

Dramaturgical frameworks and interactionism

Greg Smith

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Abstract

As a sociological perspective, dramaturgy takes seriously the similarities between life and theatre. It is ineluctably associated with Erving Goffman's 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and its central notion of impression management. The chapter first asks, what was it about Goffman's book that made it so significant? Part of the answer lies in the novel ways in which a dramaturgical perspective is firmly confined to the study of face-to-face interaction. Goffman articulated his analysis of interaction by carefully employing notions of dramaturgy, presentation of self and impression management and developing the framework through a set of six 'dramaturgical principles'. While many acknowledged that Goffman's skilful use of these analytic resources shed fresh light on the 'compositionality' of interactional conduct, some critics complained that Goffman exaggerated the degree of people's awareness of their capacity to scheme, manipulate and deceive others. Dramaturgy attracted criticism also for its apparent blurring of distinctions between theatre and social life that resulted in a morally debilitated conception of the human actor. Such views overlooked how dramaturgy remained a potent figure in Goffman's subsequent books and articles, to be recast in circumscribed realist rather than metaphorical terms. Despite limited success in developing a dramaturgical methodology, dramaturgy continues to be an enormously fertile framework used to analyse and demystify the constructed features of presentations of self.

Chapter 6 Dramaturgical frameworks and interactionism

Greg Smith

Goffman's breakthrough

Dramaturgy originated in the eighteenth century as the study of the arts and techniques of dramatic composition and stage representation (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2020). Nowadays, it is a theatrical specialism that also encompasses consideration of the wider historical, material, social and psychological contexts of a dramatic production. The boundaries of dramaturgy are blurred (Gronbeck, 1980): even in sociology, the term does not neatly demarcate an unambiguous approach and research tradition. Sociologically, it is a perspective that takes seriously the similarities between life and theatre.

Interactionists' use of dramaturgy originated in Erving Goffman's (1922–1982) brilliant first book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). The notion of dramaturgical frameworks has proved a little more complex since it includes ideas going beyond the specific concepts, settings and theorising contained in that book to some of Goffman's other related ideas. Some studies use Goffman more as a handhold than an anchor to pursue dramaturgical analyses. This was always to be expected since his ideas can be understood at different levels. Also, Goffman encouraged fresh applications of his ideas to extend the new ground that he exposed to sociological analysis. The first question for interactionists must

surely be, what was it about Goffman's book that made it so significant? To address this question, the chapter will outline the key ideas of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and situate it in mid-twentieth-century US sociology. Goffman's dramaturgy is often considered to be indebted to the dramatism of literary critic Kenneth Burke. Points of convergence and difference are outlined. Then Goffman's dramaturgy will be examined in more detail, and the main lines of critical response will be sketched. Here it will be suggested that dramaturgy was a lively figure in both Goffman's early and late thought. In the 1950s and 1960s Goffman's dramaturgy was broadly metaphorical in character but gave way in the 1970s and early 1980s to a realist dramaturgy. Finally, aspects of how interactionists developed dramaturgical frameworks will be addressed, to indicate the continuing fertility of Goffman's dramaturgical analysis in a range of new social contexts.

Dramaturgy, the eye-catching idea driving *Presentation*, which propelled Goffman to international attention in 1959, went far beyond a simple restatement of the centuries-old metaphor of life as theatre. The freshness of Goffman's use of dramaturgy arose in part from its application to a single circumscribed aspect of life – face-to-face interaction, 'roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence' (Goffman, 1959: 15). The dramaturgical model took the reader through an intricate conceptual framework that highlighted practices of face-to-face interaction that were largely unnoticed and not well understood. Goffman offered repeated demonstrations of how these practices were socially organised. In contrast to older role theory's emphasis on abstract expectations associated with a status, Goffman's dramaturgy acknowledged materiality. It underlined the importance of the physical sites of interaction, the capacities of the human body, and the symbolic and material resources on – the places, capabilities and stuff – needed to accomplish interaction. While recognising the importance of conceptual work for sociological understanding, his writing was lushly illustrated with examples from everyday life to allow the most novice sociologist ready access to his key insights.

