and Yves Winkin, "Goffman and Communication," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Goffman Studies*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Greg Smith (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2022), 184–94.

[21] See H. J. Leavitt and R. A. H. Mueller, "Some Effects of Feedback on Communication," *Human Relations* 4 (1951): 401–10. Seen again in P. Hare, F. F. Borgatta, and R. F. Bales, eds., *Small Groups: Studies in Social Interaction* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 414–23.

[22] Erving Goffman, "A Reply to Denzin and Keller," *Contemporary Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1981): 62.

Note how Goffman repeats the formula "in its own right": It seems to be borrowed from Durkheim's own lexical fetish: "society as a reality *sui generis.*" Indeed, what Goffman is after is the reality *sui generis* of interaction. This is (again) clear from the very first page of his dissertation: He wants to "build a systematic framework useful in studying interaction throughout our society." And here comes the crucial justification: "As the study progressed, conversational interaction came to be seen as one species of social order." We can observe the birth of the "interaction order" (the title of his 1982 American Sociological Association presidential address) right here.[23] Goffman is indeed taking interaction away from social psychology and reinstalling it "as a domain in its own right" within sociology, thanks to the idea that it is "one species of social order." For thirty years, Goffman pursued the same argument, but he often buried it under other explorations. Here, in the dissertation, it is crystal clear.

[23] Published as Goffman, "The Interaction Order," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 1 (1983): 1–17.

Such a Luminous Piece of Work

The dissertation is structured in five parts: description of the fieldwork site (one chapter), presentation of the theoretical model (one chapter)—and three more parts of theoretical developments (five, ten, and six chapters, respectively). It is highly unusual for a dissertation to devote only one chapter to the description of the field and twenty-two chapters to theoretical elaborations. And those chapters bear titles as odd as "Indelicate Communication," "Safe Supplies," or "Involvement Poise." Imagine how puzzled the members of the committee must have been. Goffman was surely aware of the "false impression" that his unorthodox presentation might produce since he tried to correct it in the "Introduction":

> . . . the beginning of each chapter is phrased in terms of a general discussion of particular communication concepts, and only later in each chapter are field data introduced. This stylistic device is employed as a way of rendering the data easy for use in the development of a general communication framework. In consequence, a false impression is sometimes given that the field data has been brought in as an afterthought, merely to illustrate concepts earlier arrived at. I should like to make it quite clear that the terms and concepts employed in this study came after and not before the facts.[24]

[24] *CC*, 9.

This is not the place to offer a full analysis of the dissertation. Let me just highlight a few outstanding innovations.

Once "Dixon" (the pseudonym for Baltasound) is presented, Goffman bluntly offers his "sociological model," which consists of a nine-point parallel between social order and social interaction—or interaction order, as he called it later in the dissertation. This is the

first and only time in his entire work he so explicitly shows how the interaction order proceeds from the social order. This is also one of the rare occurrences of a clearly acknowledged debt to Talcott Parsons (*The Social System*, 1951) and, even more strangely, to Chester Barnard (*The Functions of the Executive*, 1938).[25] It may be worth noting that, at the end of the 1920s, both Parsons and Barnard attended the Harvard seminar of Lawrence Henderson, a physiologist who was fond of the work of Vilfredo Pareto.[26] Between Pareto, Henderson, Barnard, Parsons, and Goffman, there is a common denominator: the notion of system, loosely defined as a set of interdependent elements. For Parsons and Goffman, regulating mechanisms maintain the system in operation. The system may be society as whole or a single interaction. As systems, society and interaction work the same way: When they are under pressure, coping mechanisms intervene to maintain the balance, i.e., to maintain social order or interaction order. Goffman is thus going to introduce, almost in passing, notions that will be developed later, notably in *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), such as embarrassment and working acceptance.[27] He is also going to offer his vision of interaction "not as a scene of harmony but as an arrangement for pursuing a cold war."[28] As Parsons would not have dared to say, an open war is too costly, but a cold war is affordable—here Goffman is already adumbrating his work of the 1960s on strategy, as discussed with conflict specialists such as Thomas Schelling, Albert Wohlstetter, and Daniel Ellsberg.

