situations. The medium theorists discuss media as if they have little to do with the dynamics of face-to-face interaction, and the situationists barely seem to notice that media exist. In order to fuse these two approaches into a theory of the impact of media on social behavior, we must develop a common denominator concept that will link the discussion of media with the discussion of place-bound situations. We also need a framework that extends the description of relatively fixed role behaviors in static situations into an analysis of situational and behavioral *change*. Further, we need to discover how social roles, in general, are affected by changes in media and situations. These tasks are the work of the remaining two chapters in Part I.

3
Media, Situations, and Behavior

Beyond Place: Situations as Information-Systems

Situations are usually defined in terms of behaviors in physical locations. Goffman, for example, describes a behavioral region as "any *place* that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception."[1] Roger Barker sees "behavior settings" as "bounded, *physical-temporal locales*."[2] Lawrence Pervin defines a situation as "a specific *place*, in most cases involving specific people, a specific time and specific activities."[3]*

It is not surprising that most of those who have studied the effects of situations on behavior have focused on encounters that occur in given places. Until recently, place-bound, face-to-face interaction was the only means of gaining "direct" access to the sights and sounds of each other's behaviors. The physical barriers and boundaries marked by walls and fences as well as the passageways provided by doors and corridors directed the flow of people and determined, to a large degree, the number, type, and size of face-to-face interactions.

Further, such physical settings continue to be very special. A given place, such as a room, takes on particular social significance because its walls and doors and location tend to include and exclude participants in a particular way. The walls of a room simultaneously permit focused interaction among some people while isolating the participants from other

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*Of course, situationists also consider many other characteristics of situations, including: tasks, goals, rules, roles, traditions, temporal factors (season, month, day, time, and length of encounter), the characteristics of the people present (number of people, their age, sex, status, nationality, race, religion, degree of intimacy with each other), and the subjective perceptions of participants. But place often figures as an implicit or explicit part of the definition of situations, perhaps because situationists realize that so many of the other factors would be affected by a major change in the physical setting or its boundaries.

people. The size of a physical setting tends to set a minimum and a maximum number of people who can interact within it comfortably. A football field, for example, is not a very romantic spot for two lovers to interact, and a telephone booth is not a suitable place for a meeting of a board of trustees. The thickness of doors and walls, the size and location of windows (as well as the presence or absence of window shades), and the distance of the setting from other encounters in other locations, all serve to support or undermine various potential definitions of the situation.*

Although there are many logical reasons for the traditional focus on place-bound situations, a question that arises is whether behavioral settings must be places. That is, is it actually *place* that is a large determinant of behavior, or is it something else that has traditionally been tied to, and therefore confused with, place? There is another key factor besides place mentioned in Goffman's definition of regions that tends to get lost in most of his and other situationists' discussions of behavioral settings: "barriers to perception." Indeed, a close examination of the dynamics of situations and behavior suggests that place itself is actually a sub-category of this more inclusive notion of a perceptual field. For while situations are usually defined in terms of who is in what location, the implicit issue is actually the types of behaviors that are available for other people's scrutiny.

Goffman describes, for example, how waiters are in a "front region" when they are *in* a dining room, and in a "back region" when they are *in* the kitchen. The relationship between back and front regions in Goffman's analysis is often tied directly to physical location. Yet place is not the real issue. If there are no patrons in the dining room (before or after serving time, for example), then the dining room could clearly serve as a back region area of preparation, rehearsal, and relaxation. Conversely, if a customer walks into the kitchen, the kitchen would be transformed, for a time (and to the extent possible), into a front region. Similarly, if two waiters in the dining room surreptitiously exchange glances that mock the patrons they are serving, or if they whisper "stage directions" to each other, in passing, then they have had a back region interaction, even though they are physically "onstage."

It is not the physical setting itself that determines the nature of the interaction, but the patterns of information flow. Indeed, the discussion of the definition of the situation can be entirely removed from the issue of direct physical presence by focusing only on information access. If an intercom is mistakenly left on in the kitchen and a few patrons overhear the back region banter of their waiters, then the situational definition will

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*Other physical variables *within* a given room—such as furniture arrangement, lighting, and temperature—also affect behavior. In a classroom, for example, freestanding chairs arranged in a circle obviously foster different types of interaction among those present than desks bolted to the floor in straight rows. Similarly, the distance between a receptionist's desk and the chair of a waiting client may determine whether the receptionist and client feel that they "have to" interact with each other.*

be affected even though no change in the physical place or in the physical locations of the participants has occurred. In the same way, social situations and social performances in society, in general, may be changed by the introduction of new media of communication. When literacy allows parents to spell words to each other to prevent their young and still illiterate children from understanding what is being said, the parents have established a backstage area even while they are in the presence of their children. Similarly, when two teenagers speak to each other on the telephone, they override physical distance and create a backstage area apart from the adults with whom they live.

