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# Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: between discourse in the abstract and face-to-face interaction

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## Abstract

Michel Foucault's 'archaeology' and Erving Goffman's interpersonal sociology are complementary. Both are essential for understanding how classifications of people interact with the people classified, and hence for the author's studies of 'making up people'. The paper begins by explaining how that project is rooted in an 'existentialist' conception of the person. It then uses Goffman's *Asylums* and Foucault's *Folie et déraison* – both published in 1961 – to illustrate how these methodologies reinforce each other.

Keywords: Foucault, Goffman, Sartre, classification of people, looping effect, Foucauldian archaeology, labelling theory.

## The title

'Between Foucault and Goffman': that suggests a middle ground between the French philosopher and the American sociologist. That would in turn imply that the two stand in opposition. Not so: they are complementary. One needs to stand between the two men in order to take advantage of both. There is a clear sense in which Foucault's research was 'top-down', directed at entire 'systems

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of thought' – to refer to the title of the chair he chose for himself at the Collège de France. Goffman's research was 'bottom-up' – always concerned with individuals in specific locations entering into or declining social relations with other people.

Foucault wrote of discourse in the abstract, or so says my title. Why abstract? In the first chapter of his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969)<sup>1</sup> he wrote that his project was the 'pure description of discursive events'. Discursive events are particular utterances, such as statements made or questions asked, diagrams drawn or inscriptions chiselled – and, for anyone concerned with the past, the recorded versions of such events, so often the printed word. Their pure description is their description as entities in themselves, uttered in particular sites, with definite presence or lack of authority, yes, but with the speakers or printers or technical artists left out, or present only by implication. It is a doing unto others what Foucault said, in his Inaugural Lecture of 2 December 1970 (*The Order of Discourse*, 1971), he would like to have done to himself by himself – to sit in the back of the room and hear the words of his lecture floating freely, in their own space, and not related to himself as speaker. For lack of another short word, I call that attitude to discourse 'abstract', in the plain sense of being abstracted from those who speak.<sup>2</sup>

Goffman too was concerned with discourse, but also with concrete conversation and more than that. He scrupulously noted the social exchanges between individuals, not only the words but also the tone, the accent, the body language, the gestures, the withdrawals, the silences. But Goffman was not reporting individual exchanges for their own sake. One of his projects was to understand how people were constituted, defined themselves and were understood by others, in terms of exactly such interactions. I call this 'bottom-up' because we start with individual face-to-face exchanges, and develop an account of how such exchanges constitute lives. I call Foucault top-down because he starts with a mass of sentences at a time and place, dissociated from the human beings who spoke them, and uses them as the data upon which to characterize a system of thought, or rather, its verbal incarnation, a discursive formation.

Foucault and Goffman will not receive equal time and space here. I shall explain why it is necessary for someone like me to pay attention to Goffman's methods. In the past I have incorporated or adapted many of the kinds of analysis that Foucault developed (but not his remarkable style of writing). There is something missing in those approaches – an understanding of how the forms of discourse become part of the lives of ordinary people, or even how they become institutionalized and made part of the structure of institutions at work. Of course there is something absolutely missing in Goffman too: an understanding of how the institutions he described came into being, what their formative structures are. I am not concerned with completing Goffman, but rather with filling out Foucault. So I shall describe how Goffman's work looks to a philosopher steeped in Foucault. It aims not at finding a doctrine or a method that lies in between those proposed, at various times, by each of the two men, but at explaining why we need both. The two perspectives are complementary and both are necessary.

## On the need

First I should explain, in a more personal vein, why I need both of them for a particular type of philosophical reflection and research. For over twenty years I have tried to study (among many other things) what I call 'making up people'. This is sketched as the second of three projects announced in an inaugural lecture (2001a), whose English version has appeared in this journal (31(2002): 1–14). The project is far older than that. It began with a 1983 talk at Stanford with just that title (Hacking 1986, reprinted 2002: 99–120). It was about interactions between classifications of people and the people classified. But also about the ways in which those who are classified, and who are altered by being so classified, also change in ways that causes systems of classification be modified in turn. I call this the *looping effect* of classifying human beings (Hacking 1995). Classifying changes people, but the changed people cause classifications themselves to be redrawn.

There is no single underlying structure according to which looping occurs. More generally, as asserted in 1983, 'I see no reason to suppose that we shall ever tell two identical stories about making up people' (2002: 114). There is no one process, but only a motley. Hence several examples had to be examined in detail. *Rewriting the Soul* (1995a) studied two occasions in the past – call them 1875 and 1970 – when, in some quarter of the globe, multiple personality became a viable diagnosis, and a multitude of multiple personalities came into view. I do not say the epidemic caused the diagnosis or that the diagnosis caused the epidemic, but that they were mutually reinforcing, a case of positive feedback. *Mad Travelers* (1998) was a spin-off. It was, on the one hand, a story of confused men afflicted by inexplicable impulses to take to the high road, largely unaware of why they were travelling or who they were, and, on the other hand, the story of their doctors and their diagnoses, starting 1886 and ending 1908. The story was fascinating, but the application was to 'transient mental illnesses' that appear at a place and a time, without any physiological explanation of why. Then there was a decade-long series of articles and chapters on the evolving practices of, attitudes to, laws about and meanings of child abuse, 1961–85. They are summarized in 'Kinds of kind-making' (1999: 6). This already out-of-date sequence of studies, of kind-making and people-making in action, is a real-life example of what Nelson Goodman (1978) called *Ways of World-Making*. There is less detailed work in the same vein on the 'poverty level' (Hacking 2000) and 'Criminal behaviour' (Hacking 2001b).

In 1983 I called the underlying philosophy *dynamic nominalism* (2002: 108). The traditional extreme nominalist is supposed to hold that stars, or algae, or justice, have nothing in common except for their names, that is, the usage of the words 'star' or 'algae' or 'justice'. Aside from sophomores who quickly grow up, I am not sure there has ever been such a paradoxical nominalist. Dynamic nominalism is a nominalism in action, directed at new or changing classifications of people. In some cases it suggests that there was not a kind of person who increasingly came to be recognized, and to which a new name was given. Rather a kind of person came into being at the same time that the name (or a special

sense of that name) became current. In some cases our classifications and the classified emerge hand-in-hand, each egging the other on.

Early in 1984, Bert Hansen observed in a conversation that I could equally call this philosophy *dialectical realism*. I like this alternative, for the classes of individuals that come into being are real enough, in any plausible sense of the word. They come into being by a dialectic between classification and who is classified. Naming has real effects on people, and changes in people have real effects on subsequent classifications. In any event we are not concerned with an arid logical nominalism or a dogmatic realism.<sup>3</sup> Above all, this philosophy is both dynamic and dialectical.

Notice the emphasis on *new* classification. I studied the development of child abuse precisely because attitudes to child abuse, definitions of it, laws about it, practices of child abuse and practices intended to curb it were evolving before our very eyes. I undertook this work at the suggestion of the distinguished feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith, whom I asked, in about 1985: 'Can you give me a good example of an important social and human concept that is changing right *now*?' 'Well, you might try child abuse,' she carefully replied. Here one could study the dynamics and dialectics in action, not as a finished, closed history like the story of the mad travellers long ago. It was nominalism in action opening up and closing down fields of human possibility. It was realism in action as real classes of people were sorted in new and specific ways, making and moulding people as the events were enacted.

