

ON PERFORMANCES. THE CONTRIBUTION OF DRAMATURGICAL SOCIOLOGY. TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN ETHNO-METHODOLOGY *

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Every culture possesses a certain "expressive coherence", namely the capacity to maintain the coherence of gestures, manifestations, appearances, in conformity with the "projected definitions" for the situations that entail such gestures, manners, appearances. On the other hand, in every culture "minor accidents", "unintentional gestures" etc. occur, which contradict the impression we want to leave to the others and the suitable definition for the interactive situation we are in. These are "discrepancies", "dysrhythmies", "breaks" or "fractures" that are symbolical, definitional, of the frame etc., in relation with a certain degree of "expressive coherence" of the respective society. We are dealing in our paper with such a problem like the one regarding the "frames breaking off" and their effects on the equilibrium of societies.

1. "Hombre Secreto" or the "Natural Conspiracy".

We will attempt, in what follows, to examine the *field of social performances* taking into account the contribution of dramaturgical sociology on this topic. With this we pass on from the latent plan to the manifest one of society. We will have in this way the opportunity of remarking the risk of general degradation of the world from the perspective of the spiritual deficit in human performances. This type of approach allows the possibility of verifying even more systematically the hypothesis that between the plan of *bestowal (gifts)* of our existence and the plan of the *given* of our performances there arise such serious discrepancies that they menace the very balance of both social and individual life. As with the other frames of the interpretations, in the case of performances also, the referential system is that of the intensity of the experiential processes, that is, of the degree of spiritualization of performances. The matter sends us directly to the relation between the appearance of "things", of phenomena, and their spiritual substance, that is to say, between content and expressiveness. The first reality that we encounter when we examine the world is that of its *expressiveness*, that to know society is, up to a great extent, the same as pinpointing the "real" sociological "scenery" of our world. Human being as an "expressive being" and as "interpretative agent" becomes thus the object of study of sociology. Such a sociological approach has been established by dramaturgical sociology through one of its initiators, E. Goffman.

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We will pursue our interpretations within a frame of dialogue precisely with this perspective of man's performance on the life scene.

The individual's expressiveness implies, as E. Goffman, the most renowned personality in dramaturgical sociology warns, two types of "signaling activities": "the expression intended by the individual", which is deliberate, and "the involuntary expression", that his conduct inspires involuntarily (or, in Goffman's words: "the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off"¹). The former refers to "verbal symbols and their substitutes that are used to transmit the particular information contained in these symbols" (Goffman, E.). The latter refers to those actions that a random observer considers "symptomatic for the actor", that is, he perceives them as involuntarily sending a significant piece of information ("The expectation being that the action was performed for other reasons than the information conveyed in his way"²). Even the "misinformation" transmitted through both vehicles is differentiated, the former involving *deceit or trickery*, the latter, *dissimulation, duplicity and feigning*.

Under these circumstances, we live in front of the *individual* not in a "scientific" way, but in an inferential way, as Thomas says: "We live by inference. I am, let us say, your guest. You do not know, you cannot determine scientifically, that I will not steal your money or your spoons. But inferentially I will not, and inferentially you have me as a guest".³

Taking into consideration the *intended* or *nourished expressions* and the *inferred* ones, we may affirm that any individual will act "in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain."⁴ In order to illustrate this idea, Goffman presents a long excerpt from an English novel, which refers to the way in which an English tourist makes his entrance (appears) on a beach from a hotel in Spain. "But in any case he took care to avoid catching anyone's eye. First of all, he had to make it clear to those potential companions of his holiday that they were of no concern to him whatsoever. He stared through them, round them, over them- eyes lost in space. The beach might have been empty. If by chance a ball was thrown his way, he looked surprised; then let a smile of amusement lighten his face (Kindly Preedy), looked round dazed to see that there were people on the beach, tossed it back with a smile to himself and not a smile at the people, and then resumed carelessly his nonchalant survey of space. But it was time to institute a little parade, the parade of the Ideal Preedy. By devious handlings he gave any who wanted to look a chance to see the title of his book-

¹ Goffman, „The Presentation of Self in Everyday life", (1959), New York, Penguin Books, 14.

² Idem

³ Ibid. 15

⁴ Ibid. 17

a Spanish translation of Homer, classic thus, but not daring, cosmopolitan too – and then gathered...” etc., etc.⁵ We may therefore speak of a “game of informing”. “When we allow that the individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before others, we must also see that others, however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the respective individual...”⁶. These “definitions of the situations” that are projected by different actors, “are sufficiently attuned to one another, so that open contradiction will not occur”.⁷ This harmony is rather of an ideal nature. In fact things happen so that “each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable.”⁸ “The maintenance of this surface of agreement (...) is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind the statements which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service.”⁹

Goffman believes that things happen according to the rule of a “relative division of definitional labor”, in the sense that each “participant” “is allowed to establish” a sort of “rule” on those matters that “are vital to him, but that are not vital to the others. (...) In exchange for this courtesy he remains silent or non-committal on matters important to others but not immediately important to him”.¹⁰