To include mediated encounters in the study of situations, we need to abandon the notion that social situations are only encounters that occur face-to-face in set times and places. We need to look at the larger, more inclusive notion of "patterns of access to information."

"Information" is used here in a special sense to mean *social* information: all that people are capable of knowing about the behavior and actions of themselves and others. The term refers to that nebulous "stuff" we learn about each other in acts of communication. This type of information is the heart of news, gossip, political campaigns, courtships, as well as all personal and professional relationships and encounters. It is also the subtext of most primary education. Such information comes in many forms including words, gestures, vocalizations, posture, dress, and pace of activity. At base, the information of concern here deals with social behavior—our access to each other's social performances.

This definition of information differs from some of the common uses of the term to refer to "facts," in general, or to quiz show type trivia such as "What is the capitol of Nebraska?" or "Who was the first female member of Congress?" Similarly, it does not refer to objective statements about the workings of the universe that exist prior to, and apart from humanity. In this analysis, information relates to the social, not the natural order. The concern is more with "social experience" than general "knowledge."*

Another way to think about a social situation is as an "information-system," that is, as a given pattern of access to social information, a given pattern of access to the behavior of other people. This definition is not in contradiction to the definitions presented by most situationists, but it extends the study of situations beyond those interactions that occur in place-bound settings.

The notion of situations as information-systems allows for the breakdown of the arbitrary distinction often made between studies of face-to-

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As is discussed in Chapter 4 and the Appendix, however, knowledge—or what might be called "technical information" or "objective fact"—which supposedly exists beyond the subjectivities of social interaction, often turns out to be very much about people, behavior, and the social order. When Galileo peered into the heavens, for example, he retrieved "facts" that threatened the Catholic Church and the role structures of his day. Technical knowledge, therefore, often functions as social information in disguise.

face interaction and studies of mediated communications. The concept of information-systems suggests that physical settings and media "settings" are part of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Places and media both foster set patterns of interaction among people, set patterns of social information flow.

Thus, while places create one type of information-system—the live encounter—there are many other types of situations created by other channels of communication. This wider view of situations as information-systems, rather than as places, is especially relevant to the study of *electronic* media because electronic media have tended to diminish the differences between live and mediated interaction. The speech and appearance of others are now accessible without being in the same physical location. The widespread use of electronic media leads to many new social situations.

New Media, New Situations

We all know from everyday experience that electronic media override the boundaries and definitions of situations supported by physical settings. When two friends speak on the telephone, for example, the situation they are "in" is only marginally related to their respective physical locations. Indeed, the telephone tends to bring two people closer to each other, in some respects, than they are to other people in their physical environments. This explains the almost jealous response on the part of some people who are in the same room with someone speaking on the phone. They often ask "Who is it?" "What's she saying?" "What's so funny?" or "Come on, get off the phone already!" Or they try to participate by throwing in remarks from the background and by attempting to elicit a response from the person on the other end of the phone. Ironically, to participate fully in the phone conversation of someone you are "with," you often have to leave that person and go to another room to pick up an extension phone.

There are many rough parallels between the flow of information through media and the flow of information in physical settings. A phone conversation, for example, is roughly analogous to the situation that occurs when four people go to a lecture or a play together and sit side by side in one row of seats. In this situation, the people on the two ends often feel isolated from each other and from conversations that take place between the two people in the center. Conversely, the two people in the center may feel that they share a small conspiracy and can say things to each other that are not fully accessible to the other two people.

In the same sense, when salespeople ring a doorbell and then quickly check the neatness of their hair or clothing, they are in a situation roughly analogous to salespeople who dial a telephone number and then clear their throats before the phone is answered. Before the door is opened and before the phone is answered, the salespeople remain backstage. The

dividing line between backstage and onstage is informational, not necessarily physical.

Most interactions through media can be described using an interpersonal analogue.[5] Watching television is somewhat like watching people through a one-way mirror in a situation where the people know they are being watched by millions of people in isolated cubicles; radio listening is like listening to people through a door or wall with a similar awareness on the part of participants; and so on. The point is that while mediated and live encounters are obviously very different in some ways, they can be analyzed using similar principles. The patterns of information-flow, whether direct or mediated, help to define the situation and the notions of appropriate style and action.

When we find ourselves in a given setting we often unconsciously ask, "Who can see me, who can hear me?" "Who can I see, who can I hear?"* The answers to these questions help us decide how to behave. And although these questions were once fully answered by an assessment of the physical environment, they now require an evaluation of the media environment as well.