Presentation originated in Goffman's first significant statement about face-to-face interaction, his doctoral dissertation, *Communication Conduct in an Island Community* (Goffman, 1953). But the book is much more than a simple reprise of the dissertation – and the dissertation is in many respects a richer, more general statement than *Presentation*, setting out ideas that Goffman would develop in other writings in the 1950s and 1960s. The first edition of *Presentation* was published by a small research unit at the University of Edinburgh (Goffman, 1956) three years before the enlarged New York edition appeared. That edition was not a re-write of the Edinburgh book. The chapter organisation and basic arguments of the 1956 edition were retained in their entirety; further examples and elaboration of arguments were added. In Philip Manning's (1989) view, the new material suggested that Goffman already entertained reservations about the validity of the dramaturgical framework, even as the book was to become very widely known through its promotion by a major publisher. Yet these changes were no mere set of afterthoughts. These revisions marked the start of Goffman's long engagement with a productive metaphor that would lead eventually to a reformulation of dramaturgy that advanced emergent thinking about performativity.

Unsurprisingly, because it was the theoretical idea driving Goffman's first book, dramaturgy also became another name for Goffman's sociology in toto – a reading reinforced by Alvin Gouldner's (1970) brief but significant critical intervention. In a rare interview in 1980,

Goffman was dismissive of this characterization, telling Jef Verhoeven (1993) that he could not take dramaturgy seriously as an overall depiction of his sociology. While dramaturgy was not a neologism for Goffman's sociology, it did capture an important and abiding theme of his sociological writings that was most conspicuous near the start and towards the end of his career. Significant differences exist between these two dramaturgies. *Presentation* offered a metaphorical dramaturgy, whereas the dramaturgy evident in *Frame Analysis* (Goffman, 1974) and subsequent works has more literal and realist elements (Smith, 2013). Using frame as an analytic device enabled Goffman (1974: 155) to distinguish 'how staged interaction differs from what it copies' and allowed him to propose that dramaturgy was relevant to the organisation of informal talk. Goffman regarded such talk as giving a show that 'replayed' personal experience by telling a story in a way that created sufficient suspense as to hold the listener's attention and elicit an appropriate response (Goffman, 1974: 506–511). His last book was guided not by a 'large literary claim that social life is but a stage' but 'only by a small technical one: that deeply incorporated into the nature of talk are the fundamental requirements of theatricality' (Goffman, 1981: 4).

Dramaturgy, impression management, presentation of self and dramatism

Presentation introduced three interrelated and often indistinct concepts – dramaturgy, impression management and presentation of self. Goffman did not always clearly distinguish these terms from one another nor did those who used his work. Yet, the terms are not interchangeable: there are some significant differences to be discerned.

Dramaturgy was the metaphor driving the overall shape of the analysis of face-to-face interaction in *Presentation*. Goffman did not offer a general treatment of the idea or history of the concept. Rather, Goffman sought to explore where a dramaturgical metaphor could take the analysis that he sets out in the book's six substantive chapters. Those chapter titles incorporated the dramaturgical 'principles' (Goffman, 1959: xi) that provided the basic elements of his analytical framework. In fact, the term dramaturgy was mentioned only once in the 'necessarily abstract' introduction. There Goffman announced that he was 'concerned only with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting . . . activity to others', adding that although the matters dealt with by 'stagecraft and stage management are sometimes trivial . . . they are quite general; they seem to occur everywhere in social life, providing a clear-cut dimension for formal sociological analysis' (Goffman, 1959: 15). Yet from the first, Goffman (1959: xi) acknowledged the metaphor's difficulties.

