The Interaction Order: American Sociological Association, 1982 Presidential Address

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PREFATORY NOTE

A presidential address faces one set of requirements, an article in a scholarly journal quite another. It turns out, then, that *ASR*'s policy of publishing each year's ASA address provides the editor with an annual breather. Once a year the lead space can be allocated to a known name and the editor is quit of responsibility for standards that submissions rarely sustain: originality, logical development, readability, reasonable length. For in theory, a presidential address, whatever its character, must have *some* significance for the profession, even if only a sad one. More important, readers who were unable or unwilling to make the trip have an opportunity to participate vicariously in what can be read as the culmination of the meeting they missed.

Not the best of warrants. My expectation, then, was not to publish this talk but to limit it to the precincts in which it was delivered.

But in fact, I wasn't there either. What I offer the reader then is vicarious participation in something that did not itself take place. A podium performance, but only readers in the seats. A dubious offering.

But something would have been dubious anyway. After all, like almost all other presidential addresses, this one was drafted and typed well before it was to be delivered (and before I knew it wasn't to be), and the delivery was to be made by reading from typescript not by extemporizing. So although the text was written as if in response to a particular social occasion, little of it could have been generated by what transpired there. And later, any publication that resulted would have employed a text modified in various ways *after* the actual delivery.

THE INTERACTION ORDER

For an evening's hour, it is given to each current president of the Association to hold captive the largest audience of colleagues that sociology can provide. For an hour then, within the girdle of these walls, a wordy pageantry is reenacted. A sociologist you have selected from a very short list takes to the center of this vasty Hilton field on a hobby horse of his own choosing. (One is reminded that the sociologically interesting thing about Hamlet is that every year no high school in the English-speaking world has trouble finding some clown to play him.) In any case, it seems that presidents of learned societies are well enough known about something to be elected because of it. Taking office, they find a podium attached, along with encouragement to demonstrate that they are indeed obsessed by what their election proved they were already known to be obsessed by. Election winds them up and sets them loose to set their record straight; they rise above restraint and replay it. For Association presidents are led to feel that they are representative of something, and that this something is just what their intellectual community wants represented and needs representing. Preparing and then presenting their addresses, presidents come to feel that they are temporarily guardians of their discipline. However large or oddly shaped the hall, their self swells out to fill it. Nor do narrow disciplinary concerns set limits. Whatever the public issues of the day, the speaker's discipline is shown to have incisive bearing on them. Moreover, the very occasion seems to make presidential speakers dangerously at one with themselves; warmed by the celebration they give without stint, sidetracking their prepared address with parenthetical admissions, *obiter dicta*, ethical and political asides and other medallions of belief. And once again there occurs that special flagrancy of high office: the indulgence of self-congratulation in public. What this dramaturgy is supposed to bring is flesh to bones, confronting the *reader's* image of a person with the lively impression created when the words come from a body not a page. What this dramaturgy puts at risk is the remaining illusions listeners have concerning their profession. Take comfort, my friends, that although you are once again to witness the passion of the podium, ours is the discipline, the model of analysis, for which ceremonies are data as well as duty, for which talk provides conduct to observe as well as opinion to consider. Indeed, one might want to argue that the interesting matter for all of us here (as all of us know) is not what *I* will come to say, but what *you* are doing here listening to me saying it.

But I suppose you and I shouldn't knock ritual enterprises too much. Some goy might be listening and leave here to spread irreverance and disenchantment in the land. Too much of *that* and even such jobs as we sociologists get will become empty of traditional employment.

You might gather from this preamble that I find presidential addresses embarrassing. True. But surely that fact does not give me the right to comment at length on my uneasiness. It is a disease of the self, specific to speakers, to feel that misuse of other people's time can be expunged through confessings which themselves waste some more of it. So I am uneasy about dwelling on my embarrassment. But apparently I am not uneasy about my unease about dwelling on my embarrassment. Even though you are likely to be.

I

Apart from providing a live demonstration of the follies I have outlined, what I have to say tonight will be by way of a preachment already recorded more succinctly in the prefaces of the books I've written. It is different from other preachments you have had to listen to recently only by virtue of not being particularly autobiographical in character, deeply critical of established methods, or informed by a concern over the plight of disadvantaged groups, not even the plight of those seeking work in our profession. I have no universal cure for the ills of sociology. A multitude of myopias limit the glimpse we get of our subject matter. To define one source of blindness and bias as central is engagingly optimistic. Whatever our substantive focus and whatever our methodological persuasion, all we can do I believe is to keep faith with the spirit of natural science, and lurch along, seriously kidding ourselves that our rut has a forward direction. We have not been given the credence and weight that economists lately have acquired, but we can almost match them when it comes to the failure of rigorously calculated predictions. Certainly our systematic theories are every bit as vacuous as theirs; we manage to ignore almost as many critical variables as they do. We do not have the esprit that anthropologists have, but our subject matter at least has not been obliterated by the spread of the world economy. So we have an undiminished opportunity to overlook the relevant facts with our very own eyes. We can't get graduate students who score as high as those who go into Psychology, and at its best the training the latter get seems more professional and more thorough than what we provide. So we haven't managed to produce in our students the high level of trained incompetence that psychologists have achieved in theirs, although, God knows, we're working on it.

II

Social interaction can be identified narrowly as that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence. (Presumably the telephone and the mails provide reduced versions of the primordial real thing.) This body to body starting point, paradoxically, assumes that a very central sociological distinction may not be initially relevant: namely, the standard contrast between village life and city life, between domestic settings and public ones, between intimate, long-standing relations and fleeting impersonal ones. After all, pedestrian traffic rules can be studied in crowded kitchens as well as crowded streets, interruption rights at breakfast as well as in courtrooms, endearment vocatives in supermarkets as well as in the bedroom. If there are differences here along the traditional lines, what they are still remains an open question.

My concern over the years has been to promote acceptance of this face-to-face domain as an analytically viable one—a domain which might be titled, for want of any happy name, the *interaction order*—a domain whose preferred method of study is microanalysis. My colleagues have not been overwhelmed by the merits of the case.

In my remarks to you tonight, I want to sum up the case for treating the interaction order as a substantive domain in its own right. In general, the warrant for this excision from social life must be the warrant for any analytical extraction: that the contained elements fit together more closely than with elements beyond the order; that exploring relations between orders is critical, a subject matter in its own right, and that such an inquiry presupposes a delineation of the several social orders in the first place; that isolating the interaction order provides a means and a reason to examine diverse societies comparatively, and our own historically.

It is a fact of our human condition that, for most of us, our daily life is spent in the immediate presence of others; in other words, that whatever they are, our doings are likely to be, in the narrow sense, *socially situated.* So much so that activities pursued in utter privacy can easily come to be characterized by this special condition. Always of course the fact of social situatedness can be expected to have some consequence, albeit sometimes apparently very minor. These consequences have traditionally been treated as "effects," that is, as indicators, expressions or symptoms of social structures such as relationships, informal groups, age grades, gender, ethnic minorities, social classes and the like, with no great concern to treat these effects as data in their own terms. The trick, of course, is to differently

conceptualize these effects, great or small, so that what they share can be extracted and analyzed, and so that the forms of social life they derive from can be pieced out and catalogued sociologically, allowing what is intrinsic to interactional life to be exposed thereby. In this way one can move from the merely situated to the situational, that is, from what is incidentally located in social situations (and could without great change be located outside them), to what could only occur in face-to-face assemblies.

What can be said about the processes and structures specific to the interaction order? I report some glimmerings.

