Extending Goffman's Dramaturgy to Critical Discourse Analysis: Ed Burkhardt's Performance after the Lac-Mégantic Disaster

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ABSTRACT   *This article presents an approach to critical discourse analysis using Erving Goffman's dramaturgy. It discusses how the analysis and evaluation of a press conference performance can be strengthened if contemplations of role selection, audience, and frame from Goffman's dramaturgy are included. Goffman's dramaturgy is found to contribute to a normative and explanatory critique of the performance of the chief executive officer (CEO), which is strained by his chosen role, pressures to conform to the audience's expectations, and a failed attempt to influence the frame.*

KEYWORDS   *Erving Goffman; Dramaturgy; Communication theory; Critical discourse analysis; Corporate communication; Lac-Mégantic*

RÉSUMÉ   *Cet article se fonde sur l'approche dramaturgique d'Erving Goffman pour présenter une analyse critique du discours particulière. Il évalue comment on pourrait améliorer l'analyse et l'évaluation d'une performance en conférence de presse en ayant recours à des réflexions sur les concepts dramaturgiques de sélection de rôle, de public, et de cadre. On se rend compte que la dramaturgie de Goffman peut contribuer à une critique normative et explicative de la performance du directeur général, laquelle a été compliquée par le rôle qu'il a choisi, des pressions le poussant à se conformer aux attentes du public et une tentative infructueuse de modifier le cadre.*

MOTS CLÉS   *Erving Goffman; Dramaturgie; Théorie de la communication; Analyse critique du discours; Communication d'entreprise; Lac-Mégantic*

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Introduction

This article suggests Erving Goffman's dramaturgy can give communication scholars a theoretical and methodological model to better understand impression management and the social limitations and functionality of communicative acts. It attempts to illuminate how meaning is socially generated in a co-structured environment and suggests one-way communication scholars might apply Goffman's dramaturgy—combining it with critical discourse analysis (CDA)—to further our understanding of a communicative act.

A transcript of a 29-minute Global News media clip of Edward Burkhardt, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway (MMA), is analyzed using a combined approach incorporating components of the critical discourse analysis with Goffman's dramaturgy. In this strip of activity the CEO is featured arriving at Lac-Mégnatic five days after a train derailed and exploded in the Québec town, killing 47 people. This analysis suggests Goffman's dramaturgy can be applied to a CDA to better understand how the stability of a social situation (press conference) unravels when participants do not perform as expected.

Critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a form of research that focuses on the relationship between language and society, and addresses how content and meaning are influenced by text and the wider socioeconomic contexts in which they are embedded (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). It examines the role that language plays in creating and sustaining unequal power relations and focuses on how some people (performers) are privileged over others (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In addition it is interdisciplinary, enabling the researcher to bring together theories or frameworks (such as Goffman's dramaturgy) to written and spoken texts in a rigorous manner (Fairclough, 2013). In bringing CDA and dramaturgy together in an analysis of a political interview (Goffman's "podium talk"), this article seeks to incorporate the latter into a systematic approach and interdisclipinary collaboration. Can these two forms of critique be combined in a manner that furthers our understanding of the case study in a way that respects their underlying assumptions?

Teun van Dijk (1993) highlights a critical function of CDA: "to focus on the discursive strategies that legitimate control, or otherwise 'naturalize' the social order, and especially relations of inequality," (p. 254). Critical discourse analysis seeks to understand the nature of social power and dominance, as expressed through "managing the mind of others … essentially a function of text and talk," (van Dijk, p. 254). As Doris Merkl-Davies and Veronika Koller (2012) point out, there is a multitude of ways CDA is approached by scholars, however, "they all focus on the dialectic relationship between language and society," (p. 180). Scholars have used CDA to study political conferences (Bhatia, 2006), the performance of a CEO after an incident at a German nuclear power plant (Beelitz & Merkl-Davies, 2012), and to understand a chairman's statement at a U.K. defence firm (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). Drawing on this research, CDA was determined to be a good fit to understand the performance of a CEO during a press conference after a crisis.

Erving Goffman (1922–1982) examined cultural assumptions, thereby revealing how dominant institutions and narratives are supported and constructed in the public sphere.

Thomas Scheff (2006), a student of Goffman's, explained, "it seems to me that his work sought to demonstrate, each time anew, the possibility of overthrowing cultural assumptions about the nature of identity," (p. 20.) Scheff (2006) argued that in order to adopt Goffman's method of investigation, "we all need to be marginal persons, like him," (p. 31). Goffman's dramaturgy is determined to be a good fit with CDA because both encourage contemplations of the relationship between power (Goffman's authority) and language within a defined context. Critical discourse analysis encourages the examination of discourse at both a macro and micro level, with the intent to challenge language-based socially constructed realities that undemocratically assign power/influence, whereas Goffman's dramaturgy helps us to understand what it is that is going on during these interpersonal interactions, or the "why" and "what" behind people's behaviours. Goffman's approach further encourages contemplations of nonlinguistic communication.