In Goffman’s vision, therefore, the “*natural*” or ordinary *man*, that is, the “individual”, a common man, who is on the life stage, is not the same as the “*simple man*”. He resembles, rather, that “*hombre secreto*” of Balthasar Gracian, as he makes sure to “stage” in his own conduct and *performances* a continuous *game of plans*, in which tacitly and universally accepted *deceit* and *feigning* combine. The *ordinary man*, therefore, is neither *simple*, nor *natural*, but somewhat “conspiratorial”, in the sense that he is spontaneous in handling an art of “the hidden”, as if, together with the others, he accepted a “minimal conspiracy”. This *modus vivendi* of interaction, towards which all those who incidentally participate in an ordinary interaction (a conversation, for example) evolve, is based on the fact that they all tacitly agree not to be radical and hence “indiscreet” about the “matter that seems important” to the other, so that I concede to that one “one instance of silence”. The oddity about Goffman’s analysis is not to take notice of the fact that this *concessive predisposition*, this *innocent “conspiracy”* is nothing else than the *unanimous effort of being good* overlapped with that strange and apparently spontaneous complication in everyone’s way of being whenever they *mean* to be concessive, that is, good.

⁵ Ibid. 16

⁶ Ibid. 20

⁷ Idem

⁸ Idem

⁹ Ibid. 20-21

¹⁰ Idem

Let us remember anyway this interesting distinction between the *simple man* and the *ordinary man*, as it warns us of a deeper one, between the *good man* and the *man who is striving to be good* in an anonymous world, in which the most natural thing possible, the relationship with the one who is next to you, seems to be mimicry, as if the other were in fact an actor to some extent, which he really is, *but not because he was trying to hide, but because he has forgotten to give himself in a simple way and in all circumstances*. This oblivion of the modern man and especially post-modern man on which the triumph of dramaturgical sociology is based! *The recessivity of moral communities, based on the natural consensus in the decision of being good, explains the ascension of the "stage", of man as an actor, of society as a life stage, of life as a theatre, of social knowledge as dramaturgical sociology. It is when the good and religious man weakens that the actor appears on stage.*

2. The Breaking Up of Reference Frame.

This "*passing by in silence*" is the *natural* root of any conspiracy and it relies on a pertinent-enough argument that in any group there is a natural, *spontaneous "conspiracy"*, that all those who gather together are predestined, by this very fact of being together, to pass something by in silence, that is, to "*conspire*". *What does the regular man actually want? He wants to be kind with the others and to be the beneficiary of their kindness. If he were kind by nature, he would be as innocent as a dove and as babies, but, strangely, he seems to be uncomfortable to reveal his kindness and then he resorts to all the props of dramaturgy, he becomes deceitful, and sometimes deceitful as a snake.* But there is another type of energy that demands the individual to act like an actor besides *kindness*, namely *interest* for example. In Goffman's vision, therefore, the individual is, necessarily, a "*conspirator*", so that the *art of conspiracy* appears as part of the *nature* and the *specificity of human interaction*. It is precisely this latent secret nature of any social interaction that makes possible the "*breaking up*" (of reference frame), that is, "*de-conspiracies*" at the level of human interaction.

"Given the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others, we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit or otherwise throw doubt upon his projection. When these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused and embarrassed halt."¹¹ It is as if the "actor" suddenly finds that he is disclosed as the naked emperor from Andersen's story. For as long as the courtiers have competed in complimenting the emperor on his garment, while the emperor was in fact naked, everything was being kept within

¹¹ Ibid. 23

the bearers of "naturalness", namely of that tacit public conspiracy around the emperor's "nakedness". That until something came up and someone unveiled this "interactive conspiracy" that had formed the nucleus of previous interactions. From that moment on everything collapsed, the interactions were broken and the very legitimacy of order collapsed.

This phenomenon of genuine "explosion" of the "conspirative nucleus" of the interaction causes, as you can see, the "breaking up of reference frame" and probably even the suspension of the interaction. And this because the "assumption upon which the responses of the participants had been predicated become untenable, and the participants find themselves lodged in an interaction for which the situation has been wrongly defined and is no longer defined."¹² There appear feelings of embarrassment, hostility, discomfort.

The preliminary notions with which the new sociological paradigm (having Goffman at the top) operates are: *interaction, encounter, performance, audience, observers, co-participants, part, routine, social part, front, backstage, stage, dramatic performance* etc.

We shall present them one by one, in the attempt to render intelligible the manner in which man comes to lose his simplicity and innocence in the process of becoming a complex actor on the life stage, among other actors who are trying to *act*, not to *live*. The greatest challenge launched to noological sociology is, therefore, dramaturgical sociology, as the latter *seems to overlook the one who really lives, the living (trăitor) man, replacing him with the condition of the actor, of the one who does not live but plays parts*. With the help of ethno-methodology and of dramaturgical sociology we will try to *re-examine the notion of living (trăire) and the condition of man on the life stage in a world that is decaying*.