Whatever is distinctive to face-to-face interaction is likely to be relatively circumscribed in space and most certainly in time. Furthermore (as distinguished from social roles in the traditional sense), very little by way of a dormant or latent phase is to be found; postponement of an interactional activity that has begun has a relatively massive effect on it, and cannot be much extended without deeply altering what had been happening interactionally. For always in the interaction order, the engrossment and involvement of the participants—if only their attention—is critical, and these cognitive states cannot be sustained for extended periods of time or much survive forced lapses and interruption. Emotion, mood, cognition, bodily orientation, and muscular effort are intrinsically involved, introducing an inevitable psychobiological element. Ease and uneasiness, unselfconsciousness and wariness are central. Observe, too, that the interaction order catches humans in just that angle of their existence that displays considerable overlap with the social life of other species. It is as unwise to discount the similarity between animal and human greetings as it is to look for the causes of war in genetic predisposition.

A case can be made that the necessity for face-to-face interaction (aside from the obvious requirements of infant care) is rooted in certain universal preconditions of social life. There are, for example, all kinds of unsentimental and uninherited reasons why individuals everywhere—strangers or intimates—find it expedient to spend time in one another's immediate presence. For one, fixed specialized equipment, especially equipment designed for use beyond the family circle, could hardly be economic were it not staffed and used by numbers of persons who come together at fixed times and places to do so—whether they are destined to use this equipment jointly, adjacently, or sequentially. Arriving and departing, they will find it to their advantage to use hard-

ened access routes—something that is much facilitated if they feel they can closely pass each other safely.

Once individuals—for whatever reason—come into one another's immediate presence, a fundamental condition of social life becomes enormously pronounced, namely, its promissory, evidential character. It is not only that our appearance and manner provide evidence of our statuses and relationships. It is also that the line of our visual regard, the intensity of our involvement, and the shape of our initial actions, allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose, and all this whether or not we are engaged in talk with them at the time. Correspondingly, we are constantly in a position to facilitate this revealment, or block it, or even misdirect our viewers. The gleaned character of these observations is itself facilitated and complicated by a central process yet to be systematically studied—social ritualization—that is, the standardization of bodily and vocal behavior through socialization, affording such behavior—such gestures, if you will—a specialized communicative function in the stream of behavior.

When in each other's presence individuals are admirably placed to share a joint focus of attention, perceive that they do so, and perceive this perceiving. This, in conjunction with their capacity to indicate their own courses of physical action and to rapidly convey reactions to such indications from others, provides the precondition for something crucial: the sustained, intimate coordination of action, whether in support of closely collaborative tasks or as a means of accommodating closely adjacent ones. Speech immensely increases the efficiency of such coordination, being especially critical when something doesn't go as indicated and expected. (Speech, of course, has another special role, allowing matters sited outside the situation to be brought into the collaborative process, and allowing plans to be negotiated regarding matters to be dealt with beyond the current situation, but that is another and forbiddingly complex issue.)

Another matter: The characterization that one individual can make of another by virtue of being able directly to observe and hear that other is organized around two fundamental forms of identification: the *categoric* kind involving placing that other in one or more social categories, and the *individual* kind, whereby the subject under observation is locked to a uniquely distinguishing identity through appearance, tone of voice, mention of name or other person-differentiating device. This dual possibility—categoric and individual

identification—is critical for interaction life in all communities except bygone small isolated ones, and indeed figures in the social life of some other species as well. (I will return to this issue later.)

It remains to be said that once in one another's immediate presence, individuals will necessarily be faced with personal-territory contingencies. By definition, we can participate in social situations only if we bring our bodies and their accoutrements along with us, and this equipment is vulnerable by virtue of the instrumentalities that others bring along with their bodies. We become vulnerable to physical assault, sexual molestation, kidnapping, robbery and obstruction of movement, whether through the unnegotiated application of force or, more commonly, "coercive exchange"—that tacit bargain through which we cooperate with the aggressor in exchange for the promise of not being harmed as much as our circumstances allow. Similarly, in the presence of others we become vulnerable through their words and gesticulation to the penetration of our psychic preserves, and to the breaching of the expressive order we expect will be maintained in our presence. (Of course, to say that we are thus made vulnerable is also to say that we command the resources to make others similarly vulnerable to us; and neither argument is meant to deny that there might not be some conventional specialization, especially along gender lines, of threatened and threatener.)

Personal territoriality is not to be seen merely in terms of constraints, prohibitions, and threats. In all societies there is a fundamental duality of use, such that many of the forms of behavior through which we can be offensively treated by one category of others are intimately allied to those through which members of another category can properly display its bondedness to us. So, too, everywhere what is a presumption if taken from us is a courtesy or a mark of affection if we proffer it; our ritual vulnerabilities are also our ritual resources. Thus, to violate the territories of self is also to undermine the language of favor.

So there are enablements and risks inherent in co-bodily presence. These contingencies being acute, they are likely everywhere to give rise to techniques of social management; and since the same basic contingencies are being managed, one can expect that across quite different societies the interaction order is likely to exhibit some markedly similar features. I remind you that it is in social situations that these enablements and risks are faced and will have their initial effect. And it is social situations that provide the natural theater in which all bodily displays are enacted and in which all bodily displays are read. Thus the warrant for employing the social situation as the basic working unit in the study of the interaction order. And thus, incidentally, a warrant for claiming that our experience of the world has a confrontational character.

But I do not claim a rampant situationalism. As Roger Barker reminded us with his notion of "behavioral setting," the regulations and expectations that apply to a particular social situation are hardly likely to be generated at the moment there. His phrase, "standing behavior pattern," speaks to the fact, reasonably enough, that quite similar understandings will apply to a whole class of widely dispersed settings, as well as to particular locations across inactive phases. Further, although a particular behavioral setting may extend no further than any social situation which two or more participants generate in its precincts—as in the case of a local bar, a small shop floor, or a domestic kitchen—other arrangements are frequent. Factories, airports, hospitals, and public thoroughfares are behavioral settings that sustain an interaction order characteristically extending in space and time beyond any single social situation occurring in them. It should also be said that although behavioral settings and social situations are clearly not ego-centric units, some interaction units clearly are: that ill-explored unit, the daily round, is clearly one.

But deeper reasons than these can be given for caution. It is plain that each participant enters a social situation carrying an already established biography of prior dealings with the other participants—or at least with participants of their kind; and enters also with a vast array of cultural assumptions presumed to be shared. We could not disattend strangers in our presence unless their appearance and manner implied a benign intent, a course of action that was identifiable and unthreatening, and such readings can only be made on the basis of prior experience and cultural lore. We could not utter a phrase meaningfully unless we adjusted lexicon and prosody according to what the categoric or individual identity of our putative recipients allows us to assume they already know, and knowing this, don't mind our openly presuming on it. At the very center of interaction life is the cognitive relation we have with those present before us, without which relationship our activity, behavioral and verbal, could not be meaningfully organized. And although this cognitive relationship can be modified during a social contact, and typically is, the relationship itself is extrasituational, consisting of the information a pair of persons have about the information each other has of the

world, and the information they have (or haven't) concerning the possession of this information.

III

In speaking of the interaction order I have so far presupposed the term "order," and an account is called for. I mean to refer in the first instance to a domain of activity—a particular kind of activity, as in the phrase, "the economic order." No implications are intended concerning how "orderly" such activity ordinarily is, or the role of norms and rules in supporting such orderliness as does obtain. Yet it appears to me that *as* an order of activity, the interaction one, more than any other perhaps, is in fact orderly, and that this orderliness is predicated on a large base of shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraints. How a given set of such understandings comes into being historically, spreads and contracts in geographical distribution over time, and how at any one place and time particular individuals acquire these understandings are good questions, but not ones I can address.

