Book Review/ Compte rendu

Edgley, Charles, ed., *The Drama of Social Life: A Dramaturgical Handbook.* Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, 338 pp., £65.00 hardcover (9781409451907).

The field of dramaturgical and performance studies has been growing steadily over the last twenty-five years or so, with strong contributions fuelling the sociological discipline. New concepts, methods, and analytical tools have established schools of thought. They sometimes maintain apparent rivalries that mimic the more typical separations between conventional approaches, such as that between "macro" and "micro" – as Edgley emphasizes, referring to the mere background that macro-sociologists would presumably take into account (3). Interestingly, it is often within Erving Goffman's legacy that this rivalry is played out – with Cultural Sociology, based on Jeffrey Alexander's use of Durkheim, developing more macro-sociological analyses on the one hand, and the more micro-sociological analyses developed by Symbolic Interactionism on the other. However, such a rivalry is unfortunately not discussed at length in the book.

The book that Edgley has edited can be seen as an update of, and a complement to, a previous book he co-edited with Dennis Brissett in 1990, *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Sourcebook* (New York: De Gruyter, 451 pages), although in this work a couple of articles were reprints of classical texts (from Goffman, Peter Berger, Wright Mills, Kenneth Burke, etc.). The new addition to Goffman's legacy offered by *The Drama of Social Life: A Dramaturgical Handbook* concentrates on new scholarship only, with authors working generally under the umbrella of Symbolic Interactionism (such as Simon Gottschalk, Eugene Halton, Phillip Vannini and others). The book is divided into four, unequally weighted sections; the first and second ("Classical and Contemporary Thinkers and Perspectives in Dramaturgical Thought," and "Foundational Concepts") each contain four chapters, whereas the third section ("Substantive Investigations and Empirical Elaborations") contains eight, and the fourth section ("The Future of Dramaturgical Thinking") only three.

In the first section, the work of Kenneth Burke is put into perspective, particularly in its relation to Goffman's, with Ann Branaman emphasizing that Burke's more realistic view undermines the metaphoric

role that "drama" comes to play in Goffman, and where, as she puts it, "real life is far less scripted and not often such a cooperative endeavour" (23). A similar parallel is drawn between Goffman's and Victor Turner's works, by Karen L. Drummond, who finds more congruent paths of analysis, given the anthropologist's attention to the structure of interactional practices in the passage from social dramas to stage dramas through the liminal characters found in established forms of ritual. Greg Smith, looking more specifically at Goffman's legacy, underlines the proximity that links his work with Harold Garfinkel's and Judith Butler's on gender construction, dismissing the latter's narrow vision (and rejection) of Goffman's ideas on the subject (featured primarily in his 1979 *Gender Advertisements*). Eugene Halton, in his piece, takes a freer ride with Goffman's achievements, while looking at the "evolutionary drama of symboling," and remarking that the nature-culture connection (rather than disconnection) should be able to show how animal life (in dance, for example) embodies the very essence of human dramatization. For Halton, in failing to make this connection, Goffman's "dramatism not only narrows the range of the dramatic, but is prejudiced by a shallow sociological anti-naturalism that misses the deep sources of the dramatic in conduct" (39).

In the second section of the book, "Foundational Concepts," four different areas of Goffman's theoretical work are covered. Michael Schwalbe argues that interactionist views on situations do not preclude the understanding of social structures at work in self-construction, and also, that it can be shown that Bourdieu's notion of habitus can be traced back to Goffman's reference to "human nature" in individuals (86). Next, J. Patrick Williams insists that "authenticity" should not be contraposed to "performance" or "dramaturgy," since any "authentic reality" is also produced in social interactions, according to lifestyles and codes used in different social settings. For his part, John Hewitt looks at the role motives and motivation play in human conduct – particularly in the way they define situations – arguing that every social interaction puts identity at stake because individuals "are attempting to shape their own and others' impulsive responses to the scene unfolding before them" (120), primarily through excuses, justifications or disclaimers. In the last chapter of this section, Robert A. Stebbins pays attention to role-distance and activity distance, and covers the literature produced since Goffman first introduced his seminal idea about distancing vis-à-vis the "role" to be assumed socially, while insisting that "activity distancing" should also be considered, given its more dynamic and fluid character.

The eight chapters of the third section cover a wide range of different possible empirical applications of the dramatic paradigm and analyses

using its various components, from social movements (Robert D. Benford) to protest movements (Daniel D. Martin), media drama (David L. Altheide) to performative bodies (Dennis Waskul, Phillip Vannini), and from social scenes such as museums (Dirk vom Lehn) and barbershop singers (Jeffrey E. Nash) to transsexual gendered presentations (J. Edward Sumerau, Douglas Schrock, Teri Jo Reese) and sadomasochistic selves (Stacy Newmahr). With such an extensive range, the dramaturgical perspective seems to gain the status of a general theory of social life – and not improperly, if one admits that social action and its representation are involved at every step in sociological analysis.

The fourth and final section of the book relays this idea to new fields of inquiry. Annette Markham looks at the digital experience in its relation to dramaturgy, remarking on the transformations that occur among the boundaries between self and others, situations, and contexts, in the transfer of agency from individuals to their relations with communication technologies, as well as in the performative dimensions of devices, interfaces, and networks of information (290). Simon Gottschalk and Jennifer Whitmer consider, in the same vein, the transformations of dramaturgy in online encounters, and employ the differences between face-to-face interactions that Goffman used as a yardstick to downplay other, "mediated" forms of interaction. They arrive at the conclusion that social networking sites, mobile phones, and email have given rise to a new "digital self" that seems to be more alienated than its previous avatar. Finally, Phillip Vannini confronts dramaturgical analysis with post-structuralism, according more attention to "non-representational" theory, which he equates with a Deweyan approach, relying less on cognition – with its correlates such as "scripts" and social representations – and more on pragmatist and interactionist concerns with actual embodied and improvised experiences. Essentially, as he expresses it: "A non-representational dramaturgy, in sum, cannot know or explain the outcomes of performance; it can only find its enchantments and effectuations worthy of astonishment" (299). Here we are left with a decidedly low degree of analytical content (and hope!), despite the quite heavy theoretical considerations that are supposed to comfort such a position.

On the whole, then, this book offers a highly valuable look at "state of the art" of dramaturgical analyses of social life, but includes almost no direct confrontation with some concurrent approaches in performance and dramaturgical studies (especially those coming from macro-sociological perspectives). Finally, one unfortunate thing to mention is the mediocre editing work done by Ashgate concerning textual references to various authors, which are very often lacking in the reference section

accompanying each text – a real problem for anyone trying to track down the often important sources provided by the authors.

Université du Québec à Montréal Jean-François Côté

Jean-François Côté is professor of sociology at Université du Québec à Montréal. He specializes in theory, epistemology, and sociology of culture.

cote.jean-francois@uqam.ca