3. The Manifestation.

"When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be."¹³

Consequently, an individual is, as Petras and Meltzer have noticed, as Goffman himself puts it, the *manager of the impressions* he wants to give to the ones around him. In this respect he may be compared to an actor. "In line with this there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people.'¹⁴ However, at this very point

¹² Idem

¹³ Ibid. 28

¹⁴ Idem

lies a very dangerous temptation for the human being, that of separating *appearance*, i.e. the *front*, from the *soul*, and even of proceeding to the *management of the front*, of appearance, which is an act below the affairs of the soul.

Dramaturgical sociology begins, therefore, with the study of this first reality that consists in the “performances (shows) of the individual” who performs on the stage of normal, daily life. The first step for living in a collectivity is given precisely by these “performances”.¹⁵ Man’s image as a social being is, that of a *perpetual actor*, in a spectacle, and therefore evolving on the life stage not so much for living for himself as for *convincing the others* of the verisimilitude of the “reality” he composes in his game, from the point of view of the performance. He is condemned to be an interpreter and to attract the others, through the mastery of his “performances”, within a “reality” that is no more than the sum of these performances. His greatest efforts aim at persuading them of the fact that the “reality of the act” is the “real reality” and then he is transformed into an individual who is always bent on checking, searching and acting. He necessarily becomes a “conspirative man”, he constantly performs the management of impressions, he *fabricates a reality*, and he does it ceaselessly. At one pole lie all those who really believe in this “fabricated” reality, so that they lose the possibility of realizing their condition of players and it is only the “sociologist”, who is, indeed, the *man in the shadow*, that may have “doubts” and may therefore elude this continuous “fabrication” of images and dramaturgical “realities”. In this view of Goffman, he appears as the most conspirative of all, as, although he appears to everyone as being just like them, as resembling them all, he differs from them, because he supposedly knows more than all of them, he knows that they are all actors without exception, endowed with the mastery of the play to various degrees, and that their only truth is that they will strain themselves to the best of their abilities to convince the others that their act is truly real, while, in fact, everything is act and performance, show and management of impressions. At the other pole, the “interpreter might not be totally absorbed by his own routine” (his daily performances, therefore, become a routine, the routine of life). Consequently, we have at one pole the “innocent”, the one who believes in the “routine” of his conduct, mistaking his *reality* for the *routine* of his performances. At the other pole, nevertheless, there appears the one who does not allow oneself be fooled by this routine. “When the individual does not believe in his own act and has no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him *cynical*,

¹⁵ Ibid. At one extreme, the “social performer” may find himself completely “absorbed in the act of his performance; he may be sincerely convinced that the simulacrum of reality he is creating on stage is the real reality. When the audience are themselves persuaded by his performance – and this seems to be the typical case – then, at least for the moment, only the sociologist may be having some doubts about the «realness» of what is being performed”.

reserving the term «sincere» for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance.”¹⁶

Dramaturgical sociology offers us, therefore, a strange, somehow paradoxical anthropological vision. We deduce that the “honest man” can never be authentic, in the views of this sociology, he is condemned to mistake *reality* for *routine*, whereas the authentic man is, in his turn, in the same views, condemned to be a *cynic*, he never has access to *moral* evolution. Between *innocence* and *authenticity* there is no longer any connection. When man has become “authentic”, that is, when he has access to the *more profound truth*, which shows him that between the routine of conduct and the *truth about the person* there may be a dramatic (and scandalous) divorce, he has lost his innocence, that is he has become realistic towards that detachment that we associate with cynicism. Social reality ranges in between these two poles: that of the innocent man and that of the cynical-realistic man, that of the involuntary conspirator and that of the one who conspires using all the art through which reality, the sum of the relations with the others is woven. Another paradoxical aspect that this dramaturgical anthropology unveils to us through its vision, is that the *innocent man* cannot live up to the measure of this reality unless he resorts to deceit and *trickery*, while the type of the realistic-cynical man can do it through *duplicity* and *dissimulation*. And the reversal at which Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology arrives is: *the more deceit and duplicity the more reality*. Or we know from the Greeks and the Christians that the anthropological truth is exactly the opposite: the more innocence, i.e. purity, and spirituality, i.e. authenticity and truth (*aletheia*), the more reality. Plato’s conception of the “puppet man”, that is, the one who is the slave of appearances and desires, stands in opposition to Goffman’s dramaturgical anthropology. Not to mention the Christian man. We will dwell upon the possibility of a Christian ethno-methodology later on. *Let us remember, for now, that dramaturgical sociology is the sociology of the man who has lost his interiority, who is the man of the front, of pure exteriority, of the mask, who destroys his inner essence and who sets fire to his soul with the sterile flame of deceit and vanity.*