### Michael Lynch's critique

It is all very well to demonstrate a doctrine by deliberately diverse examples. Among other things they display the motley of phenomena covered by the 'looping effect' idea. (I take the idea of a 'motley' from Wittgenstein (1984: 176, 182) in another context, and I take the word – which he used with double emphasis – from his translators.) There is a sketchy attempt at a synoptic view of making up people in chapter 3 of my book on social construction (1999). That is the only issue about the tired warhorse of social construction that remains of interest to me. Michael Lynch (2001) reviewed this book, together with *Mad Travelers*, with great insight, in this very journal.

Among his many astute observations, Lynch writes 'Sociologists who read Hacking may appreciate his substantive research but wonder if he is not reinventing the wheel. Or, rather, they may wonder if he is not reinventing *the loop*.' This is because Erving Goffman 'developed an ecological orientation (involving "looping effects") that resembles Hacking's substantive account of transient mental illnesses' (Lynch 2001: 247). He adds at once that there are plenty of 'cognate differences' but that there are lots of parallels to explore. How right he was! I have a slightly different view of the parallels than he does; I think the parallels are like straight lines that never meet. We need to change the structure of the space of discussion.

In general, I agree wholeheartedly with Lynch's criticism. It demands further

exploration. I need Goffman as a counterweight to everything I acquired from Michel Foucault's archaeologies. I seldom comment explicitly on the relations between my studies and his methods, but they have haunted part of my work since the early 1970s, when I was writing *The Emergence of Probability* and *Why does Language Matter to Philosophy?* Here is a rare statement from *Rewriting the Soul*:

As a research strategy, I have always been much taken by what Michel Foucault named archaeology. I think that there are sometimes fairly sharp mutations in systems of thought and that these redistributions of ideas establish what later seems inevitable, unquestionable, necessary. I hold that whatever made possible the most up-to-the-moment events in the little saga of multiple personality is strongly connected fundamental to and long-term aspects of the great field of knowledge about memory that emerged in the last half of the nineteenth century.

(Hacking 1995: 4)

From now on, in this essay, I shall be less specific, less dense in concrete historical examples, than I have been in the past. But, before proceeding to say something that looks overly general, I must repeat my caution that there is not and never will be any universally applicable theory of making up people. Just because dynamic nominalism is grounded in the intricacies of everyday and institutional life it will not lead to a general philosophical structure, system or theory. There is, nevertheless, a rather plausible general question in the offing. If we talk about making up people, we can sensibly be asked: 'What is your idea of a person, who can be thus made up?' I believe my own attitude was unwittingly formed in one of the heroic episodes of philosophy. Philosophy is heroic (in my version of events) when it tries to paint a picture of the *whole* of human nature – and of the place of human beings in nature. Kant was heroic. Aquinas was heroic. Aristotle was heroic. I am the very opposite of heroic, not cowardly but proudly particularist. I think there is no fixed whole of human nature to discuss.

One heroic episode in the history of Western thought was post-war existentialism of the sort that stemmed from *Being and Nothingness*, which Jean-Paul Sartre was able to have published during the occupation of Paris in 1943. Existentialism is paradoxical because it offered a vision – highly intellectualized but nonetheless a vision – of the whole of human nature, while denying, in a sense, that human beings have a nature at all. It is in the nature of a human being to have no intrinsic nature, but to live one's life constantly choosing who one is, and being responsible for the person one chooses to be. Virtue and authenticity consist in being well aware that one is choosing who to be, and in being responsible for those self-conscious choices.

### An existentialist attitude

Let us set the stage with the most banal expression of existentialism. Existence precedes Essence. Those words have been used by thinkers with the highest

standards of rigour. But also by ignorant enthusiasts. Many years ago, adolescents, of whom I was one, used to exclaim that sort of thing without having much idea what it might mean. It was code for the idea that one was young and rebellious, and that nothing was as fixed as it seemed. In particular, the sexual conventions of the day could be thwarted by free acts of choice.

Nevertheless, it was part of being a teenager that one did read, aside from novels, the work of people who were said to be existentialist philosophers. Some of them seemed very deep, very spiritual and quite hard to understand. Kierkegaard comes to mind. Others were much more user-friendly, and there Sartre was tops. I confess that it is impossible for me to reread Sartre without being infused once again with rosy adolescent sloppiness. Hence these introductory words of stage-setting do not profess scholarship. Just a certain cheerful conviction about what one part of what existentialism was all about. That part almost completely ignores two of the most important aspects of post-war existentialism: first, the strong vein of phenomenology that Sartre and others imported from Husserl; second, the powerful connection between existentialism and political commitment.

'Existence precedes essence.' That meant to us that who you are is determined by your own actions and choices. Yes, you do have an essence, and you do have a character, unless you are very disturbed in body or mind. Most of the time, you act in definite and predictable ways. Characters are often at least as determinate as stone – as Hume observed, the prisoner thinks he has a better chance of chiselling his way through the floor of his jail, than trying to cajole or bribe the warden into allowing an escape. So much is true even of those who are quite miserable candidates for being whole human beings. It may be true even of a person who fits the title of Robert Musil's book, *The Man without Qualities*, or who is as mercurial as the *Lui* in Diderot's dialogue, *Rameau's Nephew*. But your essence, your character, your consistent and self-revealing patterns of behaviour are not something you were born with. You acquired them as you grew up, acted, behaved, and sometimes as you made choices of what to do, occasionally when you decided what to be, who to be. It was, of course, a Sartrean edict, that more of your behaviour and action should be a matter of deliberate and responsible choice than it usually is.

To say that essence is the resultant of choices is not to say, in any ordinary sense, that you are unconstrained, or were free of constraint when you made the choices that led to your being you. There are endless blind or meaningless limitations on your activities. There are all sorts of blind or meaningless things that have happened to you and which shut down some possibilities and opened up others in altogether unexpected ways. We push our lives through a thicket in which the stern trunks of determinism are entangled in the twisting vines of chance. Still, you can choose what you can do, under the circumstances. The choices that you make, situated in the thicket, are what formed you and continue to form you. Responsibility is in part taking responsibility for that being that you become, as a consequence of choosing.

It is by no means simply a question of deciding what to do, but also one of

choosing with whom to associate. Essences, as Pascal taught us when he wrote about his wager, *infini-rien* (stakes of infinity to nothing) are infectious. To some extent you catch aspects of essence and character from those whom you have chosen to make your fellows. Keeping good company is good for you, and helps make you good; bad is bad. Who you are now, is, from this existentialist point of view, your responsibility. If you do not like who you are, you may well feel that it is your fault, that that is who you are and what you are. This is true for all of us, at age 20 or age 80, although usually the field of choices is far greater at the younger age, and the essence is less solidly entrenched.

Although we adolescents did not notice it at the time, this picture of the human condition was far less radical than it sounded. The idea that you make who you are, and are responsible for who you are, is as deep a tradition in Western philosophy as could be. It is to be found not only in the legacy of romantic soul-searchers such as Pascal, for it is also at the heart of all those philosophies that encourage spiritual exercise for forming the satisfying self. A whole gamut of ancient philosophers comes to mind, stoics, epicureans and Socrates himself. It was also the teaching of those haughty individuals whom we imagine as prim and proper, Aristotle and Kant. The idea of autonomy is neither a human universal nor has it always been present throughout the history of Western civilizations. Yet it is astonishingly endemic to our religions and views of life. The highest aspirations take responsibility not only for what you do but also for what you make of yourself, how you make yourself.