As "information-systems" rather than physical settings, a society's set of social situations can be modified without building or removing walls and corridors and without changing customs and laws concerning access to places. The introduction and widespread use of a new medium of communication may restructure a broad range of situations and require new sets of social performances.

Interaction settings themselves, of course, are not the only source of situational definitions. The shared meanings of situations develop over time and through social traditions. Religious ritual, social custom, and legal codes all contribute to the stock of situational definitions, and they guide people's use of available settings. A change in settings alone, therefore, will not bring about immediate or complete change. Nevertheless, while the social "scripts" develop through many sources, appropriate "stages" are necessary for the social dramas to be performed. If the settings for situations merge, divide, or disappear, then it will be impossible to maintain the old definitions of the situations.

Perhaps one of the reasons that theorists of situations and roles have tended to view social situations as relatively stable is that it is extremely rare for there to be a sudden widespread change in walls, doors, the layout of a city, or in other architectural and geographical structures. But the change in situations and behaviors that occurs when doors are opened or closed and when walls are constructed or removed is paralleled in our

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*In live settings, we also often ask "Who can touch or hurt me?" Indeed, one of the things that distinguishes mediated communication from live communication is the lack of risk of physical harm or involvement. The aggressive or erotic style of some telephone and CB radio conversations may be attributable to the odd mixture of intimacy and distance afforded by these media.

times by the flick of a microphone switch, the turning on of a television set, or the answering of a telephone.

To understand more fully the potential impact of electronic media on behavior, we need to look more closely at the relationship between behavior and "situation segregation" with an eye toward seeing what happens to behavior when situational boundaries move.

New Situations, New Behavior

As you sit reading this book, there are probably people somewhere who could very much use your help or advice. An elderly relative may need assistance changing a light bulb. A depressed friend might be cheered to hear your voice. If you are a trained professional, there are, no doubt, many people in dire need of your professional skills. If any one of these people was with you in the *same room*, you would probably put this book down and interact with them. Yet by being in a place *away* from the people and situations in which your help is needed, you are more easily able to behave in a manner that might be considered inappropriate, rude, or hostile if the people needing your help were in the same space with you.*

Truly different behaviors require truly distinct situations. This principle explains why restaurant managers often find it difficult to "dine out" in their own restaurants. For even if they are technically "off duty," they are too aware of, and concerned about, possible problems. Similarly, hospital interns who want to read or eat while off duty usually do not do so in the corner of the hospital emergency room. When in the same space with a bleeding patient, it is difficult for doctors to say, and for patients to hear, "Sorry, I can't help you, I'm off duty." In general, when people are "on their own time," they usually try to be "in their own space" as well.

The ability to accept each other in terms of specific roles in a given situation often depends on our lack of awareness of each other in *other* situations. A man, for example, would be very uncomfortable to discover that the marriage counselor he and his wife have made an appointment to see is one of his former wives. Similarly, a young woman may be quite hesitant to undress in front of a doctor whom she recognizes as a boy who had a crush on her in high school. The lack of sufficient insulation between a new and an old situation in each of these examples makes it difficult to accept the new definition as the "real" one. For these reasons, there is often mutual embarrassment when people who know each other in one situation run into each other in other situations. What does one say to one's gynecologist at a cocktail party?

It is very difficult to respond to one situation as if it were another. Parents' exhortations that a child must finish all the food on a plate "because

*Ironically, however, the longer and better we know people, the more easily we are able to ignore them even when they are in the same space with us. As we will see later, this may be an analogy for the long-term effects of our electronically heightened awareness of national and international problems and issues.

children are starving in Africa" are usually ineffective because so rarely are there any starving African children peering through the window. Separation of situations allows for separation of behaviors. It is through the separation of situations that even dedicated doctors and teachers are able to rest and be merry in certain times and places—even though somewhere *else* there are surely patients dying for lack of care and children condemned to ignorance.