“It should be understood that the cynic, with all his professional disinvolvement, may obtain unprofessional pleasures from his masquerade, experiencing a kind of gleeful spiritual aggression from the fact that he can toy at will with something his audience must take seriously.”¹⁷ The real “delinquency” may not be the fact that somebody steals his victims’ money, but that that somebody whom we deem as “trustworthy” “steals everyone’s trust (makes us believe) that the manners and the appearance of the *middle class* can be kept up only by those who are part of the middle class”. In a way, the victim searches for its. “A cynical individual may delude his audience from what he

¹⁶ Idem

¹⁷ Ibid. 28-29

considers to be their own good, or for the good of community.”¹⁸ Goffman shows that the doctors who use the placebo effect are an example in this respect. The same with, the attitude of the inferior towards his superior etc. The individual who “starts out from the position of lack of inward belief in his role” may evolve in conformity with the pattern described by Park and quoted by Goffman: “It is probably no mere historical accident that the word *person*, in its first meaning, is a *mask*. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role...It is in these roles that we may know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.”¹⁹ “In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would want to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes *second nature* and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as *individuals*, *achieve character*, and become *persons*.”²⁰

It is to this point that the great achievement of this vision materializes, because, obviously, our attention is being drawn on the true perspective on the human being, as being *the one on the stairway*, the one who has to climb all the way from the condition of the poor individual who is thrown into the world, as this is what *man* is, to the state of the one who affirms himself as a *character*, that is, as a subject and object of his destiny, and hereby to the condition of his full accomplishment as a *person*. This condition is truly the greatest gift bestowed upon man, as it is through this condition that man eludes the danger of simply being thrown into the world, as in Pascal’s view, or, even worse, as in the truly terrible, bent to anarchic nihilism view of the post-modernists. Hence the chance of a Christian ethno-methodology arises, as the possibility of integrating the sociological initiative on the mysterious phenomenon of the synthesis of the person who is *the face of man unified with his real, transcendental spirit, God, the only One who saves him from death and from eternal death appears*. Dramaturgical sociology warns us that any individual who is placed in a new situation enters the same cycle of movement forwards and backwards, *in between cynicism and honesty, from lack of faith to faith*.

4. The Front. Front Behavior.

The relation between *intimacy* and *anonymity* from the phenomenological sociology (especially that of Schutz’s) is restated as the relation between the backstage and the *frontstage* in E. Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology. We may say that in the light of noological sociology man’s social problem is how to turn an anonymous world into an intimate one, that is, a personal or personalized

¹⁸ Ibid. 29

¹⁹ Park, Robert Ezra. *Race and Culture*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950. 249, quoted in Ibid. 30

²⁰ Ibid. 250

world and this process was partly revealed to us by phenomenological sociology, which can be divided, as we have already seen, in two great sections: *the intimacy of the world or the lived world of the human persona and the anonymous world as a synthesized world in the human persona*. The problem of phenomenological sociology may be discussed in terms of the two great sections of noological sociology, in and through which the foundations of a new Christian ethno-methodology are also being laid: “the world stage or the human face” and “altar or backstage, or on the spiritual core of the human being”. Intimacy, as emotional value and pure directness, is almost absent in the world, the way the world appears in the views of dramaturgical sociology, because, in conformity with these views, the most intimate of situations still preserves the effort of the “partner”, of the one who is in your presence, of performing the management of impressions, of persuading you of the fact that the impression he is conveying, as far as he is concerned, is the same as the *reality* of his persona, so much so that the game, the mask, that is to say, the essence of persuasion are more important than the *truth of the persona*.

This relation between the *mask*, namely what an individual *displays* through his performances, and what that individual really is, renders the *reality of interaction* uncertain, insecure. Who is the one standing in front of me? – you could ask yourself. And intuiting (anticipating) your question, he will try his best to convince you that he is the way he *seems* to be, the way he appears to be, the way he reveals himself. *The face-disclosure, instead of being discreet and profoundly humble, becomes a show, a well performed or lousily performed comedy, in which trickery combines with dissimulation, sincerity with cynicism, suspicion with trust etc.* Let us remember, therefore, that in the new dramaturgical sociology man is a character who *interprets* a part in order to convince you of the truth of his act or *appearance*. The notions of *performances* (manifestation, interpretation), *character*, *persona*, *front*, *stage*, with its derivatives: *frontstage* and *backstage* etc., acquire a central position in the new discourse. “I have been using the term ‘*performances*’ to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers. It will be convenient to label as ‘*front*’ that *part* of an individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind, intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance”.²¹ Therefore, we unexpectedly encounter the theory of form without substance, extensively adopted by the intellectual movement in the modern period of Romanian culture. Switching the emphasis from substance to form, from the moral essence to the front of the amorality of the post-modernists, in public life or group life as well as in individual life, is, thus, the

²¹ Ibid. 32

point of intersection of the theory of forms without substance with Goffman's theory of the front of interactive, social game. The only difference is that Maiorescu, for example, connects the form without substance with those historical moments that were marked by a terrible time gap between the level of public performances, that were made apparent, and the level of the real, that were not made apparent, or of the real background experiences (*trăiri*), whereas Goffman extends this idea to human nature, to the essence of man as social being, which evidently strikes us as too much.