The core of *Presentation*'s introduction addressed the foundations of impression management. Here Goffman built on Gustav Ichheiser's (1949) work on misunderstandings to develop what can be called a theory of situated expressivity. From Ichheiser, Goffman took the idea that when humans express themselves through their words, gestures and postures, they impress others in particular ways (an apt phrase, a querulous raised eyebrow or an attentive look). Expressions emanated from the individual, while impressions fell into the social realm. Goffman took up Ichheiser's scepticism about a harmonious relation between expressions emanating from the inner self and impressions shaped by social convention and pressed it further. Confining himself to the situated realm of what transpires in face-to-face interactions, Goffman proposed that when we are face to face with others, we give expressions of ourselves through the content of our talk and give off or exude expressions through various postures and gestures, including the tone of our talk. Next, Goffman further

loosened the relations between expressions, impressions and the inner self by reminding readers of the possibility that expressions given can be deceitful, and expressions given off may be feigned. Presenting and misrepresenting oneself is easier to control though expressions given (the content of our talk) than expressions given off (all the remaining communicative conduct between co-present persons), a matter known and used by interactants. Therein lies the possibility that impressions can be managed, that is, subject to conscious control in varying degrees. Consequently, face-to-face encounters can turn into ‘a kind of information game – a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation and rediscovery’ (Goffman, 1959: 8). The game-like, if not openly calculative elements of impression management were considered fundamental features of face-to-face interaction. The strategic dimension extended impression management well beyond anything Ichheiser envisaged. What made Goffman’s conception of dramaturgy distinctive was the expressive–impressive feature of interaction captured by the notion of impression management.

Several lines of thought inclined Goffman towards the notion of presentation of self. The term comes from late nineteenth-century British psychological and philosophical discourse (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910–11), where it was used as a general notion to describe different aspects or dimensions of the self. The term ‘presentation of self’ may have been suggested to Goffman by Tom Burns after he had read the first draft of *Presentation*, a 1954 manuscript titled *The Management of Impressions in Social Establishments* (Yves Winkin, personal communication). The Victorian notion of presentation of self sits close to Goffman’s earlier interest in ‘self-representations’ (Goffman, 1951: 296). In Goffman’s hands the presentation of self loses some of its cognitive associations and was considered instead as empirically encoded in face-to-face conduct. The notion of the self that is ‘presented’ in everyday life was also a refinement of the notion of ‘projected selves’ found in Goffman’s (1953) dissertation:

The participant may be non-committal and indefinite; he may be passive, and he may act unwittingly. None the less, others will feel he has projected into the situation an assumption as to how he ought to be treated and hence, by implication, a conception of himself.

(Goffman, 1953: 300)

In turn, the idea of a self that is projected in interaction constitutes a clever sociological adaptation of the psychological concept of projection underpinning the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) that Goffman used in his 1949 master’s thesis (Smith, 2003). Instead of the TAT’s psychological emphasis on projection as a reflection of the inner self, Goffman – at first tentatively in his master’s thesis and then more fully in his 1953 PhD dissertation – considered projection as evident in interactional practices in which a participant introduces assumptions about the proper treatment s/he expects from others.

Each of the three key terms of *Presentation* – dramaturgy, impression management and presentation of self – turn out to have a continuing presence in Goffman’s subsequent sociological reasoning. Dramaturgy is the overall label for the model Goffman presents. Impression management introduces a game-like approach to human expressivity in face-to-face situations. Presentation of self serves to connect the impressions gleaned from that expressive conduct to the kinds of person fellow interactants can take each other to be. These terms, when applied to the practices of face-to-face interaction, facilitate a new understanding

of the life as theatre metaphor that take dramaturgy far beyond the plodding conceptions of human action and the human actor contained in functionalist role theory. In Goffman's hands, as Berkeley colleague Ted Sarbin (2017: 188) observed, dramaturgy places much emphasis on the actor as an agent who is less concerned with enacting conventional role expectations 'as in trying to be someone or something'.