[25] Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951); Chester Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

[26] L. J. Henderson, *Pareto's General Sociology: A Physiologist's Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935).

[27] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959).

[28] *CC*, 40.

Once his model has settled, Goffman turns to conversational interaction. This is stunning. Goffman is the only Chicago sociologist who finally paid his due to the linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir. As Everett Hughes later admitted, Chicago interactional sociology never managed to deal empirically with language as social behavior.[29] Moreover, Goffman foreshadows the sociolinguistics movement of the 1960s, led by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz. It is even more surprising to call into being an ethnography of speaking in the early 1950s, when the field was dominated by a descriptive linguistics which claims that texts indicate their own structures, a position leaving little room for the speakers or the context.[30] Goffman was the only sociologist of his generation to break away from such an attitude and, instead, provide an early argument for an analysis of language as interaction. Only in his 1964 paper "The Neglected Situation" would he return to language, and then again, much later, in *Forms of Talk*, his last book (1981).[31] But he opened the field thirty years ahead of everyone.

[29] See Stephen O. Murray, *Group Formation in Social Science* (Edmonton: Linguistic Research, 1983), 79, 243 (letter from Hughes to H. D. Duncan).

[30] Dell Hymes, "Linguistics: The Field," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 356.

[31] Goffman, "The Neglected Situation," *American Anthropologist* 66, no. 6 (1964): 133–36; Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

Goffman does not reduce his scope to verbal exchanges. He discusses in Chapter IV the old notion of "expressive behavior," quoting Darwin and Sapir as well as Gordon Allport and Philip Vernon (*Stud-*

ies in Expressive Movements, 1933) and, more surprisingly, the French psychologist Charles Blondel (*Introduction à la psychologie collective*, 1928).[32] He swiftly navigates between the traditional characterization of gestures as spontaneously revealing the "soul" and the culturally oriented approach stressing the learned, and thus intentional, aspects of the gestural repertoire:

> . . . the member is obliged to obey the rules of expression, once learned, in a sufficiently automatic and unselfconscious way so that observers will in fact be partly justified in their assumption that the emotion conveyed to them is a dependable index of the actor's emotional state.[33]

This is the necessary platform for developing the notion of "impression management" that will be so central in *Presentation of Self*. By then, citations to the background literature will have disappeared. But it is worth stressing that Goffman had already laid the theoretical groundwork in his dissertation. And he did not need the metaphor of the theatre to build his case—a "dramaturgical model" that seduced superficial commentators for years.

When we read Chapter V, "The Management of Information about Oneself," we realize that the quintessential Goffman we all know, the sociologist deciphering "members"—be they members of a rural community, of a mental hospital, or of a casino—is already fully evident in his dissertation, at age thirty. Intentional linguistic behavior and supposedly impulsive expressive behavior are combined to produce interactions based on mutual "exploitations" of information. The receiver exploits the expressive behavior of the sender "as a source of impression about him," while the sender "may attempt to exploit the fact that this exploitation occurs and attempt to express himself in a way that is calculated to impress the recipient in a desired way."[34] We all know this, yet it is still impressive to find it so clearly expressed in Goffman's dissertation.

It is also impressive to find Goffman shifting, by the end of Chapter VII, from an exploitative view of interaction to a ritual view: "Even more than being a game of informational management, conversation interaction is a problem in ritual management."[35] This is the model later developed in "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" (1956).[36] Here, in the dissertation, only two pages are needed to reshuffle Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.[37] But they are sufficient to break away with the rather paranoid vision of social life developed in the dissertation's first hundred pages. Goffman then distills this ritual view of interaction in the remaining two hundred pages.

The fourth part of the thesis consists of ten chapters dissecting "the concrete units of conversational communication." It would be

[32] Gordon W. Allport and Philip E. Vernon, *Studies in Expressive Movements* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Charles Blondel, *Introduction à la psychologie collective* (Paris: A. Colin, 1928).

[33] *CC*, 59–60.