For every moment of our lives, there are things happening someplace that would upset us, that would involve us, that would drain our energies and engage our feelings. There are more things that—if present and in our view—we would feel compelled to respond to or do something about than could possibly fit into the sane experience of a single lifetime. Situation segregation, however, acts as a psycho-social shock absorber. By selectively exposing ourselves to events and other people, we control the flow of our actions and emotions. Compassion, empathy, and even ethics may be much more situationally bound than we often care to think.[6]

But what would happen to our social behavior if there was a sudden widespread change in our society's overall pattern of situations? Unfortunately, most of those who have studied situations have little to say on the subject. For Goffman and many other situationists, situations and their matching roles are relatively stable. The boundaries of situations sometimes break down, but the disruptions are generally seen as unusual and temporary. Someone may say or do something inappropriate, inconsistent behavior or information may "leak" into one situation from another situation (causing confusion and embarrassment), or two distinct situations may temporarily merge—but ultimately, the old definitions are reasserted.[7]

Young children, for example, may wake up and emerge from their bedrooms into the midst of a party given by their parents, thereby causing some embarrassment on the part of those adults who may feel they have been overheard or observed saying or doing things not usually said or done in front of children. Or a young executive may be embarrassed when her parents come to see her office and insist on telling everyone they meet about some of the "cute" things she used to do as a child. But once the children go back to bed and once the executive's parents leave the office, the old definitions generally regain their hold.

Even in extreme cases, where individual performers are disgraced and permanently lose credibility, similar situations and similar performances continue unchanged. Thus, when a supposedly distinguished professor appears at a national conference too drunk to deliver a keynote address, conferences and professors, in general, nevertheless remain largely untouched. Similarly, unprofessional remarks or behaviors on the part of a few individual executives, doctors, or judges do not necessarily undermine the basic social definitions of corporations, hospitals, and courtrooms.

What has interested many situationists up to this time is how the definitions of situations are protected from such disruptions and how those situations that are disrupted are repaired. What we cannot tell from such analyses is what happens to behavior when changes in situations are relatively *permanent*—and this is precisely the type of information we need to know if we are to study the behavioral impact of new media by examining their effects on the boundaries of situations.

To explore the effects of media on behavior, we need to convert the static and descriptive model of behavior in situations into a variable and predictive one. We need to come up with some general principles that allow us to describe the *dynamics* of situations and behavior. The remainder of the chapter develops a few such principles: the importance of "situation pattern" as opposed to "behavior sum," the general need for a single definition of a situation, the rise of "deep back," "forefront," and "middle region" behavior as situations divide or merge, and the interdependency of all an individual's onstage and backstage performances.

Variable Situation Pattern

Social reality does not exist in the *sum* of people's behaviors, but in the overall *pattern* of situated behaviors. Therefore, when the dividing line between two distinct situations is moved or removed, social reality will change. Contrary to what much of the situational literature often seems to imply, the pattern of situation segregation and integration is a variable rather than a static aspect of an individual's or a society's existence, and there are potentially infinite degrees and patterns of situation overlap. Patterns of situation segregation and integration can be modified by individual life decisions, by chance, and by other forces, including a society's media use.

While we usually tend to think of situations in terms of what and who is in them, situations are also defined by what and who is outside of them. Behavior in an environment is shaped by the patterns of access to and restriction from the social information available in that environment. The way male high school students speak in a locker room, for example, is determined not only by the presence of other male students, but also by the absence of female students, parents, teachers, and principals.

A key factor in determining the extent to which a situation is isolated from other situations is the nature of the *boundary* line that divides the situation from other situations. The membranes around social situations affect behavior not only because they often fully include and exclude participants, but also because they can partially include and exclude participants. A person may be visually excluded from a situation by a wall, yet aurally included by the thinness of the visual barrier. In the same way, media may affect the definition of situations by bypassing traditional physical restrictions on information flow. Richard Nixon, for example,

found that a tape recorder in the Oval Office led to his private "locker room" conversations being evaluated as public pronouncements.

By changing the boundaries of social situations, electronic media do not simply give us quicker or more thorough access to events and behaviors. They give us, instead, new events and new behaviors.

McLuhan writes, for example, that "Jack Ruby shot Lee Oswald while tightly surrounded by guards who were paralyzed by television cameras."[8] Although McLuhan does not elaborate, perhaps he means that the guards could not respond appropriately to the immediate situation because the television cameras blurred the guards' role function and the identity of their "audience." Were they performing their roles for those present or for those watching television? Were they there to intimidate the crowds and respond quickly to physical disorder? Or were they there as mute and rigid symbols of authority for the television collage?

The example is extreme, but it is indicative of the situations faced by many Americans as they find that they are acting in new arenas, with new audiences, and that they have access to others and others have access to them in new and confounding ways. And these changes are affecting everyone from Watts to the White House.