Let us remember at this point that, in the light of dramaturgical sociology, one can distinguish in any performance the so-called *setting* proper by, involving "furniture, scenery, and the other elements in the setting that compose the stage". Generally, the setting is fixed, so that the performers (interpreters) can only "play" their part in a *location* that is specially arranged to this purpose. "It is only in exceptional circumstances that the setting follows along with the performers; we see this in the funeral cortege, the civic parade, and the dream-like processions that kings and queens are made of."²²

In these cases, the protection of the performers is ensured by sacredness, i.e. by being or becoming "sacred". This protection of "sacred-rendered" persons distinguishes these from the "performers" of "pedlar classes". While talking about the stage aspects of the "front" we have not granted enough attention to the "assemblages of sign-equipments which large numbers of performers can call their own for short periods of time".²³ "It is a characteristic of Western European countries, and no doubt a source of stability for them, that a large number of luxurious settings are available for hire to anyone of the right kind who can afford them."²⁴ Goffman quotes an example from Great Britain: "the question of how far the man who rises the top in the Civil Service take on the 'tone' or 'color' of a class other than that to which they belong by birth is delicate and difficult. The only definite information bearing on the question is that of the figures relating to the membership of the great London clubs. More than three-quarters of our high administrative officials belong to one or more clubs of high status and considerable luxury, where the entrance fee might be twenty guineas or more, and the annual subscription from twelve to twenty guineas. These institutions are of the upper class (not even of the upper-middle) in their premises, their equipment, the style of living practiced there, their whole atmosphere..."²⁵ Therefore, the problem of the "sign-equipment" opens the perspective of the sociology of the "public persons" or, more accurately, of that region of society, that by being private, not public, does not lose its *intimacy*,

²² Ibid. 33

²³ Idem

²⁴ Idem

²⁵ Dale, H. E. The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941. 50, quoted in Goffman, op. cit. 33-34

but, on the contrary, redistributes the expressive values of intimacy according to a stage management of the show, of the front. *Being present* does no longer mean being direct and intimate or spontaneous and *face-to-face*, but to appear. *It is the most terrible test of the social human being, that of losing or disfiguring one's image, by entirely taking refuge in the strategies of imagining, of appearance, or with Goffman's term impersonation.*

The dramaturgical sociology of the front is a sociology of a person's "appearance". The Christian theme of the "transfiguration" acquires new meanings here, that show how much *degradation* and *decay* there are to be found in the conventional morals of high classes, which are excessively preoccupied with this "sign-equipment" so that they could *appear*, could *show* themselves to the others.

The *image* is taken for the *front*. And the *front* contains the elements of the *physical-spatial scenery* (what we call *setting*), as well as those of the "personal scenery" or "personal front", as Goffman names it. The degradation of the image through the emphasis on appearance becomes an intelligible phenomenon only from the perspective of a Christian ethno-methodology of the image, that is, from the culminative theology of the great mystery of light from Mount Tabor; this matter is in principle accessible from the perspective of a Christian sociology. The transfiguration is a sacrament that is accomplished within the setting of a moment of complete disclosure of the persona in the light of its truth, that is, of the gift that it carries for the others, not for itself, whereas appearance is a phenomenon connected to vanity, a mask, namely a form without substance, a face emptied of spiritual light, a poor specter that can barely hide its masked unreality. This is precisely how the miracle of the transfiguration on the Mountain is achieved, as a stage of light, as a revelation of the inner image in the light of His godliness. Transfiguration makes way for the light of the revealed image.

"If we take the term «setting» to refer to the *scenic parts* of expressive equipment, one may take the term «personal front» to refer to other items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes. As part of «personal front» we may include: insignia of office or rank, clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics, size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions, bodily gestures; and like this."²⁶

Some of these signs are "permanent" (racial characteristics), others, on the contrary, are "relatively mobile or transitory, such as facial expression, and can vary during a *performance* from one moment to the next."²⁷

Goffman divides these stimuli (signs) of the "appearance" and "manners", in conformity with "the function that is accomplished by the piece

²⁶ Ibid. 34

²⁷ Idem

of information that these stimuli-signs convey".²⁸ We may use appearance in order to refer to those stimuli that function in order "to inform us on the social status of the performer". "These stimuli also tell us of the individual's temporary ritual state: that is, whether he is engaging in the formal social activity, work, or informal recreation; whether or not he is celebrating a new phase in the season cycle or in his life-cycle."²⁹

In its turn, we may use the concept of *manners*, as Goffman stipulates, in order to refer to "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us on the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation."³⁰

For instance, an "*apologetic manner*" may give the impression that the performer is willing to follow the others' command etc.³¹

Certain "congruence between appearance and *manner* is to be expected". And this congruence is sometimes achieved to a greater extent, as it is the case of "the procession of a mandarin" in a Chinese town.³² Some other times, however, the two sides of the "personal front" tend to contradict each other, "as when a performer who appears to be of higher state than his audience acts in a manner that is unexpectedly equalitarian, or intimate, or apologetic, or when a performer dressed in the garments of a high position presents himself to an individual of even higher status. In addition to the expected consistency between appearance and manner, we expect, of course, some coherence among *setting, appearance, and manner*."³³

Goffman warns us that this congruence is an *ideal type* that helps us become sensitive to exceptions (Goffman presents the case of Rosen Stevens, the real estate agent who concerned himself with the management of the sale of Empire State Building, he himself living in a small house, having an obscure and poorly furnished office etc.).