Goffman's dramaturgy is widely regarded as sitting close to Burke's dramatism, developed in the 1930s and 1940s. Burke was a maverick literary critic and cultural theorist whose ideas were promoted by Louis Wirth during Goffman's graduate apprenticeship at Chicago. Goffman recognized the influence of Burke on his early thinking, while Burke, who read *Presentation* in 1959, credited Goffman with developing a sociological perspective based on some of his precepts (Branaman, 2013; Smith, 2013). What did Goffman obtain from reading Burke? First, Goffman put Burke's 'perspective by incongruity' very fully into practice. This involved juxtaposing incongruous ideas to yield fresh insights. The many witticisms that crop up in Goffman's writings are not mere literary flourishes but attempts to use humorous tropes to propose new ways of looking at everyday actions. Secondly, Goffman understood very well what Burke called the 'rhetorical' power of language – its capacity to persuade. Goffman carefully crafted his writing to deliver exactly the points he wished his readership to get. Thirdly, Burke remains the likeliest source of Goffman's interest in the dramaturgical figure. In some respects, Goffman's use of dramaturgy as a metaphor in presentation might be regarded as less bold than Burke's more literal interpretation of drama: 'Burke's theatre is always life itself' (Branaman, 2013: 23). Burke's dramatisic pentad – 'what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)' (Burke, [1945] 1969: xv) – pose the fundamental questions that any comprehensive account of human action must address. There is a strong motivational thrust to Burke's dramatisic pentad. In contrast, Goffman often seemed agnostic about motivational issues, preferring to concentrate on the behavioural – on the characteristics of the 'moments' rather than in whatever moved the 'men' (and women) of these moments to act as they did (cf. Goffman, 1967: 3). It is interesting to note that Goffman's later use of dramaturgy remained distant from the dramatisic pentad but did take dramaturgy in a less metaphorical direction. In this regard, Goffman comes closer to Burke in considering at least some aspects of life *as* drama, not *like* drama. Perhaps too much can be made of the affinity with Burke's ideas; Goffman himself regarded Burke as an early but not abiding or decisive influence (Verhoeven, 1993). And while many dramaturgical researchers have used Burke's ideas, it is Goffman's dramaturgy that has been more influential in the social sciences in catalysing fresh empirical studies, perhaps because Goffman's formulations can be more readily mobilized in clearly sociological directions.

Goffman's dramaturgical principles

Like all Goffman's books, *Presentation* was structured in a flat manner (Giddens, 2009), so each chapter and section could be read and understood well enough without too much cross-referencing to ideas contained in the other chapters. It makes reading Goffman relatively easy to do: the reader can dip into and out of different sections without too much loss of the points Goffman makes. But this accessibility feature of Goffman's writing also makes it easy to lose sight of the deeper logic of the book's conceptual framework.

Presentation is made up of six chapters, each articulating a dramaturgical ‘principle’. Commentators and researchers have tended to focus on the first three chapters – ‘Performances’, ‘Teams’ and ‘Region and region behavior’ – perhaps because they outline the elementary units and basic architecture of the dramaturgical perspective and are easier concepts to grasp quickly than the subtler analyses set out in the book’s remaining three chapters on discrepant roles, communication out of character and the arts of impression management, which deal with a range of broader processual issues concerning how interactants manage performances.

Goffman’s opening chapter, ‘Performances’, defined as ‘all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion that serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’, gets off to a brisk start with a discussion of ‘belief in the part one is playing’. From the off, Goffman seeks to challenge the reader’s easy rejection of the value of the dramaturgical metaphor by showing its effectiveness in analysing features of everyday performances. Sincere performers are those who believe their own act and convince their audience of the reality presented, while cynical performers do not believe in their own act or have any ‘ultimate concern’ for their audience’s beliefs about the reality of the performance. Typically, cynical performers are regarded as morally unworthy. However, Goffman goes on to show that this is not always the case. Cynical performances can be done for the good of an individual, as when an anxious patient is prescribed a placebo by a doctor. Nor can the sincere/cynical distinction be used to typify performers. Over time cynical performers can come to believe in the show they put on and vice-versa, as in the typical trajectory of students in medical school described by Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer (in Goffman, 1959: 20–21). According to the study medical students often start off with lofty ideals about helping humanity and then become cynical when faced with the considerable burden of practice and academic learning, tests and exams before graduating and finally being able to enact those original aspirations that drew them to medicine in the first place. Perhaps the single most common criticism of Goffman’s dramaturgy is a moral complaint that the perspective endorses or advocates cynicism. Careful reading of Goffman’s discussion of cynical and sincere performances leads to a different conclusion, one better attuned to the moral complexities of actions taken by diversely situated human agents.