Such a moralizing story need not deny obvious facts. We are born with a great many essential characteristics that we cannot change. Most of us can change how fat or thin, how trim or flabby our bodies are. But we can make only the most miniscule alterations to our height. A very great many physical characteristics appear to be fixed at the moment of conception, and many more are determined before the foetus sees the light. We do not yet have the genetic technology to change that, even if it were desirable. Neurologists and cognitive scientists teach us the same about the brain – that a great many of our potential thoughts and thought processes are innate, and that many more mental traits are part of our biological constitution.

Many of the possibilities available to us, and many of the constraints imposed upon us, were dealt us at birth. At most we can choose what to do with what is there, although we know little except the most obvious facts about what is ‘in our genes’ and what is the result of other developmental processes. The chances of birth, of family, of war, of hunger, of social station, of the supports and the oppression that can result from religion or caste – the chances of wanton cruelty or high rates of unemployment – once you start listing everything there does not seem to be much room for choice at all. But of course there is. All that stuff is the framework within which we can decide who to be.

Choice is for the lucky. Bernard Williams (1981) taught us much about moral luck, which has since become a much-discussed topic. That concept applies to those of us who have seldom been faced with truly hard choices. (Throughout my life, my modest circumstances look like immense prosperity to the vast



proportion of people on earth, and have been blessed by opportunity; I have been too young or too old to have to make the real choices of a pacifist philosophy.) Moral luck is pertinent to those who are able to heed Aristotle or Kant – or Sartre – and to reflect on the extent of our own freedom, not only to choose what to do, but also to choose what kind of person to be.

Existence may precede essence for the lucky, but there is a vast dead weight of essence that presses down on most human beings. Lifting a little of that weight is the object of the most optimistic theory of political autonomy in existence today, that of Amartya Sen. His thoroughly practicable and achievable goals, such as more education for women, in the hope of making Uttar Pradesh more like Kerala, or Columbia more like Costa Rica, are aimed at increasing what we might call the pool of autonomy in a society.

Sen is the greatest of existential optimists. But he does not venture into the shades of the soul. Even when material conditions are as good as they are for, let us say, at least half the population of contemporary Europe, freedom to choose is threatened once again by that great existential pessimist of the early twentieth century, namely Sigmund Freud. What, or who, is the judge (Kant used to ask). Freud asked not who judges, but who chooses. The pitiless invisible superego may judge you, even if the you being judged was not the you, but some less conscious part of you, that did the choosing. Know thyself – in order that thou canst choose and choose who thou shalt be? There are too many battling selves of which no one can be conscious, for there to be a single self who is choosing and judging.

Or so Freud seemed to teach. He perverted the possibility of existentialism in advance. Taken in one way, psychoanalysis calls in question, for individuals who have absorbed the concept of the choosing self that continually makes and remakes itself, the very idea of the self, of a unitary subject who chooses. The optimist behind this gloomy Freud proposed yet another scheme of self-improvement, of guided talking for endless hours reclining on a couch. That is more comfortable for the body than wearing haircloth for the confessor, but it has a tendency to make the mind more distraught.

### Kinds of constraint

On rereading Sartre, one finds that he took great pains to examine many kinds of constraints under which we rightly judge that our freedom is limited. You will find even in *Being and Nothingness* every one of the constraints I have mentioned – the genetic and the circumstantial, the deterministic and the fortuitous – and a good many more. He took Freud and analysis so seriously that he and his associates proposed but did not practise an existentialist form of analysis of the psyche. He also saw clearly that, at a given place and time, only some possibilities are intelligible. Others are not open not because of constraints or limitations, but because they do not, in that place and time, make sense. They do not enter into what Quine might have called the ‘conceptual scheme’ of intelligible courses of action or thinkable states of being. Sartre introduced this fact in a

user-friendly way, in connection with artefacts as yet unimagined. Here is a passage already quoted in my first reflections on making up people:

Of course a contemporary of Duns Scotus is ignorant of the use of the automobile or the aeroplane. . . . For one who has no relation of any kind to these objects and the techniques that refer to them, there is a kind of absolute, unthinkable, and undecipherable nothingness. Such a nothing can in no way limit the For-itself that is choosing itself; it cannot be apprehended as a lack no matter how we consider it.

(Sartre 1956: 522)

Sartre immediately made plain that '[t]he feudal world offered to the vassal lord of Raymond VI infinite possibilities of choice. We do not possess more.'<sup>4</sup>

That phrase, 'a kind of absolute, unthinkable, and undecipherable nothingness' is a wonderful way to capture possibilities that may not exist at a place and time, and which do exist at another place and time. Sartre perhaps did not emphasize enough that it is not only an absence of artefacts that explains such nothingness. An absence of institutions and practices accounts for just as much nothingness. The previous footnote gives some examples of joys and dangers absolutely unthinkable by the vassal lord of Raymond VI in 1201, but very present for Duns Scotus – Inquisition, universities, persecution by Dominicans. Neither the vassal lord nor the philosopher could have entertained a vast number of the choices available to us today, and many of their choices are intelligible to us, if at all, only by intense hermeneutical thinking into their respective epochs.

All classifications that stick exist only within practices and institutions. Hence, when I asked about interactions between classifications and people classified, there was implicit reference to more than mere naming. That stated, one may propose that the introduction of new classifications can open up new possibilities of what to do and to be. One must be cautious here. The labels 'war criminal' and 'war crime' are now entirely current. Perhaps that began at the Nuremberg trials. There are certain persons alive today who are troubled by being so labelled. Now it makes good sense to say that the Simon de Montfort (1150–1218, not his son the English reformer, 1208–65) mentioned in footnote 4 was one of the great war criminals of all time. He led the anti-Albigensian crusade and murdered ruthlessly, hundreds of conquered prisoners thrown off battlements in a day. But 'war criminal' was not a way he could think of himself, even when he did repent in the confessional. Present war criminals can do so, and we think ought to do so.

Does one feel different, has one a different experience of oneself, if one is led to see oneself as a certain type of person? Does the availability of a classification, a label, a word or phrase, open certain possibilities, or perhaps close off others? It was that question that most exercised me in the 1983 talk on making up people. It seemed to me that a new way of describing people does not only create new ways to be, but also new ways to choose – in the existentialist philosophy, new ways to choose who one is.

I favour an almost existentialist vision of the human condition over an essentialist

one. But that vision is wholly consistent with good sense about what choices are open to us. We take for granted that each of us is precluded from a lot of choices for the most mundane of physiological or social reasons. Social: as a young man growing up in Vancouver, I could not have chosen to be an officer in the Soviet Navy. Physiological: my father thought I should spend my first two university years at a college that trains officers for the Royal Canadian Navy, because tuition was free, I would get free room and board, and it would make a man of me. Happily my vision was not good enough for me to be accepted. So I had the moral luck not to have to make a choice between a fight with my family and enrolling in the naval college.