One of the properties of *social front* is, in the light of Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, that of *inducing to other people the routines* that are associated with a given situation and of transferring them to other situations. The front is, therefore, inductive, it stimulates *imitation behavior*. Although the "abstract standards" that compose the *social front* of a *routine* (a way of acting that is repetitive) vary from one situation to the other, individuals tend to imitate them. Hence, the tendency that a routine, a conduct be presented through its "social fronts", namely through a category of "abstract standards" that the "performers" mean to suggest (induce) to the others appears. "Thus in London the current tendencies for chimney sweeps and perfume clerks to wear white lab coats tends to provide the client with an understanding that the delicate

²⁸ Idem

²⁹ Idem

³⁰ Ibid. 35

³¹ Idem

³² Idem

³³ Burke, Kenneth. A Grammar of Motives. New York, 1945. 6-9, regarding the "scene-act-agent" proportionality

tasks performed by these persons will be performed in what has become a standardized, clinical, confidential manner."³⁴

*"There are grounds for believing that the tendency for a large number of different acts to be presented from behind a small number of fronts is a natural development in social organization."*³⁵

The matter presents great importance to dramaturgical sociology and we will dwell upon it. Let us remember, therefore that, in the view of these new approaches, any act holds an area of *shadow*, a *hidden side* of its own, and, hence, a *number of fronts*, so that what is "*in the back*" does not coincide with what is in the front, the *backstage*, what is in the shadow, the side scenes, does not coincide with the *front*, with what is on stage. The front appears in conformity with the *abstract standards* of that particular *act*, not with the concrete aspects, with the chiaroscuro and unembellished particularities (that are not made abstract) of that particular act. The *actor's* (performer's) tendency of *presenting* oneself in conformity with the *category features* (the ideal pattern) of their activity (performance) is, thus, a general law of behavior. Man is not in search of those *appearances* that individualize and particularize him in a natural way, but of those other appearances that categorize him, therefore, that bring him closer to the *genus proximus*, not to the specific difference. He does not mean to *resemble* somebody, but the *generic* category of his acts (of his activity of one type or another). All those that are part of a category are compelled to keep up "the same social front" in certain situations. The risk that the one behind the category be no more than an abstract individual is, to the man of the fronts, absolute. The man of the front is more than a poor individual who belongs to the social space that has been made abstract by social routines, but he is definitely less than the category individual, who is luminous and predictable. The man of the front possesses polish, or, more precisely, luster, but has no inner light. The category man has the light of the category, although he does not have the polish of appearance, the luster of the face without an image, of the front without the soul.

5. Western Idiom and Balkan Bourgeoisie. The Sociological Law of Disparity between the Frontstage and the Backstage.

However, the problem of "appearances", of multiple faces, affects entire societies, that can also be affected by a "divorce" between substance and "social façade". Knowing them exclusively through their social façade, or the "front" of society with Goffman's term, would be the same as not knowing them at all. Suffice it if we think about, for instance, the facade of a Western type of the

³⁴ Ibid. 36-37

³⁵ Ibid. 37

societies from the East of Europe, which is too often a form without substance, emptied of its substance. For one to think that one has gained knowledge of those societies solely by examining their forms would be an error. Moreover, to infer something in connection with their spiritual "substance" starting from the lack of substance of forms, would be an even more severe error. *A form without substance does not mean a "society" that is deprived of its particular substance, but a society that is forced, through the life style of its elite, to adopt forms that are alien to its spiritual substance, which determines it to live in and through those "empty forms", that often go against its organic substance.* So that the life of that society will be affected by the sad and absurd denouement of living in and according to oppressive formulae, namely formulae that are entirely alien to its real spiritual substance, precisely because the new superposed social layer imposes them. *The spirit of this society crouches in the obscure corners of its innermost being and what stands to be seen is the form, patched up with a speckled mixture of all sorts of borrowings, with elements taken from everywhere, except native ones. Everything is being deformed. Patriotism becomes jingoistic phrase deprived of any warm sentiment, faith becomes for many members of the local elite a Sunday paper, an aggressive Pharisaic expression, richness a pretext for self-praise as in Oriental idolatries, culture a simple decoration meant to give certain luster emptied of inner light to the status of the rich etc.* Everything is a painted appearance, a mask upon the face, disfigurement and aggressive delusion. The problem is not looked into by Goffman, but it has been examined by the Romanian theorists of the forms without substance. We could say that these have seized the condition of a society that is forced to have one image in the *side scenes* ("backstage", as Goffman would put it) and another one on *stage* (*frontstage*, with Goffman's term), where it obeys the performed cues of the agents of influence and of the *borrowed form, be these Eastern or Western. Yesterday they were Russian-Soviet, today they are Western.* Those performed cues do not hold even by far the *generality* and the quality of legitimate laws, that Western Europe possesses. These performed cues hold no meaning to the majority of people, not even when they are summoned to put them into practice. This is the way in which the obedient style, servility is born, combined in one and the same person with insolence, cynicism and aggressiveness. *These societies, foremost of whom their elite, become particularly aggressive with their own inner being, that is, precisely with their spiritual being, which reminds them of their real image, the human one, that is disfigured up to a mere mask. This is the way the new bourgeoisie appears today, as de-spirited, with its image disfigured by the dissimilarity with the mask. In the societies of the form without substance, richness frequently disfigures the human being.*