The agentic properties of the person were very much to the fore throughout Goffman’s dramaturgy. He shows how people do not, in face-to-face interactions, simply realise the expectations of institutionalised roles in the manner of functionalist role theory. Interactants play roles, but they also play at roles. As Goffman (1961) demonstrated, these indications of agency – teases, jokes, parodies and all the other ways of dissociating from the expectations of a role – were themselves subject to sociological analysis as forms of role distance, methods of adverting to selves beyond those implied by the institutional role. The interaction order was not the institutional order writ small. It possessed its own distinctive properties and features.

Against many common conceptions, Goffman’s dramaturgy was wary of the notion of ‘script’. The term does not feature much in *Presentation*. The nearest term seems to be the ‘part’ or ‘routine’; ‘the pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions’ (Goffman, 1959: 16). Action is patterned but not scripted. The outcome on a given occasion is not known, unlike the outcome of Hamlet, which is always the same. The issues of contrivance

and reality that bubble under the surface throughout *Presentation*, finally break through in a new section added to the New York edition. In Anglo-American common sense, there are real, sincere, honest performances that are not purposely assembled, and there are false, contrived, fabricated performances of the kind presented by stage actors or confidence tricksters. Goffman deconstructs this 'ideology of honest performers', showing how all performances require a 'command of an idiom' of appropriate expressions, the largest portion of which do not derive from a script and are often outside the performer's conscious awareness. Anticipating ideas now more usually linked to Pierre Bourdieu on habitus, Goffman argues

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well-articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.

(Goffman, 1959: 75)

While Goffman's use of the phrase dramaturgical 'principles' may overstate the coherence of each chapter's argument, there remains nonetheless a set of arguments guiding the book's chapters that piecemeal reading can easily overlook. The first chapter chiselled away at the reader's prejudice that performances must be contrived and insincere. Not necessarily so, Goffman contended: a focus on performance emphasises the need for social positions and roles to be enacted. Chapter 2, 'Teams', underlined the sociological importance of focusing not on individual actions but on the teamwork carried on in many performances between two or more people. This early contribution to an interactionist sociology of collaboration made clear that performances cannot be adequately addressed simply through the activity of the individual person. Chapter 3, 'Regions and region behavior', stressed the importance of definitions of space and place conveyed through performances. It introduced Goffman's widely cited distinction between front and back regions. Chapter 4 bears the unusual title 'Discrepant roles'. It examined those positioned to disclose a team's secrets and threaten or disrupt its performance, such as informers, go-betweens and the exquisitely named 'non-persons' (e.g. children and servants). The theme of threats to the presented performance continued in Chapter 5 under the heading 'Communication out of character', where Goffman examined the risks posed by derogatory talk about absent persons, talk about the mechanics of staging a performance and backhanded compliments. These devices underscored how a team's performance was not a simple response to the single reality of the immediate situation but that other realities could run alongside what appeared to be going on. The presence of threats to the team's performance and the acknowledgement of multiple realities in the situation meant that various 'arts of impression management' (the title of Chapter 6) must be drawn upon for performances to succeed. Concluding the chapter, Goffman (1959: 237) hints at a dramaturgical ontology: 'shared staging problems; concern for the way things appear; warranted and unwarranted feelings of shame; ambivalence about oneself and one's audience: these are some of the dramaturgic elements of the human situation'.

Dramaturgy assessed

Locating Goffman's dramaturgy, and indeed his entire approach, in terms of sociology's accepted categories has always proved difficult. He was a one-off. An early sympathetic critic, Elizabeth Burns (1972), suggested that dramaturgical analysis occupied an

intermediate space between symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology that stressed ‘the “compositional” aspects of behaviour, particularly the strategies involved in claiming a particular status and the expressive behaviour which more or less successfully maintains the claim’ (Burns, 1972: 139). The capacity to compose our performances and to recognise the compositional aspects of our own and others’ actions, Burns suggested, was central to social and personal life as we understand it, providing the basis for inferences to be made about our conduct and thus shared meaning and individual responsibility for our actions.