The workings of the interaction order can easily be viewed as the consequences of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game, the provisions of a traffic code or the rules of syntax of a language. As part of this perspective one could press two accounts. First, the dogma that the overall effect of a given set of conventions is that all participants pay a small price and obtain a large convenience, the notion being that any convention that facilitates coordination would do, so long as everyone could be induced to uphold it—the several conventions in themselves having no intrinsic value. (That, of course, is how one defines "conventions" in the first place.) On the second account, orderly interaction is seen as a product of normative consensus, the traditional sociological view that individuals unthinkingly take for granted rules they nonetheless feel are intrinsically just. Incidentally, both of these perspectives assume that the constraints which apply to others apply to oneself also, that other selves take the same view regarding constraints on their behavior, and that everyone understands that this self-submission obtains.

These two accounts—social contract and social consensus—raise obvious questions and doubts. Motive for adhering to a set of arrangements need tell us nothing about the effect of doing so. Effective cooperation in maintaining expectations implies neither belief in the legitimacy or justice of abiding by a convention contract in general (whatever it happens to be), *nor* personal belief in the ultimate value of the particular norms that are involved. Individuals go along with current interaction arrangements for a wide variety of reasons, and one cannot read from their apparent tacit support of an arrangement that they would, for example, resent or resist its change. Very often behind community and consensus are mixed motive games.

Note also that individuals who systematically violate the norms of the interaction order may nonetheless be dependent on them most of the time, including some of the time during which they are actively engaged in violations. After all, almost all acts of violence are mitigated by the violator proffering an exchange of some kind, however undesired by the victim, and of course the violator presupposes the maintenance of speech norms and the conventions for gesturing threat to accomplish this. So, too, in the case of unnegotiated violence. Assassins must rely on and profit from conventional traffic flow and conventional understanding regarding normal appearances if they are to get into a position to attack their victim and escape from the scene of the crime. Hallways, elevators, and alleys can be dangerous places because they may be hidden from view and empty of everyone except victim and assailant; but again, behind the opportunity that these arrangements provide the miscreant, is his reliance on understandings regarding normal appearances, these understandings allowing him to enter and leave the area in the guise of someone who does not abuse free passage. All of which should remind us that in almost all cases, interaction arrangements can withstand systematic violation, at least over the short run, and therefore that although it is in the interests of the individual to convince others that their compliance is critical to the maintenance of order, and to show apparent approval of their conformity, it will often not be in that individual's interests (as variously defined) to personally uphold the niceties.

There are deeper reasons to question the various dogmas regarding the interaction order. It might be convenient to believe that individuals (and social categories of individuals) always get considerably more from the operation of various aspects of the interaction order than the concomitant restraints cost them. But that is questionable. What is desirable order from the perspective of some can be sensed as exclusion and repression from the point of view of others. It does not raise questions about the neutrality of the term order to learn of tribal councils in West Africa that

orderly speaking reflects (among other things) adherence to a rule of rank. Nor that (as Burrage and Corry have recently shown) in orderly ceremonial processions through London, from Tudor to Jacobean times, representatives of the trades and crafts maintained a traditional hierarchy both with respect to their place as marchers and as watchers. But questions do arise when we consider the fact that there are categories of persons—in our own society very broad ones—whose members constantly pay a very considerable price for their interactional existence.

Yet, over the short historic run at least, even the most disadvantaged categories continue to cooperate—a fact hidden by the manifest ill will their members may display in regard to a few norms while sustaining all the rest. Perhaps behind a willingness to accept the way things are ordered is the brutal fact of one's place in the social structure and the real or imagined cost of allowing oneself to be singled out as a malcontent. Whatever, there is no doubt that categories of individual in every time and place have exhibited a disheartening capacity for overtly accepting miserable interactional arrangements.

In sum, then, although it is certainly proper to point to the unequal distribution of rights in the interaction order (as in the case of the segregative use of the local communities of a city), and the unequal distribution of risk (as, say, across the age grades and between the sexes), the central theme remains of a traffic of use, and of arrangements which allow a great diversity of projects and intents to be realized through unthinking recourse to procedural forms. And of course, to accept the conventions and norms as given (and to initiate one's action accordingly), is, *in effect*, to put trust in those about one. Not doing so, one could hardly get on with the business at hand; one could hardly have any business at hand.

The doctrine that ground rules inform the interaction order and allow for a traffic of use raises the question of policing, and policing, of course, once again raises political considerations.

The modern nation state, almost as a means of defining itself into existence, claims final authority for the control of hazard and threat to life, limb, and property throughout its territorial jurisdiction. Always in theory, and often in practice, the state provides stand-by arrangements for stepping in when local mechanisms of social control fail to keep breakdowns of interaction order within certain limits. Particularly in public places but not restricted thereto. To be sure, the interaction order prevailing even in the most public places is not a creation of the apparatus of a state.

Certainly most of this order comes into being and is sustained from below as it were, in some cases in spite of overarching authority not because of it. Nonetheless the state has effectively established legitimacy and priority here, monopolizing the use of heavy arms and militarily disciplined cadres as an ultimate sanction.

In consequence, some of the standard forms of interaction life—podium addresses, meetings, processions—not to speak of specialized forms like picket lines or sit-down strikes—can be read by governing officials as an affront to the security of the state and forcibly disbanded on these grounds although, indeed, no appreciable threat to public order in the substantive sense may be involved. And on the other side, breaches of public order may be performed not only for self gain, but as a pointed challenge to the authority of the state—symbolical acts read as a taunt and employed in anticipation of this reading.

IV

I have been speaking in terms that are intended to hold for face-to-face existence everywhere. I have done so at the usual price—the pronouncements have been broad, truistic, and metatheoretical—to use a word that is itself as questionable as what it refers to. A less windy effort, equally general but naturalistically based, is to try to identify the basic substantive units, the recurrent structures and their attendant processes. What sorts of animals are to be found in the interactional zoo? What plants in this particular garden? Let me review what I take to be some basic examples.

1. One can start with persons as vehicular entities, that is, with human ambulatory units. In public places we have "singles" (a party of one) and "withs" (a party of more than one), such parties being treated as self-contained units for the purposes of participation in the flow of pedestrian social life. A few larger ambulatory units can also be mentioned—for example, files and processions, and, as a limiting case, the queue, this being by way of a stationary ambulatory unit. (Any ordering of access by time of application can by extension reasonably be called a queue, but I do not do so here.)

2. Next, if only as a heuristic unit and for purposes of consistency in usage, there is some value in tying down the term *contact*. I will refer thus to any occasion when an individual comes into an other's response presence, whether through physical copresence, telephonic connection or letter exchange. I am thus counting as part of the same contact all those sightings and exchanges that occur dur-

ing one such occasion. Thus, a passing street glance, a conversation, an exchange of increasingly attenuated greetings while circulating at a sociable gathering, an attendee's-eye-view of a platform speaker—each qualifies as a single contact.

3. Then there is that broad class of arrangements in which persons come together into a small physical circle as ratified participants in a consciously shared, clearly interdependent undertaking, the period of participation itself bracketed with rituals of some kind, or easily susceptible to their invocation. In some cases only a handful of participants are involved, talk of the kind that can be seen as having a self-limiting purpose holds the floor, and the appearance is sustained that in principle everyone has the same right to contribute. Such conversational encounters can be distinguished from meetings in which a presiding chair manages turn taking and relevance: thus "hearings," "trials," and other jural proceedings. All of these talk-based activities are to be contrasted to the many interactive engagements in which the doings that are interwoven do not involve vocalization, and in which talk, when it figures at all, does so either as a desultory, muted side-involvement or an irregular, intermittent adjunct to the coordination of the doings in progress. Examples of such encounters are card games, service transactions, bouts of love making, and commensalism.