Instead of proceeding to the correction of these monstrous tendencies, the state becomes, through the people of these influences and of these performed

cues, a “director” who takes care that these stage management requirements which derive from that borrowed idiom be observed. Actually, most of the times these people do not believe in that Western institutional *idiom* themselves. Referring to their profile, at the end of the past century, Eminescu wrote about them: “As they have no tradition, no homeland, no clearly-defined nationality, we see them putting themselves at the mercy of strangers and voting sometimes king Stroussberg, some other times compensation. (...) The Phanariot rule and the constant arrival of (...) bankrupts in the plains of the Romanian country lasted for 121 years”. These elements that composed the predominant segments of speculative capitalism distinguished themselves through their “instinctive hatred for all historical and autochthonous elements of this country” and through their efforts “to insinuate foreign laws in all branches, laws that suited neither its interests, nor its nature.”³⁶ The only novelty that the end of the century and of the millennium brought about regarding the profile of this class created by imitation refers to its ethnological profile, as, in fact, the new superposed layer no longer has the excuse of being foreign. It is purely autochthonous, but just as alien and estranged from the natives as the occupation elite who would not even know the local idiom, not to mention their spirit or traditions.

The proportion of these manipulators of the “Western idiom” or of the Eastern one, of nowadays and of past days is reduced. As Eminescu has said and in another temporal horizon C. R. Motru has emphasized, their unexpected and unpredictable power through their number can be explained by the connections that support them and that are all “*abroad*”, located in the external powers that support them: “although the Romanians are a numerous nation, its fight is disproportionately tough, since these people have found support in foreign allies. *Since they have been brought into power by Russia*, and are supported today by the Austro-Hungarian alliance, we can see the outside connections that help them rise, whereas inside all we have is our own people, inhumanly exploited, impoverished, whose population decreases, whose consciousness is confuse about the course of action that we should take.”³⁷ The problem of the discrepancies between “appearance” (front) and substance, that is, the “actual reality”, is examined in detail by Goffman through the *six discrepancies*, upon which we shall return further on. Hiding the discrepancies entails the resort to front “decorations” which are, in this case, the *acknowledgements* and the *institutions of the metropolis*. This operation is called by Goffman “idealization”. In Romania, it has been the object of the analyses of Maiorescu, Eminescu, Motru, Caragiale. Under certain

³⁶ Eminescu, M. “Pătura superpusă” (“The Superposed Class”) in Complete Works, Vol. IV. Bucharest: *Cultura Românească*, 1938. 183

³⁷ Ibid. 184

circumstances, this regime of the discrepancies between the front and the backstage is explicitly supported, protected by the "great powers".

The theory of the protection of people of Western front by the powers of the metropolis was expanded by C. C. Giurăscu* in the context of the analysis of the phenomenon of the "Soudetes" after the treaty of Kuciuk-Kainargi (1774). "The problem of the Southerners was a consequence of the treaty of Kuciuk-Kainargi, which enabled foreign powers to set up consulates in other urban areas *in order to protect their subjects*."³⁸

This treaty opened in the Principalities the series of historical processes of introduction of the "Western front", namely of introduction on the Romanian frontstage of the *people who were of a Western front orientation*, but of a spiritual substance that was marked by the comprador orientation, the plundering inclination of behavior, speculation with money and with influence, the moral one included, as their spontaneous inclination towards sophism and demagogy, and their contempt towards the native show us.