The degree to which interactants are aware of the compositionality of performances has been a focus of significant criticism of dramaturgy. The issue was first raised by Sheldon L. Messinger et al. (1962), who argued that dramaturgy was not a model of how people understand the world in their ordinary lives. Dramaturgy focused on the impressions an interactant makes on others and the degree to which the interactant is aware of impression management techniques may be variable. Some critical readings of Goffman’s dramaturgy (often found in textbooks but occasionally elsewhere, such as Gouldner, 1970) have fastened on what is seen as the distasteful implications of dramaturgical awareness. At the extreme, dramaturgy is seen to portray a view of the human being as ‘a selfish, scheming, deceitful conniver and con artist who fashions an illusionary existence for himself by manipulating the thoughts and actions of others through skilful performances’ (Edgley, 2003: 147). As Edgley notes, some people may act like this some of the time, but it is not a necessary feature of dramaturgical awareness. Positive values and honest activity likewise depend upon the machinery of impression management.

The question of dramaturgical awareness also figures in Harold Garfinkel’s (1967) well-known critique of Goffman in his famed study of the passing practices of Agnes, a transsexual person. Based on approximately 35 hours of tape-recorded conversations with her, Garfinkel presents a sustained analysis of the practices through which Agnes succeeded in passing as a woman. Garfinkel noted that Goffman’s impression management thesis provided one plausible model to analyse these practices. However, Garfinkel disputed the idea that Agnes was an adept impression-managing gamester, finding no supporting evidence in his interviews. For example, Goffman’s model assumed that Agnes had periods of time out when she could plan her impression-management strategies for upcoming situations. This could only be done to a limited extent. There were many situations where Agnes had to deal with unexpected circumstances as best she could. Instead of managing impressions, Garfinkel suggested that Agnes encountered the lived moments of her life as a ‘texture of relevances’ in which opportunities to pass and threats of disclosure were intertwined. Agnes made good with whatever resources were at hand to undertake her ‘secret apprenticeship’ in the ways of femininity. When her boyfriend’s mother invited her to the kitchen to help cook a special Dutch recipe, Agnes was also learning how to cook in the first place and how women talk to each other about the skills of home management. One limitation of Garfinkel’s critique was that it read Goffman’s model with a game-playing interpretation of dramaturgical awareness. Garfinkel may have obtained this strong interpretation from the 1956 edition of *Presentation* (the edition cited in Garfinkel, 1967: 165n.7). Parts of Garfinkel’s critique dissolve if Goffman’s (1959: 74) qualifications are accepted about dramaturgy demanding a ‘command of an idiom’ by an interactant, not mastery of a script. Thus, the distance between Goffman and Garfinkel on the compositionality of human action may not be as great as Garfinkel concluded. Indeed, it is possible that Goffman’s additions to the 1959 edition were informed

by discussions with Garfinkel. Nevertheless, Garfinkel's critique has proved helpful to those, like Stanley Raffel (2013), who have sought to determine just how realistic Goffman's dramaturgy is. While sociological accounts diverge around the question of dramaturgical awareness, there is a small tradition of psychological research premised around the psychological reality of impression management. This tradition borders on the psychology of deception and includes very different assumptions to the sociological and semiotic conceptions of the self advanced by Goffman (Tseëlon, 1992).

Other critics focused on aspects of what they regard as unsatisfactory about Goffman's conception of the self. Wilshire (1982) maintained that Goffman failed to take sufficient account of the fictionality of life as depicted on stage, resulting in a blurring of how it differed from offstage life. Time can be compressed on stage, and the actor stands in a different relation of responsibility for their actions, for example, never being held accountable for staged assaults and murders. Lacking attention to such concerns, dramaturgy was adjudged incapable of apprehending truly moral conduct. Such critiques are overstated. Goffman (1959) hedged his use of the dramaturgical metaphor at both the book's beginning and end. Dramaturgy had a purpose to serve: to help make visible the organisation of face-to-face interaction. And he developed his own critique of the metaphor in works of the 1970s and 80s, where the metaphorical conception of dramaturgy was replaced by a more circumscribed realist dramaturgy (see Smith, 2013).