4. Next the platform format: the arrangement found universally in which an activity is set before an audience. What is presented in this way may be a talk, a contest, a formal meeting, a play, a movie, a musical offering, a display of dexterity or trickery, a round of oratory, a ceremony, a combination thereof. The presenters will either be on a raised platform or encircled by watchers. The size of the audience is not closely geared to what is presented (although it is to arrangements which allow for viewing the stage), and the obligation of the watchers is primarily to appreciate, not to do. Modern technology, of course, has exploded this interaction institution to include vast distal audiences and a widened array of materials that can be platformed. But the format itself very much answers to the requirements of involving a potentially large number of individuals in a single focus of visual and cognitive attention, something that is possible only if the watchers are content to enter merely vicariously into what is staged.

5. Finally, one might mention the celebrative social occasion. I refer to the foregathering of individuals admitted on a controlled basis, the whole occurring under the auspices of, and in honor of, some jointly appreciated circumstances. A common mood or tone is likely to develop, tracing a contour of involvement. Participants arrive in a coordinated way and leave similarly. More than one bounded region may function as the setting of a single occasion, these regions connected to facilitate moving, mingling and the circulation of response. Within its compass, a social occasion is likely to provide a setting for many different small focused undertakings, conversational and otherwise, and very often will highlight (and embed) a platform activity. Often there will be a sense of official proceedings, a period before characterized as available to uncoordinated sociability, and a period after that is marked by felt release from occasioned obligations. Typically there will be some preplanning, sometimes even an agenda. There will be specialization of functions, broadly among housekeeping staff, official organizers and nonofficiating participants. The affair as a whole is looked forward to and back upon as a unitary, reportable event. Celebrative social occasions can be seen as the largest interactional unit, being, it seems, the only kind that can be engineered to extend over a number of days. Ordinarily, however, once begun a celebrative occasion will be in continuous existence until its termination.

It is plain that whenever encounters, platform performances, or celebrative, social occasions occur, so also does ambulatory movement and thus the units in which this movement is regulated. It should be just as plain that brief, two- to four-part verbal interchanges serve throughout the interaction order in a facilitative and accommodative way, remedying hitches in coordinated activity and unintended impingements in connection with adjacent, independent activities.

I have touched on a few basic interaction entities: ambulatory units, contacts, conversational encounters, formal meetings, platform performances, and social occasions. A parallel treatment could be provided of interaction processes or mechanisms. But although it is easy enough to uncover recurrent interaction processes of some generality—especially microscopic processes—it is difficult to identify basic ones, except, perhaps, in connection with turntaking in conversation. Something the same could be said of interaction roles.

V

I speak no further of the forms and processes of social life specific to the interaction order. Such talk might only have relevance for those interested in human ethology, collective behavior, public order, and discourse analysis. I want instead to focus my concluding remarks on one general issue of wider bearing: the

interface between the interaction order and the more traditionally considered elements of social organization. The aim will be to describe some features of the interaction order, but only those that directly bear upon the macroscopic worlds beyond the interaction in which these features are found.

From the outset a matter that is so obvious as to be taken for granted and neglected: the direct impact of situational effects upon social structures. Three examples might be cited.

First, insofar as a complex organization comes to be dependent on particular personnel (typically personnel who have managed to acquire governing roles), then the daily sequence of social situations on and off the job—that is, the daily round—in which these personages can be injured or abducted are also situations in which their organizations can suffer. Corner businesses, families, relationships, and other small structures are similarly vulnerable, especially those stationed in high crime-rate areas. Although this issue can acquire great public attention in various times and places, it seems to me of no great conceptual interest; analytically speaking, unexpected death from natural causes introduces much the same embarrassment to organizations. In both cases one deals with nothing more than risk.

Second, as already implied, there is the obvious fact that a great deal of the work of organizations—decision making, the transmission of information, the close coordination of physical tasks—is done face-to-face, requires being done in this way, and is vulnerable to face-to-face effects. Differently put, insofar as agents of social organizations of any scale, from states to households, can be persuaded, cajoled, flattered, intimidated, or otherwise influenced by effects only achievable in face-to-face dealings, then here, too, the interaction order bluntly impinges on macroscopic entities.

Third, there are people-processing encounters, encounters in which the "impression" subjects make during the interaction affects their life chances. The institutionalized example is the placement interview as conducted by school counselors, personnel department psychologists, psychiatric diagnosticians, and courtroom officials. In a less candid form, this processing is ubiquitous; everyone is a gatekeeper in regard to something. Thus, friendship relationships and marital bonds (at least in our society) can be traced back to an occasion in which something more was made of an incidental contact than need have been.

Whether made in institutionalized settings or not, what is situational about such processing encounters is clear: Every culture, and certainly ours, seems to have a vast lore of fact and fantasy regarding embodied indicators of status and character, thus appearing to render persons readable. By a sort of prearrangement, then, social situations seem to be perfectly designed to provide us with evidence of a participant's various attributes—if only to vividly re-present what we already know. Further, in social situations, as in other circumstances, deciders, if pressed, can employ an open-ended list of rationalizations to conceal from the subject (and even from themselves) the mix of considerations that figure in their decision and, especially, the relative weight given to these several determinants.

It is in these processing encounters, then, that the quiet sorting can occur which, as Bourdieu might have it, reproduces the social structure. But that conservative impact is not, analytically speaking, situational. The subjective weighting of a large number of social attributes, whether these attributes are officially relevant or not, and whether they are real or fanciful, provides a micro-dot of mystification; covert value given, say, to race, can be mitigated by covert value given to other structural variables—class, gender, age, comemberships, sponsorship network—structures which at best are not fully congruent with each other. And structural attributes, overtly or covertly employed, do not mesh fully with personal ones, such as health or vigor, or with properties that have all of their existence in social situations—looks, personality, and the like. What is situational, then, about processing encounters is the evidence they so fully provide of a participant's real or apparent attributes while at the same time allowing life chances to be determined through an inaccessible weighting of this complex of evidence. Although this arrangement ordinarily allows for the surreptitious consolidaton of structural lines, the same arrangement can also serve to loosen them.

One can point, then, to obvious ways in which social structures are dependent on, and vulnerable to, what occurs in face-to-face contacts. This has led some to argue reductively that all macrosociological features of society, along with society itself, are an intermittently existing composite of what can be traced back to the reality of encounters—a question of aggregating and extrapolating interactional effects. (This position is sometimes reinforced by the argument that whatever we do know about social structures can be traced back to highly edited summaries of what was originally a stream of experience in social situations.)

I find these claims uncongenial. For one, they confuse the interactional format in which words and gestural indications occur with the

import of these words and gestures, in a word, they confuse the situational with the merely situated. When your broker informs you that he has to sell you out or when your employer or your spouse informs you that your services are no longer required, the bad news can be delivered through a sequestered talk that gently and delicately humanizes the occasion. Such considerateness belongs to the resources of the interaction order. At the time of their use you may be very grateful for them. But the next morning what does it matter if you had gotten the word from a wire margin call, a computer readout, a blue slip at the time clock, or a terse note left on the bureau? How delicately or indelicately one is treated during the moment in which bad news is delivered does not speak to the structural significance of the news itself.

Further, I do not believe that one can learn about the shape of the commodities market, or the distribution of a city's land values, or the ethnic succession in municipal administrations, or the structure of kinship systems, or the systematic phonological shifts within the dialects of a speech community by extrapolating or aggregating from particular social encounters among the persons involved in any one of these patterns. (Statements about macroscopic structures and processes can reasonably be subjected to a microanalysis but of the kind that digs behind generalizations to find critical differences between, say, different industries, regions, short-term periods, and the like, sufficiently so to fracture overall views, and not because of face-to-face interactions.)