In recent years, we have been won over to a great deal of folk genetics. Yes, we have an essence, and it is in our genes! Certainly that is sometimes correct. My moral luck, my myopia, was inherited from my father and I have passed it on to two of my children. Happily there is a great deal of disagreement over the proportion of 'me' that I owe to my genes. It is hardly a new debate. For well over a century we have explicitly debated the proportion between nature and nurture, between the innate and the acquired. But each, in whatever proportion is chosen, tends to a kind of essentialist determinism. Part of a person is determined by his neurological and physiological inheritance. Another part is determined by social circumstances, nourishment, education, youthful encounters and, some say, by foetal experiences. Certainly by foetal deprivations or poisonings (foetal alcohol syndrome), which takes us back to the physiological and the neurological. I have no interest in debating the innate versus the acquired, for they reinforce each other all the time. The important thing is not to be overwhelmed by a sense of determinism. Rather we need, in the present cultural climate, to emphasize the extent to which we make real choices all the time.

Yes, many of our choices are responses to what is imposed on us. Few choices are very reflective. We are hardly aware of many of our choices. Our choices are bounded by our genetic essences and by our upbringing. Many are consequences of our recent past. Nevertheless, we, like the vassal lord in 1201, have 'infinite possibilities of choice'.

When we are led by philosophers to discuss choice, especially in the 'existential' mode, we too often think of rather exalted examples. We need instead to be ordinary. Neurologists teach that our taste for sweets is innate, while the taste for cream is acquired. We can, nevertheless, resist the temptation to eat a sweet chocolate, just as we can resist the temptation to pour the thick cream over the apple crumble. I experience no difference between the innate temptation and the acquired one. And it is a choice to resist both, to resist only one or to enjoy both the sweet and the creamy.

Take difficult examples. Mothers love their children. Evolutionary psychology teaches that mothers have been selected to bond with their infants at birth and to be tending and loving. That is useful both for conserving the species and for the mother to transmit her genes to her offspring. Nurturing mothers are strongly reinforced in all societies: the social and the genetic are strong allies. But infanticide is not unknown, and is probably far more common among us than is usually acknowledged. Dysfunctional mothers are all too well known to social

workers, mothers who are indifferent, who neglect their babies, who batter them, who sexually abuse them. That is a sad reality that is determined neither by genes or environment. Of course the mothers have not simply chosen to be cruel. But they have made little choices, day after day, which end in these tragedies. The little choices are often made in unbearable circumstances of poverty, abusive husbands, post-birth depression. But they are choices all the same.

Other mothers make different choices. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572–1641, canonized in 1767) was a devoted mother of six children. When the youngest son was 7 she decided to take up a religious form of life, and founded a nunnery close to the monastery of her intimate friend Francis de Sales (1567–1622, canonized in 1665). Her youngest boy lay down across the threshold of the house begging his mother not to leave. To which she replied to this effect: ‘I have fulfilled my duties to my family and now I am going to found a convent close to but a decent distance from the monastery of my counsellor and friend’ (or so says a sound but old hagiography, which ends by reminding us that she is more for our admiration than our emulation). There is an act that can be presented as a big decision, but, like the decisions of the sorry delinquent mothers, it is only one in a chain of little choices. Some may celebrate Jane Francis as a saint or as the grandmother of that greatest of letter writers, Madame de Sévigné, but her extraordinary choices are just choices among innumerable choices we all, saints and sinners, make every day.

### Complementary accounts of ‘making up people’

The genes of an individual determine the extreme limits of possibilities, but it is choices that create one’s character, one’s veritable essence, one’s soul. Here is a credo for an existentialism without dogma for our time: our genetic essence is not our essence. The possibilities that are open to one, one’s character and potentialities, are formed during one’s life, even if for many they become petrified at an early age. As Sartre well knew, at any place and time only some possibilities even make sense. So we pass to the next question. *How is the space of possible and actual action determined not just by physical and social barriers and opportunities, but also by the ways in which we conceptualize and realize who we are and what we may be, in this here and now?*

Michel Foucault (1926–84) and Erving Goffman (1922–82) imply curiously complementary answers. Both began with the extreme case, how people are made up in what Goffman called total institutions: prisons, mental hospitals, concentration camps, monasteries, boarding schools, naval vessels. In 1961 these two near-contemporaries published extraordinary works on madness and its institutions (*Asylums* and *Histoire de la folie*). Each book set the stage for each author’s brilliant future trajectory. Because the two books are so obviously directed at the same overall topic, and because each plays a similar role in the intellectual evolution of its author, I shall use these early but defining works to suggest how each supplements the other.

Goffman analysed, by a series of ideal types, the ways in which human roles are constituted in face-to-face interactions within an institutional setting, and how patterns of normality and deviance work on individual agents – and how the agents change those norms, by a sort of feedback effect. Foucault's archaeologies established the preconditions for and the mutations between successive institutional forms. His later genealogies are closer to how the historical settings work on people to form their potentialities, but never indicate how this happens in daily life. Goffman does that in rich detail, but gives no hint of how the surrounding structures themselves were constituted.

I shall not attend to what interests so many readers, namely power effects. ('In our types of societies, total institutions are places of coercion intended to change people' – that's Goffman.) I want instead to draw on both the archaeological and the sociological approach to better understand the ways in which the actual and possible lives of individuals are constituted. There are of course many ways to do this. Bourdieu made us attend to the ways in which patterns of behaviour, including body language, become internalized, automatic, unconscious manifestations of who we are. I am more concerned with issues that return us to Sartre. This is not because how we are can be freely chosen, but because the choices that are open to us are made possible by the intersection of the immediate social settings, target of the sociologist, and the history of that present, target of the archaeologist.

Foucault proposed his various ideas of a structure that determines discourse and action from the top down. Goffman gave us the local incidents and idiosyncrasies that lead us from the bottom up. Both are essential for understanding what I call making up people. Each body of work can be read in many ways. You can think of each as a philosophy of human nature after Sartre. Of course that is paradoxical, for Sartre says there is no human nature, no given essence. And so, indeed, if not by explicit assertion, do Goffman and Foucault. Yet all three are addressing questions of how some of a person's possibilities grow into their very being, while others are excluded. This is a question of the dynamics of human nature, well fitted to a philosophy of dynamic nominalism.

It may seem absurd to speak of Sartre in the same sentence as Foucault. Sartre spoke of the subject, the agent who chooses, 'the self'. Foucault was one of the key players in 'the death of the subject'. Sartre was imbued with phenomenology. Foucault was a major figure in the destruction of phenomenology. And yet it is precisely the care of the self that is at the heart of Foucault's last work. *La souci du soi* is the title of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality*. The alleged antithesis between Foucault and Sartre may be more the creation of critics than in the heart of either. Foucault was certainly furious when editors tried to find in his mouth harsh words about Sartre.

### Who was Goffman?

Goffman's *Asylums: Studies on the Social Condition of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1961) was the result of a year that he passed as a participant observer in

a major psychiatric hospital in Washington DC. It is indeed a study of face-to-face interactions. I shall use it as the primary example of Goffman's way of working.

Two fascinating book-length biographies of Michel Foucault are widely distributed (Eribon 1989; Miller 1993). There is one work-in-progress biography of Goffman, of which only a fragment has been published (Winken 1999). I know of thirty-seven books about Foucault published in English since 2000 (including the genre of Foucault and ... – ... and Augustine, ... and Baudrillard, ... and Derrida, ... and Heidegger, ... and Magritte, ... and Marx, ... and Nietzsche, ... and Orwell, ... and Sartre, ... and Toqueville). I believe there are more than one hundred in all languages. There is a handful of books about Goffman, mostly in the form of collections of articles (including Ditton 1980; Joseph *et al.* 1989; Riggins 1990; Burns 1992; Manning 1992; Smith 1999; Fine and Smith 2000; Treviño 2003; Kim 2003).