When Black Power advocate Stokely Carmichael found himself attracting media attention in the late 1960s, for example, his access to a larger social platform turned out to be a curse rather than a blessing. In the shared arenas of television and radio, he found himself facing at least two distinct audiences simultaneously: his primary audience of blacks, and an "eavesdropping" audience of whites. In personal (unmediated) appearances, he had been able to present two completely different talks on Black Power to black and white audiences, respectively. But in the combined forums of electronic media, he had to decide whether to use a white or black rhetorical style and text. If he used a white style, he would alienate his primary audience and defeat his goals of giving blacks a new sense of pride and self-respect. Yet if he used a black rhetorical style, he would alienate whites, including many liberals who supported integration. With no clear solution, and unable to devise a composite genre, Carmichael decided to use a black style in his mediated speeches. While he sparked the fire of his primary audience, he also filled his secondary audience with hatred and fear and brought on the wrath of the white power structure.[9]

Similarly, when a reporter meets with the President and his wife before television cameras, how should the President and First Lady behave? Is this encounter an intimate social meeting among three people or is it a public performance before the nation? The answer is that it is both, and, therefore, that it is neither. The President cannot act as if he and his wife are totally alone with the reporter, nor can he act as if he is addressing a crowd at Gettysburg. To the extent that actions are shaped to fit particular social settings, this new setting leads to new actions and new social meanings. In this sense, we have not only a different situation, but also a different President, and—in the long run—a different presidency.

But what exactly happens to the definition of old situations when the patterns of situations change? When situations merge or divide for extended periods of time, do we get completely new behavior patterns or extended periods of time, do we get completely new behavior patterns or simply a sum or fraction of old ones? Perhaps we get no significant change at all. Or perhaps we simply get confusion. One key to the answers to these questions is our apparent need for a *single* definition for most social situations.

The Need for a Single Definition

As described in Chapter 2, when people are asked to come to a party, meeting, or other social gathering, they want to know whether the occasion is joyous or solemn, casual or formal, personal or professional and whether the interaction will be between superiors and inferiors or among equals. But this is not merely a matter of curiosity. The "definition of the situation" helps to determine participants' dress, posture, speech pattern and style, energy level, mood, and so forth. Even though the situational definition is often out of the participants' awareness, it serves as the glue that binds many elements of an interaction together. Further, because each participant must dress, speak, and behave in one generally consistent pattern, there seems to be a need and a demand for a *single* primary definition of each social situation.

The need for a single primary definition for most situations helps us begin to understand what usually happens when situations merge or divide. When two situations merge, we rarely get a simple combination of situations. Instead, a single new situation with a single new set of rules and roles often evolves. When two couples pair up to double-date, for example, the situation that emerges is not the sum of the two separate dates, but a new, third situation. Indeed, a common pattern of interaction on a double-date involves one conversation between the two males and another conversation between the two females. Similarly, when a romantic couple move in together, they do not get their romantic interactions *plus* the day-to-day necessities of life. Instead, they get a whole new interactive system; both their lovemaking and their billpaying habits are transformed.

There is a big difference between the effects of short-term and long-term mergers of situations. A sudden, temporary merger of very distinct situations causes a disruption in behavior. Without a clear definition for the situation, everyone may be embarrassed, confused, and/or angry. If, for example, someone at a party opens the door of a bathroom to find someone already there who has forgotten to lock the door, there is likely to be a moment of great embarrassment for both people.

While temporary breakdowns lead only to confusion and disruption, however, permanent or long-term breakdowns lead to the birth of new behavior patterns. When people routinely perform bodily functions in the same physical place, for example, a new, stable definition of the situation

must arise. This is what happened to the Peruvian soccer team whose plane crashed in the Andes. The book *Alive*, which details their ordeal, describes the conversations that they had concerning each other's bowel movements.[10] Similar situations occur among longtime roommates or couples who live together for many years.

There is a certain "cultural logic" to the nature of the merger of situations. Indeed, the new definition of a combined situation sometimes makes so much "sense" that we often do not see that the former situations no longer exist and that a third situation has arisen. Yet the new situation is usually one where many behaviors can take place that could not have taken place in the two distinct situations and vice versa. An employer who marries an employee, for example, will find that just as there are newly permissible behaviors, so are there many requests that can no longer be made and behaviors that are no longer appropriate. The new relationship is neither "husband and wife" nor "boss and worker."*

All separate relationships among relatives, friends, and business associates may include complaints and jokes about absent members; that is, they involve behavior that would be inappropriate or rude when all are present. These same principles apply to the situation mergers and divisions that are created by media.

