The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life
Erving Goffman.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts".

(William Shakespeare. As You Like It, Act 2, Scene 7, 1.36)

Chapter 3: Regions and Region Behavior

Let's recall where we've been so far:

\[ \text{Co-presence} \Rightarrow \text{Performance} \Rightarrow \text{Performer/Audience Information Divide} \]
\[ \text{Performance} \Rightarrow \text{Teams} \Rightarrow \text{Intra-team information challenges} \]

Now we add logic about space.

Performances generally are place bound.

\[ \text{FRONT REGION} = \text{where the performance happens} \]

activity standards

\[ \text{POLITENESS} = \text{how performer treats audience (performer as subject, audience as object)} \]
\[ \text{cf. MANNER as part of PERSONAL FRONT (108.4)} \]

\[ \text{DECORUM} = \text{observable comportment of performer (performer as object)} \]
\[ \text{cf. APPEARANCE as part of PERSONAL FRONT (108.5)} \]

And there is a temporal component: politeness is of the moment, in the act. Decorum is open to continuous inspection

We are used to thinking of decorum in conjunction with fancy spaces, but it shows up all over the place. In workplaces, for example, one has an obligation to at least appear to be busy. And one has to be dressed “for work” not because protective clothing is needed but because it shows a certain respect for the performance space.

It should be plain that while persons who are obliged to make-work and make-no-work are likely to be on the opposite sides of the track, they must yet adapt themselves to the same side of the footlights (111.7)

Now recall that the underlying topic here is INFORMATION CONTROL. PERFORMANCE is about information control. Information about the SELF and SITUATION.

Frontstage is where performance related information is “in play” while backstage or back region is where suppressed information makes an appearance.

Examples of back stage
bedrooms, dressing rooms, bathrooms
behind curtains of various kinds
off camera, off air
work rooms
break rooms
“one doesn’t want to see how hotdogs and sausage are made…”

BACKSTAGE DIFFICULTIES arise when the curtain is parted. Walls that are too thin, microphones left on, journalists with telephoto lenses, etc. threaten the information control function of keeping regions separate.

**Journal:** map front and back regions of living areas, campus, workplace.

**Journal:** people as part of front region architecture (receptionists, hostesses, phone answerers, etc.)

LANGUAGE too is stratified by region. Familiarity, jargon, insider terms rule backstage where formality and gentility rule the front (128.6)

But even when there’s no audience, performers cannot simply “let it all hang out”: (130)

want other team members to think of them as loyal and trustworthy
want to sustain one another’s morale about the performance – that it did (or will) come off
there may be divisions in the team that can’t be undermined by “just being oneself”

Social Mobility: (132) on the way up we often long for the next level where one can “be oneself” only to be disappointed by the fact that performance is required there too (e.g., eventually, I won’t have to act smart and worry about making mistakes as a graduate student only to learn later that same thing happens as professor)

The above is about problems of access to BACKSTAGE. To consider problems of Frontstage access Goffman needs to expand the picture a bit (logically allowing for “where is access to frontstage from?”). He suggests a new region the OUTSIDE (134-5). This leads to consideration of general problem of AUDIENCE SEGREGATION. When outsiders intrude on a performance they see performer and audience in an unexpected role. They are used to being “played to” or “performed for” but these actors are performing for someone else. General problem is seeing a performance that is meant for someone else:

self consciousness I feel when another professor observes my class (whether on a class visit or through the window or through the wall)

having one’s sexual exploits overheard by a neighbor

witnessing someone pulling someone’s leg

**Journal:** Try to observe the “scene changing” that goes on when a third party interrupts a private performance (friend stumbles across a tête-à-tête in a fine restaurant, for example).

It has been suggested that an intrusion may be handled by having those present switch to a definition of the situation into which the intruder can be incorporated. A second way of handling the problem is to accord the intruder a clear-cut welcome as someone who should have been in the region all along (139-40).

Example : a friend stumbles across a gathering to which she has not been invited…