Hence, while there is no need to say much about Foucault, it may be useful to recall some facts about Goffman's life and career. This may seem superfluous to many trained sociologists. Yet, as his name does not even occur in the current electronic version of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, some biographical facts are in order, especially as one of them, emphasized by Winken, may have a lot to do with his subsequent work. Standard dictionary entries come to this:

Canadian sociologist who worked in Chicago and the University of California at Berkeley. Studied social interactions involving significant intentional behaviour of individuals – not only speech but also gestures and posture – and social codes as they are perceived by individuals interacting with each other. Notable books include: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956, revised 1959), *Asylums* (1961), *Stigma* (1963) *Interaction Ritual* (1967), *Frame Analysis* (1974).

In more detail, he was the son of Max Goffman, a Jewish conscript in the Russian army. Max deserted and immigrated to Western Canada. Erving was born in Mannville, a tiny village about 100 kilometres east of Edmonton, Alberta, connected to the world by the most northern transcontinental railroad, the CNR. His father had a clothing store. He moved to a slightly larger village, and then the family moved to Winnipeg, a town whose 'North Side' had a large Jewish population and excellent schools. The North Side produced an exceptional number of doctors, scientists, scholars and even professors of philosophy. (The University of Toronto had four such when I joined it.) Himself a student of sociology at the University of Toronto, during the summers Erving Goffman had a minor job with the National Film Board of Canada. This may have been the most important part of his education.

Film Board? Goffman's biographer Yves Winken notes that during the 1940s the NFB produced a great many documentaries of daily life in diverse regions of this enormous and thinly populated country. (Later, in the early 1950s, it was to produce the most original and imaginative animated films in the world.) The mission was to show Canadians how their fellow citizens a few thousand miles

away lived ordinary lives. Amazingly, the films were actually interesting. They observed, with tiny telling detail, what went on, day to day, in this or that village or town, when people met and talked to each other. Today these films retain a remarkable historical interest. In their day they won many international prizes. These little films were not so little. Winken suggests that Goffman did not learn how to make his studies of everyday life from courses in sociology. Documentary cinema, and mingling with enthusiastic film-makers with visions, may have provided the impetus.

Goffman did his graduate work at the University of Chicago, which ever since its foundation in 1892 has produced generations of brilliant sociologists. From pragmatist roots in John Dewey and Herbert Mead, there is a Chicago school (or schools) that played a defining role in establishing the discipline. I should emphasize that in a sense Chicago sociologists have been all about making up people. That is right: people do not have essences with which they start but are formed in social interaction.

Goffman's dissertation, accepted for the doctorate in 1953, was based on participant observation in a guest hotel in one of the Shetland Islands off the coast of Scotland. The island had peasant farmers and shepherds, but also small groceries and little tourist hotels. The interactions between waitress and tourist, or maid and cook, took place in different ways in different sites. Goffman described with some panache the words, the gestures, the locations of exchange and the roles that were played. Hence the title and the thesis, later a book, 'the presentation of self in daily life'. From the beginning he used the metaphor of the theatre to suggest that here are actors (agents) who maintain roles and play out the social relations according to rather precise rules of staging. Thus the role of the waitress when she is serving table is altogether different from when she is in the kitchen – or at home with her parents, or out with her friends or courting. This translates into facial expressions, way of talking, words used, gestures. Throughout Goffman's work the idea of *role* is central. But it is not that of an essential person who plays various roles. The roles are not gliding surfaces that conceal the true person. The roles become aspects of the person, some more owned, some more resented, but always an evolving side of what the person is.

It is often the early steps that count for most, and it is the first book of his to win notable acclaim that will be my focus. Hence I shall end this biographical sketch abruptly. Goffman became a professor at Chicago, and then at Berkeley. He finally moved to the University of Pennsylvania, where he died of cancer at the age of 60.

### Symbolic interactionism

George Herbert Mead set sociology at Chicago on its path by trying to understand the way in which individuals become social creatures. He was totally opposed to a static picture in which a subject passively receives or absorbs social norms. When people acquire a first language they also interiorize 'significant



gestures' (extend a hand on meeting, the other person automatically puts out a hand to shake). Social roles of 'significant others' are learned, starting with the mother, then the aunts, the father, siblings. . . . He emphasized the symbolic basics of communication and social relationships. The apt if ugly label 'symbolic interactionism' seems to have been invented in 1937 by Herbert Blumer, who stated these three fundamental principles (Blumer 1969: 180).

- 1 The ways in which human beings relate to things are a function of what they mean to them.
- 2 This meaning results from interactions with other people, or is derived from them.
- 3 This meaning is manipulated or modified by each person in the process of interpreting objects.

It is quite instructive to read, in this connection Sartre's presumably independent account of '*attitudes envers l'autrui*'. Mead, Dewey and their students are sometimes called the first Chicago school (of sociology, let us not forget other 'Chicago schools', e.g. architecture). Blumer and his colleagues are thought of as the second school. Goffman is of the second generation of this second school. The project of all these 'schools' was always to understand the socialization of human beings, and thus to understand people as very complex social animals. This idea is linked to the paradoxical doctrine enunciated by the first and greatest pragmatist at the very start of his career. Charles Sanders Peirce (1868): 'man himself is a sign, and nothing more than a sign'. Peirce is said by his admirers to be not only the founder of pragmatism but also of semiotics; perhaps better to say that both semiotics and Chicago sociology are both products of the earliest and most creative phase of pragmatist thought in the United States.

According to the Chicago conception, the essence of a man or of a woman is constituted by their roles, the ways in which they interact and even their spoken accents and their gestures, their 'body language'. The Chicago schools presented one of the ways in which to understand making up people. A contemporary understanding of roles is suggested by a French instruction manual that I noticed recently. It taught how to draw comic strips. Remember that the *BD*, the *bande dessinée*, is a major French literary genre read by fans of all ages, published in the form of hardbound books reviewed in the highbrow dailies and weeklies. There are regular *BD* book fairs, with hundreds upon hundreds of exhibits. Alongside its drawing lessons, there was advice like this:

- You must learn how to exaggerate your characters so as to display their personality and social origin. Use the way they dress, their hair-dos, not ignoring their overall look; introduce each one in an appropriate milieu. (*Mettez-les en scène* makes the role playing and stage setting more precise.)
- In your sketches drawn on the spot, learn to distinguish different social categories by the ways in which they behave. Whatever their class, age or culture, each one of your characters must have a place in at least each of these categories, and others as well.



- You have endless possibilities for your choice of characters: Japanese tourists, Olympic athletes, adolescents addicted to their skateboards, mothers and their children in the city. Your only limit is your own imagination.
- Never forget that *society* is a mosaic of *different personalities*.

Not a bad introduction to Goffman's method in sociology.