Although we often say that we want people to be "consistent," what we often mean by this is that they should be "situationally consistent." That is, we generally demand consistency of treatment from others *within* a situation, but we are less concerned with consistency of treatment *across* situations. Shoppers, for example, will tolerate paying more for an item one day than the next. They will even tolerate paying different prices for the same item on the same day in different stores. But they will generally not tolerate paying a higher price than other people in the same store at the same time and place. Similarly, college students generally accept the fact that professors modify course requirements from semester to semester, but there would be an uproar of protest if a professor established different requirements for different students in the same class. Changes in

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*Because mergers of situations destroy old definitions, there are many implicit and explicit rules about keeping situations separate. Psychiatrists are not supposed to become emotionally or sexually involved with their patients. The military strongly condemns "fraternization"—a friendly or romantic relationship between superiors and subordinates. Similarly, teachers are not supposed to date their students. There are many vulgar sayings about how unwise it is for business associates to become romantically involved. For whether the personal relationships prosper or end poorly, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the old business relationships. Besides the moral problems with some role mergers, the relationships are confusing, and the motives of the parties involved are often ambiguous. Indeed, one explanation for the incest taboo is that it allows for a very special type of unambiguous relationship—a loving, caring, and nurturing bond that is not sexual.[11] Of course, people often break the implicit and explicit rules. As a result of past and present personal relationships, for example, many workplaces are teeming with animosities, and there often exists a whole network of unwritten rules and behavior patterns that do not appear on organizational charts.

the boundaries of situations, therefore, can change people's perceptions of equality and fairness and lead to social unrest. As discussed later, changes in situation boundaries as a result of changes in media may have much to do with the recent rise of feminist and minority consciousness.

In general, it can be argued that: ①*behavior patterns divide into as many single definitions as there are distinct settings*, and ②*when two or more settings merge, their distinct definitions merge into one new definition.*

These principles suggest that the dynamics of social systems are, in one sense at least, very similar to the dynamics of physical systems. Both social and physical systems can divide into as many distinct states as there are distinct systems, and yet merged systems tend to blend into a relatively consistent state. It is possible, for example, to keep two separate, but adjacent rooms at vastly different temperatures, let us say forty degrees and four degrees. If the wall between the two rooms is removed, however, then the entire joined space will, after a short while, reach a relatively consistent temperature. The temperature, however, would not be forty four degrees (the *sum* of the two distinct temperatures), but some temperature in between. In the same way, people can develop distinct behavior patterns in two distinct situations, but if the two situations merge, then they often get one new, synthesized definition. The physical analogy can be extended even further. For just as there is some variation in temperature from the top to bottom of a room and from the center to the edges, so are there different degrees of commitment to the definition of a social situation. At a wedding, for example, there will be people who are deeply involved in the ritual and there will be those who are less involved and have their thoughts and emotions in other places.

"Middle," "Deep Back," and "Forefront" Region Behavior

Given the idea that the merging of previously distinct situations leads to a new single situation, is there any way to describe the new situation in relation to the old? What is the relationship between the old behaviors and the new behaviors?

While Goffman's model of back and front region behaviors describes a static set of stages and is limited to face-to-face interaction, the principles implicit in it can be adapted to describe the changes in situations and behaviors brought about by new media. Implicit in the region model is the interdependence of back and front regions. Individuals' onstage performances depend on the existence of a backstage area, isolated from the audience, where performers can learn their roles, rehearse them, discuss strategies with teammates, or simply relax or lapse into inexpressiveness. Thus, if performers lose the ability to keep their back region behavior separate from their front region behavior, they not only lose aspects of their privacy, they also lose the ability to play certain parts of their front region roles. When actors have no place to rehearse lines in private, they cannot build to a performance that excites and moves the audience. People who

live together, for example, often help each other rehearse for onstage roles on *other* social stages, but they often have little private space and time to rehearse for and impress each other.

This either/or conception of the dramatic aspects of social performance—having a backstage area or not having one—can be extended into a continuous and variable model of the interplay of onstage and backstage styles. In general, *whatever aspects of the rehearsal become visible to the audience must be integrated into the show itself; whatever backstage time and space remain hidden can still be used to perfect the performance.* When the dividing line between onstage and backstage behaviors moves in either direction, the nature of the drama changes accordingly. The more rehearsal space that is lost, the more the onstage drama comes to resemble an extemporaneous backstage rehearsal; when the backstage area is increased in size, then the onstage behavior can become even more formal.

Using the concepts of back and front region as a base, the new behavior that arises out of merging situations could be called "middle region" behavior. Conversely, the two new sets of behaviors that result from the division of situations could be called "deep back region" behavior and "forefront region" behavior. Middle region behavior develops when audience members gain a "sidestage" view. That is, they see parts of the traditional backstage area along with parts of the traditional onstage area; they see the performer move from backstage to onstage to backstage. To adapt, the competent performer adjusts his or her social role so that it is consistent with the new information available to the audience. A middle region, or sidestage, behavior pattern contains elements of both the former onstage and offstage behaviors but lacks their extremes. "Deep back" and "forefront" region behavior develop when performers gain increased isolation from their audience. The new separation of situations allows for both a coarser backstage style and a more pristine onstage performance.