Nor do I subscribe to the notion that face-to-face behavior is any more real, any less of an arbitrary abstraction, than what we think of as the dealings between two corporations, or the distribution of felonies across the weekly cycle and subregions of a New York borough; in all these cases what we get is somebody's crudely edited summaries. I claim merely that forms of face-to-face life are worn smooth by constant repetition on the part of participants who are heterogeneous in many ways and yet must quickly reach a working understanding; these forms thus seem more open to systematic analysis than are the internal or external workings of many macroscopic entities. The forms themselves are anchored in subjective feelings, and thus allow an appreciable role for empathy. The very brief span in space and time of the phenomenal side of many of these events facilitates recording (and replaying), and one has, of course, the comfort of being able to keep one's own eyes on particular instances throughout the full course of their occurrence. Yet one must see that even within the domain of face-to-face interaction, what some students

accept as the smallest (and in that sense, ultimate) units of personal experience, others see as already a hopelessly complex matter requiring a much more refined application of microanalysis.

In sum, to speak of the relatively autonomous forms of life in the interaction order (as Charles Tilly has nicely done in connection with a special category of these forms) is not to put forward these forms as somehow prior, fundamental, or constitutive of the shape of macroscopic phenomena. To do so is akin to the self-centering game of playwrights, clinical psychologists, and good informants—all of whom fit their stories out so that forces within individual characters constitute and govern the action, allowing individual hearers and readers to identify gratefully with the result. Nor is it to speak of something immutable. All elements of social life have a history and are subject to critical change through time, and none can be fully understood apart from the particular culture in which it occurs. (Which is not to say that historians and anthropologists can often provide us with the data we would need to do a realistic analysis of interaction practices in communities no longer available to us.)

VI

I have mentioned direct connections between social structures and the interaction order not because of having anything new or principled to say about them, but only to establish the appropriate contrast for those interface effects that are most commonly considered, namely, the Durkheimian ones. You all know the litany. A critical feature of face-to-face gatherings is that in them and them alone we can fit a shape and dramatic form to matters that aren't otherwise palpable to the senses. Through costume, gesture, and bodily alignment we can depict and represent a heterogeneous list of immaterial things, sharing only the fact that they have a significance in our lives and yet do not cast a shadow: notable events in the past, beliefs about the cosmos and our place in it, ideals regarding our various categories of persons, and of course social relationships and larger social structures. These embodiments are centered in ceremonies (in turn embedded in celebrative social occasions) and presumably allow the participants to affirm their affiliation and commitment to their collectivities, and revive their ultimate beliefs. Here the celebration of a collectivity is a conscious reason for the social occasion which houses it, and naturally figures in the occasion's organization. The range in scale of such celebrative events is great: at one end, coronations, at the other, the two-couple dine-out—that increasingly com-

mon middle-class network ritual, to which we all give, and from which we all gain, so much weight.

Social anthropology claims these various ceremonies as its province, and indeed the best treatment of them in modern communities is Lloyd Warner's *The Living and the Dead*. Secular mass societies, it turns out, have not proven hostile to these celebrations—indeed Soviet society, as Crystal Lane has recently documented, is rife with them. Benedictions may be on the decline in number and significance, but not the occasions on which they once would have been offered.

And presumably these occasions have consequences for macrostructures. For example, Abner Cohen tells us that the steel-band carnival that began in the Notting Hill area of London as a multi-ethnic block party ended up as the beginning of the political organization of London's West Indians; that what started out as an annual Bank Holiday social affair—quintessentially a creature having merely an interactional life—ended up as an expression of a politically self-conscious group, the expression itself having helped considerably to create the structural context in which it would come to be seen. So the carnival was more the cause of a social movement and its group-formative effects than an expression thereof. Similarly, Simon Taylor tells us that the calendar of political celebrations developed by the national socialist movement in Germany—the calendar being a Hitler-centric version of basic Christian ceremonies—played an important role in consolidating the hold of the Party upon the nation. The key occasion in this annual cycle, apparently, was the Nuremberg Reichsparty-day held in the Zeppelinfield. This place could concentrate almost a quarter of a million people while affording all of them direct visual access to the stage. That number of people responding in unison to the same platform event apparently had lasting influence on some participants; certainly we have here the limiting case of a situational event, and certainly the interesting issue is not how the ritual reflected Nazi doctrines regarding the world, but how the annual occasion itself clearly contributed to the political hegemony of its impresarios.

In these two examples—admittedly both somewhat extreme—one has a direct leap from interactional effect to political organization. Of course, every rally—especially ones involving collective confrontation with authority—can have some long-standing effect upon the political orientation of the celebrants.

Now although it seems easy enough to identify the collectivities which ceremony projects on to a behavioral screen, and to cite, as I have just done, evidence of the critical contribution

the shadow may make to the substance, it is quite another matter to demonstrate that *in general* anything macroscopically significant results from ceremony—at least in contemporary society. Those individuals who are in a position to authorize and organize such occasions are often the ones who star in them, and these functionaries always seem to be optimistic about the result. But in fact, the ties and relationships that we ceremonialize may be so attenuated that a periodic celebration is all that we are prepared to commit to them; so what they index is not our social reality but our nostalgia, our bad conscience, and our lingering piety in regard to what is no longer binding. (When friends remove to another town, the celebration of chance conjunctions can become the substance of the relationship not its expression.) Furthermore, as Moore and Myerhoff have suggested, the categories of persons that come together in a ceremony (and thus the structures that are involved) may never come together again, ceremonially or otherwise. A one-time intersection of variously impinging interests may be represented, and nothing beyond that. Certainly celebrative occasions such as this presidential address don't necessarily have the effect of recommitting the members of the audience to the discipline and profession under whose name they foregather. Indeed, all one can hope for is that memory of how the hour was passed will fade quickly, allowing everyone to attend again the following year, willing once again to not not come. In sum, sentiments about structural ties serve more as an involvement resource—serve more to carry a celebrative occasion—than such affairs serve to strengthen what they draw from.

VII

If we think of ceremonials as narrative-like enactments, more or less extensive and more or less insulated from mundane routines, then we can contrast these complex performances with "contact rituals," namely, perfunctory, brief expressions occurring incidental to everyday action—in passing as it were—the most frequent case involving but two individuals. These performances have not been handled very well by anthropology even though they seem much more researchable than the more complex sequences. Indeed, ethology and the ethological conception of ritual, at least in the sense of intention display, turn out to be as germane as the anthropological formulation. The question, then, becomes: what principles inform the bearing of social structures on contact rituals? It is this issue I want to consider in closing.

The events occurring for incidental reasons

when individuals are in one another's immediate presence are well designed to serve as micro-ecological metaphors, summaries and iconic symbols of structural arrangements—whether wanted or not. And should such expressions not occur incidentally, local environments can easily be manipulated so as to produce them. Given the selective sensibilities in a particular culture—for example, concern over relative elevation, value placed on right-over left-sidedness, orientation to the cardinal directions—given such cultural biases, some depictive, situated resources will of course be exploited more than others. The question, then, is how will these features of the interaction order be geared or linked into, connected up with, tied into social structures, including social relationships? Here the social sciences have been rather easygoing, sufficiently so on occasion to be content with the phrase "an expression of." Minor social ritual is not an expression *of* structural arrangements in any simple sense; at best it is an expression advanced *in regard* to these arrangements. Social structures don't "determine" culturally standard displays, merely help select from the available repertoire of them. The expressions themselves, such as priority in being served, precedence through a door, centrality of seating, access to various public places, preferential interruption rights in talk, selection as addressed recipient, are interactional in substance and character; at best they are likely to have only loosely coupled relations to anything by way of social structures that might be associated with them. They are sign vehicles fabricated from depictive materials at hand, and what they come to be taken as a "reflection" of is necessarily an open question.