### Anti-psychiatry

Goffman's first famous book was *Asylums* (1961). The era of anti-psychiatry had been heralded the previous year with Ronald Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960). Foucault's *Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la folie dans l'âge de la raison* (1961) was simultaneous with *Asylums*. In 1965 large parts of it appeared in English as *Madness and Civilization*. Add in Thomas Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961), and you have the four-sided platform upon which anti-psychiatry marched into the world. It released innumerable troubled men and women into the streets. (We owe the name 'anti-psychiatry' to Laing's colleague David Cooper.) These four books were extraordinarily powerful, but their unmatched success was a case of right time, right place. Local authorities and health services were beginning to be strapped for funds after the initial post-war boom, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s were delighted to discover that it was politically incorrect to incarcerate fairly harmless mad people at public expense. Success? There are points of view. Maybe this quartet gave us the 'the homeless', our present re-incarnation of American hobos of the 1930s Depression or the French vagabonds of the 1880s. Once the police and other authorities were unable to round up mentally problematic street people and dump them in institutions, the streets could be occupied by anyone in distress, and some who preferred that form of life.

Laing and Szasz had one mission: to change our vision both of mental illness and of psychiatry (Laing working mostly on the former, Szasz working mostly on the latter). For Goffman and Foucault, however, these beginning books marked the point at which each spread his wings and began to soar. They were not their first books. Goffman had published *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. *Folie et Dérison* was Foucault's *Thèse principale pour le doctorat ès lettres* at the University of Paris. He had earlier published a little philosophy textbook about mental illness (Foucault 1954). But it was the big books of 1961 that established their reputation, partly because they were extraordinary in their own right and partly because they fitted into the vogue of anti-psychiatry.

### Asylums

Goffman has been called 'an independent spirit, impossible to classify'. He never used the statistical apparatus that characterizes so much American sociology. His work is a study of everyday social interaction. In the preface to *Asylums* he wrote:

Desiring to obtain ethnographic data regarding the selected aspects of patient social life, I did not employ usual kinds of measurement and controls. I assumed that the role and time required to gather statistical evidence for a few statements would preclude my gathering data on the tissue and fabric of patient life.

(Goffman 1961/1991: 7)

A genuine participant observer would have lived among the patients, virtually as a patient. Goffman did not do that. 'I did not allow myself to be committed even nominally, and had I done so my range of movements and roles, and hence my data, would have been restricted even more than they were.' (p. 7.) *Asylums* described the distinct way in which a mental hospital is lived by its denizens. We have scrupulous observation of the conduct of the patients and of the employees of the establishment. Over and above ethnography, Goffman developed an analysis of what he called total institutions:

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. (p. 11.)

Such institutions include monasteries and convents, military barracks, prisons, boarding schools, merchant ships, nuclear submarines (if we care to update Goffman's examples), concentration camps and, for sure, psychiatric hospitals. 'The handling of many human needs by the bureaucratic organization of whole blocks of people – whether or not this is a necessary or effective means of social organization in the circumstances – is the key fact of total institutions.' (p. 18.) Goffman's idea was that almost the entire life of the residents of such institutions – those interned in the asylum, prisoners, sailors, monks, nuns or pupils in boarding schools – is lived in the institution. For long periods of time the institution ordains almost every aspect of their life, washing, praying, eating, outdoor exercise and 'free time'. Activities are organized by a higher authority according to a plan what represents the official aims of the institution.

The subtitle of *Asylums* has (as is often the case with Goffman's asides) its own ironic implications: *Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates*. 'Inmates' is a word we use for those who have been confined. Goffman's inmates include the staff as well as the patients. The book consists of four distinct studies:

On the Characteristics of Total Institutions

The Moral Career of the Mental Patient

The Underlife of a Public Institution: *A Study of Ways of Making out in a Mental Hospital*

The Medical Model and Mental Hospitalization: *Some Notes on the Vicissitudes of the Tinkering Trades*

The clandestine underlife has to do in part with what the inmates (be they staff or patients) do when they think they are free of observation by superiors, but

also involve keeping up appearances, behaving ‘as if’ one were following the norms. The patients evolve a way of appearing to their ward nurses as if they were doing what they were supposed to be doing; likewise the staff on the ward behave suitably when the psychiatrists make their rounds. Goffman had already learned to attend to such matters when observing the waitresses in the Hebri-dean tourist hotel serving breakfast as opposed to back in the kitchen. Within a total institution the effect is far greater, so that there is a constant gap between what one is doing, and what one is feeling or thinking. This is so to such an extent that a drawing of the location of the spaces allotted to different kinds of gestures would serve as a map of the institution itself, each place having its own code of behaviour.

Goffman wrote that in our kind of society, total institutions are places of coercion that change people – not at all necessarily in the intended directions, such as the cure of the patient, the reform of the criminal or the sound education of the schoolboy at boarding school. Goffman truly offered an analysis of making up people. The changes are not deliberately brought about by the system of control, but instead take place in the presence of another person, and by virtue of this presence. It is a question of the glances, gestures, postures and, of course, of words that each person inserts, intentionally or not, into the situation. The vocabulary of gestures and words is adapted to a multitude of uses interiorized by the individual. Each person learns how to behave, whether by concealing one’s feelings, by affirming one’s central role or by a tactical effacement. The description of behaviour and ritual is thus at the heart of Goffman’s ethnography of total institutions.

### Michel Foucault and total institutions

Goffman wrote nothing about the history of the social practices he described or about the history of the total institution. How did we ever get institutions like that? To answer, we may turn to Foucault’s archaeologies and genealogies. They are not completely accurate historical analyses, and they tend to over-generalize on French examples. The great mutations in the first few books turn out to coincide, under different names, with Descartes and the French Revolution – neither of which is noticeably mentioned. But over and over again the books draw insightful connections. The 1961 history of madness is mostly about madness in the Enlightenment, but ends with Pinel and the new treatment of the insane, not in chains but subject to the doctor and the alienist. At the end of the book we have chapter III.iv, ‘The birth of the asylum’.

Another of Foucault’s books is entirely dedicated to the coming into being of a total institution: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Penitentiary* (1975). This is about the emergence of the modern prison. Like so many of Foucault’s early books, it begins with a before-and-after picture. Before: the bustle of the public execution, prisoners in chains, the yard of captive criminals with all its violence. After: it is about the new prison, created as is usual with Foucault’s mutations,

about the time of the revolution. This new institution is the penitentiary, a closed institution, to which men are assigned with the intention that they should reform in penance. Above all it was a place where one was to be watched. Foucault made great use of the elaborate plans of the English utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham's 1787 book *Panopticon* envisaged an architecture in which one guardian could watch each prisoner in his cell, alone, while the prisoner could see no one else. Thus would the condemned man repent. Thanks to many more minds and hands than Bentham's, such structures became the archetypes of the nineteenth century prison: a circular structure organized around a central court, such that the equally spaced and equidistant cells could be surveyed from the centre by a single warden. An ultra-total institution, we might say.

It is well known that how one looked, the gaze as *le regard* is translated, was for some time a pivotal concept for Foucault's analyses. *The Birth of the Clinic* (1972) was subtitled *Une archéologie du regard médical*. That book too is connected with a total institution. The 'gaze' is only one common thread in Foucault's studies. Another is confession and penance.

Goffman listed monasteries and nunneries among the total institutions. He sorted total institutions into five classes, according to the uses for which they were officially intended. Group 5 covers establishments whose aim is to assure a retreat from the world, often for religious purposes: abbeys and the like. Group 2 includes places intended to take care of individuals who are incapable of looking after themselves, or who are dangerous to the community, even if this harmfulness is involuntary: tuberculosis sanatoriums, psychiatric hospitals, leprosaria. And the third group is of institutions intended to protect the community against menaces judged to be intentional: prisons, penitentiaries, etc.