Many critics expressed disquiet about the eviscerated 'performed self' that Goffman (1959: 252) outlined. He depicted that self as an

image . . . entertained concerning the individual, so that a self is imputed to him, [yet] this self does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events that renders them interpretable by witnesses.

This self, Goffman continued, was a product of the scene and not, as is widely thought, a cause of it. The performed self as a dramatic effect, manufactured only out of images generated in interactional conduct, lacked internal properties. For some commentators (Manning, 1989; Burns, 1992), this model generates the 'two selves' problem: there must be a manipulative self that manages and directs the actions of the performed self. However, Michael L. Schwalbe (2013) persuasively argued that there is a greater coherence in Goffman's views than is often appreciated: the dramaturgical self was a sociological self occupying a different conceptual space to the psychological self. Furthermore, this dramaturgical self was not, as is sometimes seen, a situational island confined to the interaction order but was linked to the body on the one hand and wider social structures on the other through what Schwalbe (2013: 85–88) calls 'expressive habitus' and 'networks of accountability'.

Studies in dramaturgy

Goffman saw his sociology as an exploratory project providing researchers with ideas worth testing out by a variety of methods of investigation. Even at the height of his career, he felt that some of these ideas might turn out to have no future at all: their fate was in the hands of those who applied them in empirical research. Goffman regarded his concepts and frameworks as a resource that encouraged researchers and other readers to make connections they would not make otherwise (Smith, 2006). Initially, dramaturgy was a promising

metaphor helpful to Goffman in his early sociological forays into the orderliness of interaction. Later, Goffman (1974, 1981) divested dramaturgy of its metaphorical framing as he pursued a more restricted claim that aspects of spoken interaction (telling a story, managing a response cry) were, in some fundamental sense, dramaturgical to their core. That was Goffman's journey. Nevertheless, Goffman's own intellectual journey should be distinguished from the uptake of his first book. What, then, has been the fate of dramaturgy in the hands of the interactionist researchers? How have dramaturgical ideas been applied and taken forward?

These questions are difficult to address directly because dramaturgy does not denote a clear research tradition. However, Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley's (1990) influential anthology, and a newer collection by Edgley (2013), yield testimony to the ongoing fertility of dramaturgy for researchers across a wide range of fields and topics. Further evidence of the continuing relevance of dramaturgy to understanding contemporary issues is provided by David Shulman's (2017) bold attempt to update dramaturgical thinking with analyses of workplaces, consumption, popular culture and the Internet.

The research uptake of *Presentation's* six dramaturgical principles has been uneven, with the structural concepts and ideas – performances, teams and regions – far outweighing contributions from the book's later, more processual notions. Take the example of regions: possibly the earliest attempt to apply and extend Goffman's dramaturgical thinking was Aaron Cicourel's (1958) study of the front and back of organisational leadership in a retirement community. Spencer E. Cahill et al.'s (1985) study of public bathrooms indicated the range of intimate practices and rituals associated with the staging of persons for the performances they enact in public settings. Joshua Meyrowitz (1990) suggested that considering regions in binary terms only worked well in single settings, like a hospital or office. As soon as the person's various front-region performances are considered, the binary distinction breaks down (home is backstage for work performances but frontstage for spouse and parent roles). His remedy was to posit a further set of regions and associated behaviours: middle regions, deep back regions and forefront regions.

Interactionist applications of dramaturgy have made some notable contributions to specific empirical fields. The landmark contribution to the emergence of the sociology of emotions as a distinct specialism remains Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983). Centred on empirical studies of the emotion-management practices of debt collectors and flight attendants, Hochschild explicitly built on Goffman. The concepts of 'emotional labour' and 'feeling rules' indicated that some occupations called for 'deep' rather than 'surface acting'. Interactionist-informed studies of police work owe much to Peter K. Manning's explorations of the relevance of dramaturgical ideas (see especially Manning, 1977, 2003). In social-movements research, dramaturgical notions vie with Goffman's frame concept as significant nodes of analysis. Robert D. Benford and Scott A. Hunt (1992) extrapolated from Goffman to identify four dramaturgical techniques that social-movement activists employ to maximise attention to their cause: scripting, staging, performing and interpreting.