In middle region behaviors, the extremes of the former front region are lost because performers no longer have the necessary backstage time and space; the control over rehearsals and relaxations that supported the old front region role is weakened. The new behaviors also often lack the extremes of the former backstage behavior because the new middle region dramas are public (that is, performed before an "audience") and, therefore, performers adapt as much as possible to the presence of the audience, but continue to hide whatever can still be hidden.

If children come to an adult party, for example, conversations about death, sex, and money may stop until the children leave. If the children stay for a long time, however, some new compromise style of behavior is likely to arise where "adult" topics are discussed in front of the children, but with neither the explicitness characteristic of an adult-adult party nor the innocence once deemed appropriate for an adult-children party. Indeed, the longer the adults and children stay together, the more the children will see the childish side of adulthood, and the more the children

will be exposed to and talk about adult topics. As we will see later, this serves as an analogy for what happens to child and adult roles as electronic media begin to merge child and adult information-systems.

In one sense, middle region behaviors are simply *new* front region behaviors. But if we think of them merely as front region behaviors, we lose the ability to see the nature and direction of the behavioral change. By describing the new behaviors as "middle region" or "sidestage," we are able to compare the new behaviors to the old behaviors, and we can observe the synthetic nature of the new drama. Further, the idea of middle region behaviors explains the process that brings about the new public style: a shift in the dividing line between traditional back and front region behaviors.

The middle region style seems to have a "back region bias." This bias is partly due to the fact that the back regions of our lives encompass things that cannot disappear: sleeping, eating, elimination of bodily wastes, sexual activity, depressions, anxieties, and doubts. Front region behavior, in contrast, is more flexible and variable. While we can each make up a very different front region style, back regions tend to involve many of the things we all have in common. Another reason the back region aspects of middle region behavior are most evident is that it is always easier to see what has newly arrived as opposed to what has recently disappeared. The first time that we spend the night at a new friend's house, for example, we are more likely to notice that the friend snores or burps than we are likely to notice the loss of some of the more formal aspects of the friend's speaking style.

The back region bias of middle region behavior is even more evident over time. For a brief period, a revealed back region can be converted into a relatively traditional front region performance. The less performers can control and restrict others' access to themselves, however, the more back region behavior must come to light. A normally sloppy teenager, for example, may clean his room when his aunt comes to dinner on Easter Sunday. But if Aunt Mary stays for six months, she will undoubtedly witness a different drama. Similarly, televised tours of the White House that reveal previously unseen rooms and meetings can, for a time, be changed into front region dramas (as, for example, was Eisenhower's scripted and televised "cabinet meeting."[12]) Yet, when television reveals even one full day of "live" proceedings, the performance must change. Thus, in a television special on the Carter White House, the audience heard Jimmy Carter tell President Anwar Sadat of Egypt that they were going into a long meeting and that Sadat might want to go to the bathroom first. The longer and more closely people are observed, either in person or by camera and microphone, the more their behavior is stripped of its social symbols and posturing.

When a situation divides into two or more distinct regions, exactly the opposite process takes place: behavior in each sphere becomes more spe-

cific and more extreme. When children move out of their parents' homes, for example, the privacy of their own residence offers both the parents and the children the possibility of developing more idiosyncratic private styles of behavior, as well as revised, "cleaner" fronts for each other. Similarly, the more privacy political leaders can maintain, the sharper the potential contrast between an informal backstage style and a front of "distinguished leader." When the dominant media in a society foster many distinct information-systems, therefore, they will also tend to support forefront and deep backstage behavior styles.

One of the reasons that the dynamics of region behavior and the effects of media on them are largely invisible in everyday interactions is that people very quickly adapt to the new definitions of situations. Generally, role performers control whatever backstage information can be controlled. But if damaging backstage information escapes into a front region, it is often integrated into the performance. If a dinner guest arrives earlier than expected, for example, and the guest witnesses an argument between the hosts and their children as well as the last minute attempts to clean the house and prepare the dinner food, the hosts will find it impossible to play the same front region role they would have played if the guest had come on time. As a result, middle region comments are likely to be made about "raising kids these days" or the impossibility of keeping a large house clean. Since the idea that there is no calculated "performance" is itself part of many social performances, it is important that audience members not become too aware of attempts to hide back region information.

The process through which "deeper" back region and more "forward" front region behaviors develop is even more invisible to audiences than the development of "middle region" behaviors—for, by definition, that which can no longer be seen is not there for scrutiny. When newly private situations develop, people usually give little thought to the effects of the structural change; instead, the new behaviors are often attributed to changes in personality or motivation. When young adults "go away" to college, their family and neighbors may begin to see them as "more mature." Similarly, national politicians who temporarily retire to the "privacy" of local politics may later be able to re-enter the national arena appearing more "presidential."