As Goffman organizes matters, these five types have different ends. Foucault's archaeologies imply that they have much in common. His 'before and after' story of madness began with 'the great confinement', when the old leprosaria were becoming empty, and they were used to put away and confine the dangerous classes of society, the poor, the mad and the criminal. So leprosaria and the later prisons were not unconnected. Moreover, there is a profound connection between the monastery and Bentham's panopticon. The cells of the new prison were patterned on monastic cells – even the name of the room in the prison is taken from the name of the room for the monk. And Bentham called his new prisons places of penance, 'penitentiaries', a word not now used in England but standard usage in the United States for the most severe and horrible prisons.

## Labelling theory

I should say something about another book of Goffman's, *Stigma: Notes on the Social Management of Spoiled Identity*. It is a general study of the ways in which individuals are stigmatized as 'not normal'. In fact the word 'normal' occurs very, very often in the book, as the opposite of stigmatized. In Roman times, a stigma was a mark made on the arm of a soldier – and also a mark in red on the body of a

slave, to show who owned him. The Christians changed the connotation. A stigma became one of the five wounds suffered by Christ crucified, or the same scars as they appeared on certain mystics such as St Francis. In current usage, a stigma is the sign of something degrading or disgraceful – the stigma of alcoholism or whatever. Sociologists took the word and spoke of social stigma. The word is used to refer to ‘an attribute that is deeply discrediting’. It refers, as they went on to say, to a relational attribute that is discrediting in certain eyes, in a certain social situation. What is a virtue in one place may be a stigma in another – one thinks of the boy in a tough school, where reading a book is despised. To be seen going into the library there is discreditable, though elsewhere it may be admirable.

Goffman lists numerous kinds of stigma. We must remember that the book was published in 1963. It reminds us that stigmata are relational: homosexuality, still a terrible stigma in 1963, may still be disliked by a majority of Englishmen, but is no longer such a stigma. Goffman’s list of stigmata included ‘a known record of mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour’. There are also the stigmata of physical abnormalities, on the one hand, and race, nation or religion, on the other. For Goffman, the stigmatized are those who differ in some way that is disapproved of by the world around them. This is a generalization on the more limited notion of what is called deviant behaviour, that is, behaviour that is commonly sanctioned by the norms of society, and often encoded in law – criminality, juvenile delinquents, suicide, prostitution. What sociologists came to call deviants.

The fourth chapter of *Stigma* is about ‘deviations and norms’, and the fifth chapter is titled ‘Deviations and deviance’. The book is connected with but distances itself from another descendant of symbolic interactionism, called labelling theory. This theory, also developed in Chicago, claimed that deviance is not a way of behaving, but is a name put on something. It is a label. Deviance is not something inherent in behaviour, but an outcome of how individuals or their behaviour are labelled. To quote from an early statement:

The process of making the criminal, therefore, is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way of stimulating, suggesting, emphasizing and evoking the very traits that are complained of.

(Tannenbaum 1938: 19f.)

Here we have, then, an exceptionally ‘nominalist’ approach to deviance. And it is clearly another vision of making up people. Calling an adolescent a juvenile delinquent is something that goes into the making of the young person into a juvenile delinquent.

There is even a looping effect described, if not named, in this literature, quite different from what I discuss in the next section. To quote from a later text:

We start with the idea that persons and groups are differentiated in various ways, some of which result in social penalties, rejection, and segregation. These penalties and segregative reactions of society or the community are

dynamic factors which increase, decrease, and condition the form which the initial differentiation or deviation takes place.

(Lemert 1951: 29)

Labelling theory was too simplistic for Goffman. He had acerbic words about the very word 'deviant'. He did not think that the category was itself useful. He adopted a sort of ironic reflexive nominalism, according to which certain characters of individuals – perhaps a great many of them – are created by sociologists, criminologists and psychologists. They do not exist until they are defined and studied. The use of these categories often has real effects upon people. Not necessarily direct effects, related to the mere knowledge that the authorities or experts classify you in a certain way. The effect can be indirect, when the classifications are incorporated into the rules of institutions, for example prisons. Few criminals know the elaborate theories and structures of criminological classification. There are no direct looping effects. But there are indirect effects related to the interaction with institutions, and the roles that are created in prisons or transmitted by former convicts (Hacking 2001b).

This observation is especially relevant to the classifications that I call inaccessible – inaccessible to the persons classified (Hacking 1995b). Take, for example, child autism. Now this is a rapidly expanding diagnosis, a category on the move, with more and more children being diagnosed, and a wider catchment area of criteria evolving. But, in an old and rather strict sense of the idea, autistic children cannot well know and understand their classification as autistic. So they cannot interact with their classification. But in our world of pedagogic, psychological and educational bureaucracies, autistic children are integrated into institutional practices. The children have serious handicaps in language and socializing but many quickly learn how autistic children behave. Learn, if from no other source, from their fellows thus classified. Interactions, and looping effects occur at the institutional level, often in institutions that are almost 'total' in Goffman's sense.

### Reinventing the loop

Sociologists, suggests Michael Lynch, may wonder if I was not reinventing *the loop*. Goffman does speak of 'looping' so I should explain why his excellent use of the expression differs from mine.

First, what I meant by the looping effect (see 'the looping effects of human kinds', 1995b) is a cycle of changes. It is composed of two basic stages. (a) There is an effect on people who are classified. There is a classification K of people, which is made as part of our scientific knowledge. Associated with K are what are conjectured to be laws or regularities about people who are K. At least some people thus classified change their behaviour in consequence of being so classified. (b) It may be necessary to change the criteria or the knowledge about people who are K, because in virtue of the classification, they no longer fit the old criteria. Or at any rate, one may have to modify the regularities about such people, not because one was wrong in the first place, but because the people have

changed somewhat. This, in turn, may affect the people classified, and looping may continue. (I proposed that looping effects are one of the prime differences between human and natural sciences. Objects known about in the natural sciences do not change because they are classified, although we may change them in the light of our classifications.)

Here is an example, discussed in my 'Criminal behaviour, degeneracy and looping' (2001b). I was at a conference on the conjectured genetic causes of crime. A colleague who had grown up in a black American slum spoke to me of young men, trapped, who learn that experts hold there is a genetic tendency to crime. 'So I am a born criminal! No point in even trying to stay away from all those things my mom told me not to do' – and the tendency to crime, if ever there was one, is radically enforced. The alleged correlations between crime and genetic markers would thereby become 'over-confirmed'. If such an effect came to pass, it would be a classic looping effect. First, we have people of an alleged type, having a tendency to violence and crime. Then there is some proposed knowledge, that this tendency is associated with inherited biological traits. The knowledge becomes generally known. The objects of this knowledge, the young men, learn about it and become more uncontrollable than before. Then, whatever was the case to start with, we really would get new strong correlations, not caused by anything genetic, but caused by the classification itself. And the experts would discover that these individuals are far more dangerous than was previously thought.

Good or bad, this is a different conception from Goffman's. He spoke of a looping effect when he examined subtle types of aggression against the sense of self, against the deepest sense of one's person that is inflicted on inmates of total institutions. Goffman spoke of mortification of the self, which severs the normal relation between people and their acts. Not so much a case of making a person, as of unmaking a person. This tends to produce a defensive response that serves as the pretext for a new attack on the inmate, who then realizes the impossibility of escape by usual means, and responds to this resentment by more vigorous aggression. He called this 'looping', which occurs when:

an agency that creates a defensive response on the part of the inmate takes this very response as the target of its next attack. The individual finds that his protective response to an assault upon self is collapsed into the situation; he cannot defend himself in the usual way by establishing distance between the mortifying situation and himself.