[34] *CC*, 85–86.

[35] *CC*, 103.

[36] Goffman, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 3 (1956): 473–502.

[37] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1915).

anachronistic to speak of "conversation analysis," but Goffman is almost there already. In pages replete both with data collected in situ and ad hoc concepts, he is going to build not a sociology of language but a sociology of speaking. Along the way, an enduring theme would develop: the idea that conversationalists must be present, physically but also psychologically. Goffman speaks of "accredited participation" (Chapter X) and discusses the ways to cover "improper lulls" and to display an appropriate "attention quota" (Chapter XI). Chapter XV deals with "safe supplies," i.e., "stores of messages that persons can fall back upon when they are in a position of having to maintain interplay and yet not having anything to say":[38] small talk, joking, or just watching the open fire. Chapter XVI is devoted to the "kinds of exclusion from participation," and Chapter XVII borrows the notion of "away" from Bateson and Mead's *Balinese Character*: "The participant keeps his face more or less in a position to convey attention signs to the speaker, but his thoughts and eyes turn inward or come to focus on some object in the room."[39]

[38] *CC*, 213.

All in all, those chapters lead to the notion of "involvement," developed in the dissertation's fifth and last part, but also in several later papers, such as Chapter III of *Behavior in Public Places* (1963) or Chapter 10 of *Frame Analysis* (1974).[40] One may venture to say that the notion is one of those secret keys that make Goffman's entire work more intelligible.

[39] *CC*, 232–33; Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1942).

[40] Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Involvement is the interface between the exploitative view of interaction developed in the dissertation's early chapters and the ritual view developed in the later chapters. In order to be "euphoric" (i.e., fluid), an interaction has to be a mix of calculation and deference, Goffman says in Chapter XVIII. Calculation without deference, and deference without calculation, will only lead to a dysphoric interaction, to the point of rupture. To quote the final words of Chapter XIX, precisely titled "Involvement":

> If rules of tact are followed, often boredom sets in. If rules of tact are broken, often embarrassment sets in. Apparently, a fundamental source of involvement consists of the slight infraction of tactful rules; either the infraction is committed in an unserious way or care is taken to bend the rule but not break it.[41]

[41] *CC*, 257.

The notion of involvement leads to Goffman's concept of *self*, which is crucial to understanding all of his work. In the last two chapters of his dissertation, he elaborates the idea of "projected selves." Goffman does not simply say that participant A wants to project a certain image of herself into other participants. He also does not say that participant A fits into a predefined role needing to be accomplished (as with a role in a play). To the contrary, the participant produces a

situational self, produced through their involvement in the interaction:

> 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. . . . 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 how he ought to be treated and hence, by implication, a conception of himself.[42]

[42] *CC*, 300.

In other words, A's self is actually what B thinks A projects into the situation. And they are going to maintain the initial understanding of their projected selves: "If the minute social system formed by persons during interplay is to be maintained, the definition of the situation is not to be destroyed."[43]

[43] *CC*, 302.

Goffman goes on to describe precisely the sorts of situations which ran temporarily out of control during his stay in Dixon. Those are the funny pages of the dissertation.[44] They are all based on some misunderstanding of the situation by one of the participants, which is followed by embarrassment on the parts of all those involved. Embarrassment would later appear in Goffman's work as an important concept, as in his "Embarrassment and Social Organization" (1956).[45]

[44] *CC*, 304–27.

[45] Goffman, "Embarrassment and Social Organization," *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 3 (1956): 264–71.

The dissertation's final chapter appears, from its anodyne title ("Interpretations and Conclusions"), to promise mere summary. What is more interesting is the subtitle, "The Interaction Order." The phrase would reappear as the title of Goffman's final contribution, his 1982 ASA presidential address.[46] It was as if he had wanted to come full circle, as if he had been consistent and systematic throughout his intellectual career. Actually, he was far more consistent than many commentators have recognized. Many Goffman scholars take it as given that his work jumps from one topic to another uncommonly often. As this all too brief reading of the dissertation has shown, he was, on the contrary, quite orderly in planting seeds to be nurtured later. Orderliness turned out to be a key word for both his vision of the world and for his work. A final quote sums it up:

[46] Goffman, "The Interaction Order."