Look, for example, at the bit of our ritual idiom frequently treated in term papers: license to employ reciprocal first-naming as an address formula. Pairs of persons licensed to greet and talk to each other through reciprocal first name can't be taken by evidence of this fact alone to be in a particular structural relation, or to be co-members of a particular social organization or group or category. There is great variation by region, class, and epoch, and these variations do not correspond closely to variation in social structure. But there are other issues. Take persons like ourselves for a moment. We are on reciprocal first name terms with sibs, relatives of same generation, friends, neighbors, early school mates, the newly introduced to us at domestic social gatherings, our office mates, our car salesman, our accountant, and when we gamble privately, the cronies we do it with. I regret to say that in some cases we are also on such terms with our parents and children. The very fact, that in some cases (sibs and spouses for example) first-name terms (as opposed to other proper names) are obligatory and in other relationships optional, suggests the looseness of the usage. The traditional term "primary ties" addresses the issue, but optimistically; it reflects the psychological reductionism of our sociological forefathers, and their wistful memories of the neighborhoods they were raised in. In fact, reciprocal first naming is a culturally established resource for styling immediate dealings: reduced formality is implied and the abjuring of a tone-setting opportunity to stand on one's claim to ritual circumspection. But informality is constituted out of interactional materials (as is formality), and the various social relations and social circles that draw on this resource merely share some affinities. Which is not to say, of course, that a full catalogue of the symmetrical and asymmetrical forms of interactional regard and disregard, of circumspection and ritual ease, that two individuals routinely extend to each other would not appreciably inform us about their structural ties. Nor is it to say that convention can't link some displays to social structures in exclusive ways; in our society the wedding ceremony, for example, employs some forms that advertise the formation of an instance of a particular class of social structure and this alone. Nor is it to say that forms of interaction can't themselves be responsibe to the institutional setting in which they occur. (Even apart from *what* is said, turn-taking rules in informal talk differ somewhat from those in family therapy sessions, which are different in turn from those in classroom teaching, and these in turn differ from the practices found in court hearings. And these differences in form are partly explicable in terms of the special tasks undertaken in these several settings, which in turn are determined by extrasituational concerns.)

In general, then, (and qualifications apart) what one finds, in modern societies at least, is a nonexclusive linkage—a "loose coupling"—between interactional practices and social structures, a collapsing of strata and structures into broader categories, the categories themselves not corresponding one-to-one to anything in the structural world, a gearing as it were of various structures into interactional cogs. Or, if you will, a set of transformation rules, or a membrane selecting how various externally relevant social distinctions will be managed within the interaction.

One example. From the perspective of how women in our society fare in informal cross-sexed talk, it is of very small moment that (statistically speaking) a handful of males, such as junior executives, have to similarly wait and hang on other's words—albeit in each case not

many others. From the point of view of the interaction order, however, the issue is critical. For one, it allows us to try to formulate a role category that women and junior executives (and anyone else in these interactional circumstances) share, and this will be a role that belongs *analytically* to the interaction order, which the categories women and junior executives do not.

I need only remind you that the dependency of interactional activity on matters outside the interaction—a fact characteristically neglected by those of us who focus on face-to-face dealings—doesn't in itself imply dependency on social structures. As already suggested, a quite central issue in all face-to-face interaction is the cognitive relation of the participants, that is, what it is each can effectively assume the other knows. This relationship is relatively context-free, extending beyond any current social situation to all occasions when the two individuals meet. Pairs constituting intimate structures, by definition, will know considerable about each other, and also know of many experiences they exclusively share—all of which dramatically affects what they can say to each other and how laconic they can be in making these references. But all this exclusive information pales when one considers the amount of information about the world two barely acquainted individuals can assume it is reasonable to assume in formulating their utterances to each other. (Here, once again, we see that the traditional distinction between primary and secondary relations is an insight sociology must escape from.)

The general formulation I have suggested of the relation between the interaction order and the structural ones allows one (I hope) to proceed constructively. First, as suggested, one is encouraged to treat as a matter for discovery just who it is that does it to whom, the assumption being that in almost every case the categories that result will not quite coincide with any structural division. Let me press yet another example. Etiquette books are full of conceptualizations concerning the courtesies that men owe women in polite society. Less clearly presented, of course, is an understanding concerning the kinds of women and the kinds of men who would not be looked to as expected participants in these little niceties. More germane here, however, is the fact each of these little gestures turns out to be also prescribed between other categories: an adult in regard to an old person, an adult in regard to a young person, a host for a guest, an expert for a novice, a native for a visitor, friends in regard to the celebrant of a life turning-point, a well person for a sick one, a whole person for an incapacitated one. And, as suggested, it turns out that what all these pairings share is not something in the social structure but something that a scene of face-to-face interaction allows for. (Even if one were to restrict oneself to one sphere of social life—say activity within a complex organization—a loose coupling between the interaction order and social structure would remain. The precedence one gives one's immediate boss one gives to his or her immediate boss too, and so on to the head of the organization; for precedence is an interactional resource that speaks to ordinal ranking, not to the distance between the rungs.) It is easy enough, then, and even useful, to specify in social structural terms who performs a given act of deference or presumption to whom. In the study of the interaction order, however, after saying that, one must search out who else does it to whom else, then categorize the doers with a term that covers them all, and similarly with the done to. And one must provide a technically detailed description of the forms involved.

Second, a loose-coupling approach allows one to find a proper place for the apparent power of fads and fashions to effect change in ritual practices. A recent example, known to you all, was the rapid and somewhat temporary shift to informal dress in the business world during the latter phases of the hippie movement, accompanied sometimes by a change in salutational forms, all without much corresponding change in social structure.

Third, one can appreciate the vulnerability of features of the interaction order to direct political intervention, both from below and above, in either case bypassing socioeconomic relationships. Thus, in recent times blacks and women have concertedly breached segregated public places, in many cases with lasting consequence for access arrangements, but, all in all, without much change in the place of blacks and women in the social structure. And one can appreciate the purpose of a new regime in introducing and enforcing a practice that strikes at the manner in which broad categories of persons will appear in public, as, for example, when the National Socialists in Germany required Jews to wear identifying arm bands when in public places, or the Soviet government took official action to discourage the wearing of veils by women of the Siberian Khanty ethnic group, or the Iranian government took veils in exactly the opposite direction. And one can appreciate, too, the effectiveness of efforts directly to alter contact interchanges, as when a revolutionary salute, verbal greeting, or address term is introduced from above, in some cases rather permanently.

And finally, one can appreciate the leverage those in an ideological movement can obtain by

concentrating their efforts upon salutations and farewells, address terms, tact and indirection, and other junctures for politeness in the management of social contacts and verbal intercourse. Or the fuss that can be made by a doctrine that leads to systematic breaching of standards for seemly public dress. In these matters, American Hippies, and later, "The Chicago Seven," were interesting amateurs; the great terrorists of contact forms were the mid-17th century Quakers in Britain, who managed, somehow, (as Bauman has recently described it) to design a doctrine that struck directly at the then settled arrangements through which social structures and broad official values were given polite due in social intercourse. (To be sure other religious movements of the period employed some of these recalcitrancies too, but none so systematically.) That sturdy band of plain speakers should always stand before us as an example of the wonderfully disruptive power of systematic impoliteness, reminding us once again of the vulnerabilities of the interaction order. There is no doubt: Fox's disciples raised to monumental heights the art of becoming a pain in the ass.

VIII

Of all the social structures that interface with the interaction order, the ones that seem to do so most intimately are social relationships. I want to say a word about them.

To think of the amount or frequency of face-to-face interaction between two related individuals—two ends of the relationship—as somehow constitutive of their relationship is structurally naive, seemingly taking propinquity-related friendship as a model for all relationships. And yet, of course, the link between relationships and the interaction order is close.