Deference patterns in total institutions provide one illustration of the looping effect. In civil society, when an individual must accept circumstances and commands that affront his conception of self, he is allowed a margin of face-saving reactive expression – sullenness, failure to offer usual signs of deference, *sotto voce* profaning asides, or fugitive expressions of contempt, irony, and derision. [. . .] Although such self-protective expressive response to humiliating demands does occur in total institutions, the staff may directly penalize inmates for such activity, citing sullenness or insolence as grounds for further punishment.

(Goffman 1961/1991: 141)



Thus the inmate reacts to humiliation by a word, a gesture or an action, or just by sulking. This annoys the warden, who makes some new, humiliating imposition. The inmate reacts. The insult rebounds. The warden tries to punish this further instance of bad behaviour. And so on.

The word 'looping' implies something circular. Like the word 'feedback' it has its origin in cybernetics. That once fashionable proto-science was well known to Goffman, who was present at several of the later Macy Conferences, always organized by Warren McCullough, but with Norbert Wiener always present as ideas-man. They ran annually from 1946 to 1953. They were the gathering place for everyone from anthropologists to electronic engineers interested in the vogue. I am sure that Goffman's connotations of cybernetics and feedback were intentional. Suffice it to state that Goffman's idea of looping applies to one rather well-understood phenomenon of face-to-face interaction. Mine, much less well understood, applies to a quite different phenomenon bearing on classification itself. Yet it is very probable that my kind of looping, at the abstract level of discourse, works only because of Goffman's concrete looping effect, at the interpersonal level of face-to-face interaction.

### Sociology and archaeology

I have spoken only of early works of Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman. It is convenient to call those of Foucault 'archaeological' but there is no equally accurate label for those of Goffman. At any rate Goffman's work is essential for coming to understand how people are made up day by day, within an existing institutional and cultural structure. Face-to-face interaction is a good way to conceive of how one's roles and modes of life evolve. Some roles become not only habitual, but almost an integral part of the body. Pierre Bourdieu, a great admirer of Goffman, used this notion to form his own concept of *habitus*, of the way in which classifications of self become incarnate in a language of body and practice. It will happen that a classification and its bodily incarnation in a stable role become a part of one's essence. Bourdieu sensitized us to the ways in which behaviour, including verbal and bodily language, becomes an exterior manifestation of who we are, although it begins with the interiorization of roles. Think of the *garçon de café* immortalized by Sartre. Sartre used that as a classic example of *mauvaise foi* but it becomes for the sociologist, less judgemental than Sartre, something of a necessity, something essential, in daily life.

But what is completely omitted by Goffman is the question of how institutions come into being, and what organizations of thought and statements have to do with our thinking of them as natural, as part more of the found order than the order of things made by people. What makes for the class of possible roles that a person can adopt at some place and time? Everything from genetics to education, for sure. But also the very space of roles that anyone can adopt, in a society at a time, is both limitless (there are any number) and yet bounded by a surrounding of, to use Sartre's words, 'a kind of absolute, unthinkable, and



undecipherable nothingness'. Foucault gave us ways in which to understand what is said, can be said, what is possible, what is meaningful – as well as how it lies apart from the unthinkable and indecipherable. He gave us no idea of how, in everyday life, one comes to incorporate those possibilities and impossibilities as part of oneself. We have to go to Goffman to begin to think about that.

## Notes

1 Author/date citations for French works will refer to the first date of publication in French. The citation will give both French and English editions.

2 The words '*discours*' and 'discourse' in their standard usage refer to rather formal utterances of some duration. In French the word *discours* is hallowed by Descartes; the standard French dictionary, *Robert*, says that, in current usage, the word first of all denotes rather oratorical speeches to meetings, although in times gone by it could mean more ordinary conversation. Foucault was giving his own nuances to this as to many other words on which he focused for a year or two. 'Discursive events' is a typical example of a term that he worked and dropped. 'Foucault', as I wrote, 'carved numerous turns of phrase into ice-sculptures, which had, for a moment, sharp contours. Then he walked away from them, insouciant, and let them melt, for he no longer needed them' (1998: 85).

3 Realism can here either mean something platonistic or be understood as in current British philosophy. The latter follows Michael Dummett. Realism in his sense insists on a sort of permanent bivalence of propositions. Chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul* (1995a) in effect opposes this second type of realism for the special case of post-traumatic stress disorder and other diagnoses that have come into being at specific times and place. As Allan Young has shown, this diagnosis is a dialectical product of the US Veterans Administration Hospitals in the post-Vietnam era. I hold it to be neither definitely true nor definitely false that British and Canadian soldiers, shot for desertion in World War I, suffered from PTSD. For the dogmatic realist position on this question – realist as platonist and realist as bivalentist – see the critique by Sharrock and Leudar (2002) and the subsequent debate (six contributions in all) in *History of the Human Sciences* 15–16 (2002–3).

4 I fear that Sartre's examples of Raymond and Scotus on the same page appear to be drawn almost at random from 'the middle ages'.

Raymond VI (1156–1222), count of Toulouse, was the most powerful man in the South of France, thought to have ordered the murder of a papal legate, which caused Innocent III to launch the first 'internal' crusade (1108–1244) against the 'Albigensian heresy'. The crusade was an alliance between Rome and the French forces in Paris, led by Simon de Montfort. Raymond first supported the Cathars, the puritanical group who lived in his territory, then joined the crusade, then fought against it, after he realized it was all about Paris gaining Toulouse and Languedoc. (Paris finally got it in 1271, more by diplomacy than by war.) The crusade gave us the Inquisition (1233).

Duns Scotus (c.1266–1309), 'the subtle Doctor', was esteemed by Charles Sanders Peirce to be one of 'the profoundest metaphysicians that ever lived'. The English language invented the word 'dunce' in his honour – it originally meant something more like hair-splitter. Although he thought universals had only an abstract existence, he thought they were grounded in 'common natures' that may exist in many individuals. That may be a form of nominalism, but in 'existentialist' terms it implies that essences precede individual existences. It was Duns Scotus who defended the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary against all comers, and in particular the Dominicans, not a wholly safe thing to do, since they ran the Inquisition.

He lived the university life in Oxford, Paris, Cambridge and Cologne. Although universities can be traced back to the eleventh century (e.g. Bologna), the University of Paris got statutes only in 1215 and complete autonomy only in 1231. In my opinion, a great many of the choices made by Duns Scotus would have been a kind of absolute, unthinkable and undecipherable nothingness to a vassal lord of Raymond VI. It is thought that he may have decided to teach in Cologne towards the end of his life in order to escape an Inquisition into his heretical views on the Virgin. (Duns Scotus won only in the long haul. Pius X turned his heresy into dogma in 1854.) Many of the practical choices made by Duns Scotus would have been absolutely unthinkable to the vassal lord of Raymond VI, say in happier times before the crusade, and thus perhaps 1201: no universities in his field of vision, no Dominicans, no Inquisition, all just as 'undecipherable' to him as the car and the aeroplane.

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