> In this study I have attempted to abstract from diverse comings-together in Dixon the orderliness that is common to all of them, the orderliness that obtains by virtue of the fact that those present are engaged in spoken communication. All instances of engagement-in-speech are seen as members of a single class of events, each of which exhibits the same kind of social order, giving rise to the same kind of social organization in response to the same kind of normative structures and the same kind of social control.[47]

[47] *CC*, 345.

Return from the Field

In May 1951 Goffman left Baltasound for Edinburgh, where he completed his contract with the university, which ran until that fall. At some point during the summer, he was joined by Angelica, or "Sky," as she was called by her friends and relatives. They went to London and then to Paris, where they probably stayed for several months on rue de Lille, in the apartment that Sky's aunt (her mother's sister) kept as a pied-à-terre while she lived in Italy.[48] Goffman started to draft his dissertation in Paris—"the best place to write," as he put it many years later to Dean MacCannell.[49] Together they returned to Chicago in the spring of 1952.

In May, Goffman completed his "PhD Thesis Statement," a fifteen-page document overview of the dissertation to come.[50] By that time everything was in place, except that the focus was on the self rather than the interaction order, *viz* the tentative title: "The Social Rules Regarding Expression of Oneself to Others." Although Goffman explains that he went to Unst to "study the rules of conduct which islanders adhered to while engaged in social interaction with one another," he mentions that "after some data had been collected and partly analysed [*sic*], it became apparent that a shift in original emphasis would be required."[51] Is that the shift from a Warner-like community study to the study of a terra incognita? It would be difficult to say, but at least there is, for the first and last time, the recognition that a shift happened at some point. Goffman would go on to work on the dissertation for almost a year, but he at least took time to get married to Angelica Schuyler Choate in July 1952.

A year later he publicly defended his dissertation. Here is another small mystery: While the "PhD Thesis Statement" mentions Warner, Everett Hughes, and Daniel Horton as advisors, the dissertation's first page thanks Warner, Horton, and Anselm Strauss. Hughes has disappeared. What happened? Was he mad at Goffman for his disruptive dissertation, which literally hid field data under the rug? There is actually a simpler explanation for the mystery: Hughes was in Germany at the time, as a visiting professor at the University of Frankfurt. He may have been happy to escape from Goffman's defense in this most legitimate way, but we will never know.

The rule at the time was that the entire department faculty, and not just the committee, could ask questions during a dissertation defense. Apparently, there were rough questions. As Strauss has described, "I remember it was a warm spring day, and Goffman under the usual heavy attack had good control of himself, such good control that when a bead of perspiration rolled down his brow to his nose, he did nothing about it!"[52]

[48] Born Mary Phelps Jacob, nicknamed "Polly," she was given the sweet name of Caresse by her husband, Harry Crosby, in 1924. He committed suicide with his mistress in 1929 and his widow continued to run the Black Sun Press they had created together.

[49] Dean MacCannell, interview by the author, May 13, 1987.

[50] See Goffman, "Draft of PhD Thesis Statement" (unpublished manuscript, May 1952), 3–4, http://cdclv.unlv.edu/ega/documents/eg_thesis_statement_52.pdf.

[51] Goffman, "Draft of PhD Thesis Statement," 3–4.

[52] Anselm Strauss, letter to the author, October 13, 1985.

Goffman certainly got his degree, but for his entire life he maintained a grievance against his committee, who "did not understand what I was after," as he put it to me.[53] While he never published his dissertation as a book, he exploited it throughout his career, not so much in *Presentation of Self* (1959) as in *Behavior in Public Places* (1963). His final book, *Forms of Talk* (1981), may be seen as another late result of his conversational investigations, as I have argued above. There is now a major endeavor to be undertaken: to recast Goffman's oeuvre in the light of his now-published dissertation. A new generation of Goffman scholars is invited to get to work.

[53] Goffman, discussion with the author, April 1980.