In similar ways, significant and widespread changes may occur in patterns of social interaction as a result of the use of new media of communication without people being fully aware of the degree or nature of the changes. In each given interaction, individuals will feel they are merely adapting to the demands of the particular situation they find themselves in. People may wonder why behavior patterns seem to have changed (or, more likely, why "people" have changed), and be unaware of the fact that the changes are related to a shifting line between backstage and onstage settings.

The Interdependence of All Behavioral Systems

The back region/front region model is usually used to analyze behavior in a single setting such as a restaurant or hospital. Once we go beyond a single setting, it is difficult to apply the model literally. The front/back distinction is too simple. What, for example, is the relationship among several different front region performances on the part of the same individual?

The dramaturgical model can be adapted even further, however, to consider the interdependency of *all* performances and behavioral settings. An individual's front region behavior in one role is, after all, an indirect back region to other roles. In a sense, each front region performance depends on a multiplicity of front and back regions. The ability of a person to perform well as a trial lawyer, for example, not only depends on good courtroom performance and a backstage area to prepare briefs and discuss strategies with colleagues, but also on the past and present ability to perform relatively well (and inconspicuously) in other roles such as student, taxpayer, parent, spouse, and so on. None of these roles may be as clearly and directly related to courtroom style as a strategy meeting with colleagues, but a performance as a lawyer still depends on these other roles, and also on the performance of them in segregation from the role of lawyer. A lawyer's credibility in the eyes of a judge and jurors may be undermined by information about the lawyer's driving habits, marital relationship, and parenting style.

Because most of us attempt to present ourselves as relatively consistent personalities for each one of our audiences, any information that an audience has about our behavior from other situations has to be taken into account when we execute a given performance.* The concept of "middle region" behavior, therefore, can be extended beyond the merger of the backstage and onstage behaviors for a single role. Middle region behavior can refer to the behavior that results from the merger of any two or more previously distinct situations. Conversely, "deep back region" and "fore-front region" behaviors develop whenever any situation divides into two or more distinct situations, or whenever there is an increase in the distance between situations. Middle region behaviors result from the new overlapping of situations and audiences, and deep back region and fore-front region behaviors result from the new possibility of "purer" or more extreme versions of behavior matched to more specialized and isolated contexts.

In general, *the more distance there is between two or more situations, the more an individual's behavior can vary from one situation to the next.* Con-

*One exception to the desire for consistency among all available information is in a relationship of true intimacy, where two people accept the variations in the other's behavior as easily as they accept the variations in their own. Ironically, although the language of romance suggests that love makes "two people into one," perhaps it is really that love allows one person to be many people—in at least one intimate social sphere.

versely, *the less distance there is between situations, the more similar the behaviors in them.*

Take, for example, the distinction between the student role and the teacher role. A person cannot be both a docile student and a strict teacher at the same time. Yet often the same person is asked to play both these roles. If a very competent college student, John, is asked by Ms. Smith, the teacher, to lead a class discussion while the teacher attends a professional conference, John must develop a new, synthetic role. This "student/teacher" must now play a role that is neither the role he played as student among his peers, nor the role played by the "real" teacher. For if John played only his old student role while the teacher was away, he would have little or no effect on the class, and if he played a typical "real" teacher, he would probably be mocked or resented by his classmates who know too much about him to accept him in that role. (Here, ironically, his well-performed front region student role becomes potentially damaging back region behavior when he tries to play "teacher.")

This situation can be varied to illustrate how the degree of distance between situations affects behavior. If Ms. Smith asks John to take over a different class in the same school, John can now play the role of teacher somewhat more fully. And if Ms. Smith herself is a student for an advanced degree in a different school, then the distinctions between Ms. Smith's teacher role and her student role can be very great. The distance between situations contributes to the degree of separation in behavioral style. Such "distance" is determined by both time and space. All teachers, for example, were once students, but temporal insulation allows for these roles to be very different.

Such changes in face-to-face situations and behavior can be viewed as analogies for the ways in which new media may help bring about social change by merging or dividing social situations. New media that tend to divide existing social information-systems will allow individuals to develop both "deeper" backstage and more "forward" onstage behavior styles; new media that tend to merge existing information-systems will lead to more "sidestage," or "middle region," behaviors.

We remain one step away from a basic framework for studying the potential effects of media change on everyday social behavior. We need to look beyond changes in individuals' behaviors in specific settings and consider how and why social roles, in general, will change when there is widespread and systematic change in all, or most, of a society's situations.