Other fields of study have been significantly shaped by dramaturgical perspectives. Dramaturgy has revitalised the study of family and kinship, breathing new life into 'doing family' approaches and the study of the social construction of motherhood (Collett and Childs, 2009). The deft analyses of gynaecological examinations by Joan P. Emerson (1970)

and James M. Henslin and Mae A. Biggs (1971) paved the way to a closer sociological understanding of the microphysics of power in medical settings. Countless studies of Internet sociability and the routine conduct of participants on social media sites platforms owe much to dramaturgical analysis. An early study of the presentation of self online (Miller, 1995) was, for a conference paper, very highly cited. Bernie Hogan's (2010) analysis of online self-presentations as 'performances' or 'exhibitions' amassed well over a thousand citations in the decade since its publication. Dramaturgy is the go-to idea for those studying selfies and the latest online communicative forms and fora.

While many field researchers have drawn upon Goffman's conceptual armamentarium, this has usually been undertaken in the spirit of finding new instances of the concept in question to see what can be illuminated rather than taking the further step of considering its contribution to elaborating and refining the conceptual core that Goffman established. Only the dedicated theorist may want to accept that last task. To a degree, Goffman was a victim of his own success. The flat style of Goffman's books invites his writings to be read in small bursts; they encourage piecemeal appropriation of his ideas. Thus, Goffman's work has often been selectively read and selectively used. Overall, his writings were about mapping and sociologically exploring an unexamined terrain. They were not concerned with championing a theory, refining it by further empirical tests and the other trappings of normal social science. Often, researchers using dramaturgical ideas have been more concerned with the illumination of new areas of social life over the task of conceptual elaboration and consolidation.

Goffman's contribution was primarily conceptual, which left open the question of method: how is the researcher to proceed from data to dramaturgical analysis? According to Becker (2003: 660), Goffman expressed a 'principled refusal' to address this question, arguing that no firm set of rules of procedure could be developed. But the methodological question remains: how is a dramaturgical analysis to be carried out? Hunt and Benford (1997) provide an ingenious solution to this problem, suggesting that the same four dimensions that social-movement activists use to construct and communicate power can also be used to understand how research studies are produced. Another noteworthy attempt to address questions about the conduct of dramaturgical inquiry is found in the 'Methods and dramaturgy' appendix to Manning (2003). Reflecting on the long use of dramaturgical perspectives in his research on policing, Manning proposed that dramaturgical research can be best accomplished by drawing upon some of the research practice-oriented classic texts in qualitative method and close consideration of Goffman's analytical stance, style and language (see Manning, 2003: 256–259).

It is now more than six decades from the publication of *Presentation*, yet the book continues to be read, debated and deployed in the analysis of an ever-growing number of topics. For interactionists, the power of dramaturgy remains linked to the openness and potency of Goffman's original text. Its relevance seems not to have diminished, even as younger readers complain about the datedness of the illustrations of dramaturgical techniques. Many face-to-face interactions are being replaced by technologically mediated forms of presence. As varieties of digital communications proliferate, face-to-face interaction is becoming less and less regarded as the 'primordial real thing' that Goffman (1983: 2), tongue in cheek, supposed. Dramaturgy was not simply an efficient tool helping Goffman to construct his first cartography of copresence. With its emphasis on situated expressivity from which there is no

time out from the impressions thereby formed, it remains a lively and instructive perspective shedding light on the social practices surrounding the use of such ubiquitous features of hypermodern times as emails, smartphones and social media sites platforms (Gottschalk and Whitmer, 2013). With its emphasis on performances, copresence and region behaviour, dramaturgy provides an apt vocabulary to address the unparalleled shifts in social practices associated with pandemic conditions. Clearly, the usefulness of dramaturgy for interactionists to analyse everyday life and demystify presentations of self is far from exhausted.

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