"*A fortiori* this hypostasis (of a Soudete) is adopted by foreign elements, who come from abroad, such as the Southern Slavs, immigrants in our countries after the Russian-Turkish wars, the Jews who had come in increasingly great numbers from the former Poland, the Greeks from the urban areas of the Balkan Peninsula etc. Up to 1800, the phenomenon does not have a great intensity, after 1800, nevertheless, it reaches alarming proportions."³⁹

Little by little, the condition of a Soudete will be adopted by the natives, after these have become convinced of the advantage of this "social formula". Consequently, sociologically speaking, *the Soudete is the man of foreign façade, a man of the frontstage, who receives the protection of the great power, of the metropolis, in exchange for the adoption of the "idiom" commanded by the metropolis, and for its application within the composition of the social "scenery" of conduct*. This situation is clearly depicted by the historicist C. C. Giurăscu, when he notices "the tendency of the Soudetes to construct a sort of «state within a state», to elude the ordinary law of the country (...), to avoid being subjects to imposition (taxation, note added) the same as the autochthons", which triggered a reaction from the latter. The most numerous Soudetes, Giurescu also remarks, were Austrian Soudetes".⁴⁰ The number of these people, who used the *Western front*, was fairly large (there were 1795 Soudetes in Bucharest only, as C. C. Giurescu remarks, out of whom 1226 were Austrian subjects). We realize who *ruled* in fact in the Principalities and, at the same time, we understand that the instrument of domination was simply the

* C.C. Giurăscu; Romanian historian, he wrote a monumental history of Romania.

³⁸ Giurescu, C. C. *Contribuții la studiul originilor și dezvoltării burgheziei românești până la 1848* (Contributions to the Study on the Origins and Development of Romanian Bourgeoisie Up to 1848). Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1972. 203

³⁹ Idem

⁴⁰ Idem

apparatus of the frontstage, that front equipment, as Goffman would say. Consequently, it is not the ethnic condition that is to blame, within such a system and the categories that support it, but the condition of the Soudete, that is of the agent who draws his powers not from his own spiritual or inherited potential, but from his condition of a Soudete, of somebody's protégé, be that somebody a foreign power or a local power estranged from the interests of the local society.

Therefore, the Western commercial penetration takes this cover, and may be explained from a sociological point of view, precisely with the law of "social façade". "Consulates were a sort of «apparatuses of protection», bearing at the same time a hidden function, that of «foreign agencies» (a sort of «establishments» of the commercial and usurious capital)".⁴¹

Many of the fortunes that were thus gathered were used to foster the Western front: "unlike the English gentleman-pirate, the Italian corsair and the French ship owners, who drained their treasures towards their country and contributed in this way to the launching of that brilliant human project (the Industrial Revolution), [the pseudo-elites from Romania] used the accumulated treasures in usury, commerce and prebend, for consumption or for the speculations of the regime", that is to say, for the arrangement of the scenery, for fostering the front (access to power guaranteed access to the protection of the social façade).⁴² The phenomenon of this disparity between the apparatus of the façade, of the Western "scenery", and the organic substance was extensively examined, investigated in all the profundity of its consequences, by M. Eminescu: "It is well known, above everything, that the true nation, four of the five portions of our people, do not get involved in public life, whose requirements lie more heavily on their shoulders than on anyone else's. These four portions out of all five are the countrymen..." who "share nothing in common, not even their origins, not to mention their interests or anything else with the «superposed layer» (...). Above this numerous and more unhappy than ever segment, there is the legal country, or what the «Romanian» calls by the name of «nation», and in parallel with the legal country there are the parasitic elements who have turned politics into a very lucrative profession...".⁴³ It is clear therefore that this "layer" has transformed politics, that is, the "manipulation" of the social front into a profession that, besides providing considerable financial gain, enables them to hide their "dirty work" (the parasitic act). S. Zeletin will go as far as considering that the disparity between the frontstage and the backstage will create "two superposed layers, at terrible enmity: a modern social economic structure and a medieval spirit manifesting itself in a series of reactionary cultural currents. These are two series of

⁴¹ Bădescu, I. *Sincronism european și cultura critici românească* (European Synchronicity and Romanian Critical Culture). Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984. 105

⁴² Idem

⁴³ Eminescu, M. "Țara legală" ("The Legal Country") in op. cit., Vol. III. 38-39

evolution...".⁴⁴ However, Zeletin himself had accepted that "our modern society is reduced to the adoption of «forms without substance» from the West".⁴⁵ The difference between Zeletin and other sociologists of the "social façade", or front with Goffman's term stands in the fact that, in his view, the front is not the result of the action of the bourgeoisie (who, in his opinion, has created the "apparatus of circulation and exchange, although it has also created the parasitic bureaucracy by force of circumstances at the beginning"), but of the action of reactionary culture: he considers that "the culture and the method of the Junimists" represent a "simple formalism" borrowed along the line of "Western reactionary culture" in order to oppose it to capitalist transformations. Nevertheless, the real *great* theorist of the "*façade apparatus*" and of its *damaging* effects on substance is C. Rădulescu-Motru, and his research, with which "dramaturgical sociology" will come out on a European scale dates from 1904, i.e. the year when he published his book *Romanian Culture and Petty Politics* (*Cultura română și politicianismul*). All the concepts of the new paradigm are established here: "stage" and "backstage", "front" and "front personality", "dirty work" and "scenery", "idealization" and its sociological truth, the relation between "Western idiom" and the "dirty" effects of its adoption at the "periphery" etc.

⁴⁴ Zeletin, St. *Burghezia românească* (Romanian Bourgeoisie). Bucharest: Editura Cultura Națională, 1925. 244

⁴⁵ Ibid. 222