Take for example (in our own society) acquaintanceship, or, better still, "knowership." This is a critical institution from the perspective of how we deal with individuals in our immediate, or in our telephonic, presence, a key factor in the organization of social contacts. What is involved is the right and obligation mutually to accept and openly to acknowledge individual identification on all initial occasions of incidentally produced proximity. This relationship, once established, is defined as continuing for life—a property imputed much less correctly to the marriage bond. The social relationship we call "mere acquaintanceship" incorporates knowership and little else, constituting thereby a limiting case—a social relationship whose consequences are restricted to social situations—for here the obligation to provide evidence of this relationship

is the relationship. And this evidence is the stuff of interaction. Knowledge of another's name and the right to use it in address incidentally implies the capacity to specify who it is one is summoning into talk. Similarly, a greeting owed incidentally implies the initiation of an encounter.

When one turns to "deeper" relationships, knowership and its obligations remain a factor, but now not the defining one. However, other links between relationships and the interaction order appear. The obligation to exchange passing greetings is extended: the pair may be obliged to interrrupt their independent courses of action so that a full-fledged encounter can be openly dedicated to display of pleasure at the opportunity for contact. During this convivial pause, each participant is constrained to demonstrate that she or he has kept fresh in mind not only the name of the other but also bits of the other's biography. Inquiries will be in order regarding the other's significant others, recent trips, illness if any, career outcomes, and sundry other matters that speak to the questioner's aliveness to the world of the person greeted. Correspondingly, there will be the obligation to update the other regarding one's own circumstances. Of course these obligations help to resuscitate relationships that might otherwise have attenuated for want of dealings; but they also provide both the grounds for initiating an encounter and an easy initial topic. So one might have to admit that the obligation to maintain an active biography of our acquaintances (and ensure that they can sustain the same in regard to us) does at least as much for the organization of encounters as it does for the relationship of the persons who encounter each other. This service to the interaction order is also very evident in connection with our obligation to retain our acquaintance's personal name immediately in mind, allowing us always to employ it as a vocative in multiperson talk. After all, personal name in utterance-initial position is an effective device for alerting ratified hearers as to which of them is about to be addressed.

Just as the closely related are obliged to enjoy a greeting encounter when they find themselves incidentally in one another's immediate presence, so after a measured time of not having been in contact are they obliged to ensure a meeting, either through a phone call or letter, or by jointly plotting an opportunity for face-to-face contact—the plotting itself providing a contact even if nothing comes of what is plotted. Here, in "due contacts" one can see that encountering itself is borrowed whole cloth from the interaction order and defined as one of the goods mutually provided for in relationships.

IX

Although it is interesting to try to work out the connections between the interaction order and social relationships, there is another matter that more obviously presses for consideration: what in traditional sociology is referred to as diffuse social statuses or (in another version) master status-determined traits. To close my remarks tonight I want to comment on this issue.

In our society, one could say that there are four critical diffuse statuses: age-grade, gender, class, and race. Although these attributes and corresponding social structures function quite differently in society (perhaps race and class being the most closely allied), they all share two critical features.

First, they constitute a cross-cutting grid on which each individual can be relevantly located with respect to each of the four statuses.

Secondly, our placement in respect to all four attributes is evident by virtue of the markers our bodies bring with them into all our social situations, no prior information about us being required. Whether we can be *individually* identified or not in a particular social situation, we can almost always be *categorically* identified in these four ways on entrance. (When not, then sociologically instructive troubles arise.) The easy perceptibility of these traits in social situations is not of course entirely fortuitous; in most cases, socialization, in subtle ways, insures that our placement in these regards will be more evident than might otherwise be. But of course, any trait that is not easily perceptible could hardly acquire the capacity of a diffuse status-determining (or more correctly, status-identifying) trait, at least in modern society. Which is not to say that this perceptibility is of equal importance in the role that each of these diffuse statuses plays in our society. Nor surely that perceptibility alone will guarantee that society will make use of this property structurally.

With this schematic picture of diffuse statuses in mind, turn to one paradigmatic example of the sort of context micro-analysis deals with: the class of events in which a "server," in a setting prepared for the purpose, perfunctorily and regularly provides goods of some kind to a series of customers or clients, typically either in exchange for money or as an intermediate phase in bureaucratic processing. In brief, the "service transaction"—here focusing on the kind that find server and served in the same social situation, in contrast to dealings over the phone, or through the mail, or with a dispensing machine. The institutionalized format for conducting these dealings draws upon a wider cultural complex covering government protocol, traffic rules, and other formalizations of precedence.

In contemporary society almost everyone has service transactions every day. Whatever the ultimate significance of these dealings for recipients, it is clear that how they are treated in these contexts is likely to flavor their sense of place in the wider community.

In almost all contemporary service transactions, a basic understanding seems to prevail: that all candidates for service will be treated "the same" or "equally," none being favored or disfavored over the others. One doesn't, of course, need to look to democratic philosophy to account for the institutionalization of this arrangement: all things considered, this ethic provides a very effective formula for the routinization and processing of services.

The principle of equality of service treatment in service transactions has some obvious implications. In order to deal with more than one candidate for service at a time in what can be perceived as an orderly and fair manner, a queuing arrangement is likely to be employed, this likely involving a first come first served rule. This rule produces a temporal ordering that totally blocks the influence of such differential social statuses and relationships as the candidates bring with them to the service situation—attributes which are of massive significance outside the situation. (Here is the quintessential case of "local determinism" as a blocking device.) Plainly, then, immediately on entering a service arena, customers will find it in their interests to identify the local tracking system (whether numbered slips are to be taken from a machine or spindle, or names logged in a list, or a human queue requiring one's body as a marker, or active orientation to the individual identity of those already present and to the person who enters right after oneself). They will also be expected to manage sorting themselves among sub-queues subtended by multiple servers, all of this as part of their presupposed competence. And of course, if one's place in a queue is to be respected, fellow queuers will have to sustain queuing discipline amongst themselves, apart from relations to the server.

Along with the principle of equality, another rule is everywhere present in contemporary service transactions: the expectation that anyone seeking service will be treated with "courtesy"; for example, that the server will give quick attention to the service request, and execute it with words, gestures, and manner that somehow display approval of the asker and pleasure in the contact. Implied (when taken in conjunction with the equality principle) is that a customer who makes a very small purchase will be given no less a reception than

one who makes a very large one. Here one has the institutionalization—indeed the commercialization—of deference and again something that would seem to facilitate the routinization of servicing.

Given the two rules I have mentioned—equality of treatment and courteous treatment—participants in service transactions can feel that all externally relevant attributes are being held in abeyance and only internally generated ones are allowed to play a role, e.g., first come first served. And indeed, this is a standard response. But obviously, what in fact goes on while the client sustains this sense of normal treatment is a complex and precarious matter.

Take, for example, the unstated assumptions in servicing regarding who qualifies as a serious candidate. Situationally perceptible qualifications regarding age, sobriety, language ability, and solvency will have to be satisfied before individuals are allowed to hold themselves as qualified for service. (The order "Cup of coffee to go" might not receive the laconic reply "Cream or sugar?" if it is a street bum who places the order; a polite request at the counter of a West Philadelphia hospital pharmacy for "Twenty 5-milligram valium, please" while submitting the prescription may well evoke the naked reply "How are you going to pay for it?"; and attempted purchases of alcoholic beverages anywhere in this country may well invoke a request to see an age certificate.)

Qualifying rules apart, one is likely to find understandings about the relaxation of queuing constraints. For example, faced by a queue, entering individuals can plead or display extenuating circumstances, beg to be allowed precedence and be granted this special privilege (or have it initiated to them if their need is evident) by the person whose position in the queue will be the first to be set back by the license. The cost to the donor of this license is also borne by all the other members of the queue who are behind the donor, but generally they seem willing to delegate the decision and abide by it. A more common relaxation of the norms occurs when the head of a queue volunteers to change places with the person next in line (or is requested by the latter to do so) because the latter is an apparent rush or appears to have only a very brief need for the server's time—a switch that does not affect the other parties in the queue.

There are other understandings that must be considered. Service transactions can be carried out in such a manner that the server doesn't even look into the face of the served. (This, indeed, provides the rationale for the generic term "service transaction" rather than "service

encounter.") The standard arrangement, however, is for eyes to meet, the mutual obligation of a social encounter accepted, and civil titles used (especially by the server) in the initial interchange, typically in utterance-initial or utterance-terminal position. In our society, this means a gender-marked vocative and a tinting of behavior that is thought to be suitable for the gender mix in the transaction. (Note, titles can almost always be omitted, but if they are used, they must correctly reflect gender.) If the served is a pre-adult, then this too is likely to be reflected in server's vocative selection and "speech register."

If the server and served are known to each other individually by name and have a prior relationship, then the transaction is likely to be initiated and terminated by a relationship ritual: individually identifying terms of address are likely to be used along with the exchange of inquiry and well-wishing found in standard greetings and farewells between acquaintances. So long as these initial and terminal flurries of sociability are sustained as a subordinate involvement during the transaction, so long as other persons present do not feel their movement in the queue is being impeded, then no sense of intrusion into the application of equalitarian treatment is likely to be sensed. The management of personal relationships is thus bracketed.

I have suggested in schematic terms elements of the structure of service transactions that can be taken as institutionalized and official, such that ordinarily when they are seen to apply in a particular service setting, those present feel that nothing marked or unacceptable or out of the ordinary has occurred by way of substance or ceremony. With this in mind, two critical issues can be addressed regarding the management of diffuse statuses in service transactions.

First, note that it is not uncommon that individuals seeking service feel (whether justified or not) that they have been given unequal and discourteous treatment. In point of fact, all the various elements in the standard structure of serving can be "worked," exploited, and covertly breached in almost an infinite number of ways. And just as one customer may be discriminated against in these ways, so another can be unfairly favored. Typically these breaches will take the form of deniable acts, ones whose invidiousness can be disputed by the actor if she or he is challenged openly. And of course, through this route all manner of "expression" can be given to officially irrelevant, externally based attributes, whether these are associated with diffuse social statuses, personal relationships, or "personality." I believe that to understand these effects

one must trace them back to the particular point in the framework of servicing at which they occur, and one must see that no simple formulation is possible of the medley of official and unofficial relevancies accorded various attributes of server and served. What will be given recognition at one structural point will be rigorously checked by counter-principles at another. Again, then, one finds an institutionalized framework (albeit culturally and temporally bound) quite differentiated in its structure which can serve as a resource for accomplishing all manner of ends, one, but only one, of which is informal discrimination in the traditional sense.

The second critical issue is that the notion of "equality" or "fair treatment" must not be understood simplistically. One can hardly say that some sort of objectively based equal treatment ever occurs, except perhaps where the server is eliminated and a dispensing machine is employed instead. One can only say that participants' settled sense of equal treatment is not disturbed by what occurs, and that of course is quite another matter. A sense that "local determinism" prevails doesn't tell us very much as to what, "objectively" speaking, does in fact obtain.

All of this is evident from what has been said about the acceptable ways in which personal relationships can be given recognition in service encounters. The management of queuing provides us with another case in point. What queues protect is ordinal position determined "locally" by first come first placed. But how long one must wait for service depends not merely on one's ordinal position in the queue, but how protracted is the business of each of those ahead of one. Yet, one is obliged to discount this latter contingency. Should the person immediately ahead of one take an inordinate amount of time to service, one will ordinarily be restricted to unofficial, largely gestural, remonstrance. The problem is particularly pronounced in sub-queuing. In banks, supermarkets, and airline check-in counters, the customer may have to select a sub-queue, and then may find once achieving a substantial place in it that switching to the rear of an apparently faster-moving line could entail a strategic loss. Participants can thus find themselves committed to the risk of a line that delivers service with greater than average delay. The normative response to this unequal treatment is a sense of bad luck or personal ill-management of contingencies—something definable as locally generated yet not perceived as a question of invidious treatment by the server.

Sub-queuing can illustrate another point. Large hotels currently provide multiple regis-tration queues each of which is identified with a range of last-name initials. One's last-name initial is certainly a property one brings with one to the situation, not something generated within the situation, but is perceived as having no social significance—something one is not likely to have feelings about. (In state protocol, a similar device can be employed to avoid troublesome questions of precedence, namely, allocating priority to the ambassador of longest residence.) A sense of equal treatment in such cases speaks not to the determinants of priority that are employed but to those that are explicitly excluded.

A final example. In service queuing there is the issue of two candidates coming on to the scene at the "same" time. At such junctures of indeterminacy in the queuing rules—junctures where unintended and undesired expressions of inequality may be generated—contestants have a wider set of understandings to draw on, a republican form of *noblesse oblige,* whereby the individual who might seem to be the stronger, abler, or superior in social status proffers precedence to the other, as a protector would to the protected. So preferential treatment occurs, but initiated by the individual who would otherwise be in a position to force an opposite outcome. Now there is no doubt that ordinarily such moments hardly form a ripple in the service scene, leaving everyone feeling that no breach of the equality rule has occurred. But of course, categories of individuals receiving such priority courtesy may come to feel patronized and, ultimately, disparaged. Always, a basis of discrimination that the individual may this day accept as of no significance can tomorrow lead to acute reactions of slight or privilege.

In sum, the normal sense that externally based attributes are officially excluded from a role in service dealings, and that local determinism prevails—apart, of course, from covert breaches, real and imagined—is something of a perceptual achievement. Externally based attributes are in fact given routine, systematic "recognition," and various local determinisms apart from first come first served are systematically disattended. "Equal" treatment, then, in no way is sustained by what in fact goes on—officially or unofficially—during service transactions. What can be sustained and routinely is sustained is the blocking of certain externally based influences at certain structural points in the service forework. Out of this we generate a sense that equal treatment prevails.

X

I end this address with a personal bleat. We all agree, I think, that our job is to study society.

If you ask why and to what end, I would answer: because it is there. Louis Wirth, whose courses I took, would have found that answer a disgrace. He had a different one, and since his time his answer has become the standard one.

For myself I believe that human social life is ours to study naturalistically, *sub specie aeternitatis*. From the perspective of the physical and biological sciences, human social life is only a small irregular scab on the face of nature, not particularly amenable to deep systematic analysis. And so it is. But it's ours. With a few exceptions, only students in our century have managed to hold it steadily in view this way, without piety or the necessity to treat traditional issues. Only in modern times have university students been systematically trained to examine all levels of social life meticulously. I'm not one to think that so far our claims can be based on magnificent ac-

complishment. Indeed I've heard it said that we should be glad to trade what we've so far produced for a few really good conceptual distinctions and a cold beer. But there's nothing in the world we should trade for what we do have: the bent to sustain in regard to all elements of social life a spirit of unfettered, unsponsored inquiry, and the wisdom not to look elsewhere but ourselves and our discipline for this mandate. That is our inheritance and that so far is what we have to bequeath. If one must have warrant addressed to social needs, let it be for unsponsored analyses of the social arrangements enjoyed by those with institutional authority—priests, psychiatrists, school teachers, police, generals, government leaders, parents, males, whites, nationals, media operators, and all the other well-placed persons who are in a position to give official imprint to versions of reality.