The biggest challenge of this approach (the CDA-dramaturgy method of investigation) is to present Goffman's work accurately, concisely, and comprehensively. Goffman's work is largely criticized as lacking a defined "theoretical base," being "too micro-analytic," "fragmentary," and difficult to replicate (Johansson, 2007; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2004; Meyrowitz, 1990). As Yves Winkin and Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz (2013) suggest, scholars who have cited Goffman often understand the complexity of his ideas, but are only able to present "brief overviews," thus making his work difficult for newcomers to appreciate. This article presents a key concept of Goffman's work (dramaturgy) with the appreciation that the complexity and value of his ideas may become oversimplified for austerity. This risk can be mitigated somewhat if future scholars contribute to the understanding of his work by further adopting, interpreting, and incorporating Goffman's ideas into communication scholarship.

Goffman's dramaturgy

David Wallace (2005), in a commencement speech, said:

> Important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about. Stated as an English sentence, of course, this is just a banal platitude, but the fact is that in the day-to-day trenches of adult existence, banal platitudes have a life or death importance.

Goffman was interested in these important realities. He used the term "dramaturgy" to help his readers understand that in social interactions people are restricted by what they can say and do, depending on their role, audience, and context. In the manner of actors on a stage, they play roles specific to the setting and the audience. Their stage is what Goffman called "frame," its what the actors interpret and agree to be the meaning of the situation. Simply put, it is the context in which people say and do certain things. Scheff (2006) argued that what Goffman was doing was trying to free "his readers from the culturally induced reality in which he and they were entrapped," (p. 23). Goffman dissected and explored what many take as "a given," the daily platitudes of our social lives. The metaphor of "life as a play" gave Goffman the language to explore, understand, and write about human interactions.

Goffman's dramaturgy has three main components: the performer, audience, and frame. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (POSEL),* Goffman (1959) explores

the concept of self as performer. When an individual is in the presence of others, he will tend to say and do things that the other both can understand and expect. Thus the performer requires an audience (real or imagined), who will attempt to understand and assess the performance. Finally, Goffman's frame is used to understand what it is that is going on—how meaning and reality are interpreted and brought to the situation. Frame is malleable and can be altered and layered to generate understanding. Sometimes there are keys to understanding what the frame is, for example the way a wink indicates a joke is being played.

Performer

According to Goffman, when a person is involved in an interaction he deliberately conceals certain impulses or compunctions, and only says and does things that will be understood and somehow be of benefit to himself. Often these performances are done automatically in an unselfconscious way, as they are learned at a very young age during socialization.

Goffman uses the term "performer" to illustrate and explain why people will behave differently in different settings. A person does not interact in a consistent way with every person that he or she encounters. Goffman (1959) wrote, "Urban life would become unbearably sticky for some if every contact between two individuals entailed a sharing of personal traits, worries, and secrets," (p. 49). Social rules begin to unravel when performers do not behave as expected, and the avoidance of embarrassment can sometimes be a central motive for most performers (Scheff, 2006).

A performer will usually try to exemplify the values of his society in the way that he behaves. He will try to anticipate what is expected of him (according to the situation) and will perform accordingly. In this way it can be thought of as a commitment to a role. He will try to read cues about those around him, and adjust his behaviour according to his interpretations of the situation and the audience. He will also attempt to influence the definition of the situation, so that it will support and empower his performance.

According to Goffman (1959) the performer's primary objective is to "sustain a particular definition of the situation" to control how others respond to him (p. 85). People tend to treat individuals based on the impressions they have of them, both from the past and in the present. And Goffman (1974) was interested in learning how circumstances can be influenced and altered to enforce meaning and thus impact how a person behaves and is treated in interactions.

The receiver, or audience, will read expressive signs in order to judge the performance and decipher the message. Goffman believed that the audience had a distinct advantage over the performer, as they had access to more clues—both visual and auditory. They are "hypercritical," and the balance of power in interactions is divided asymmetrically between the audience and the performer. Goffman (1959) wrote:

> the arts of piercing an individual's effort at calculated unintentionality seem better developed than our capacity to manipulate our own behavior, so that regardless of how many steps have occurred in the information game, the witness is likely to have the advantage over the actor, and the initial asymmetry of the communication process is likely to be retained. (p. 8–9)

Goffman uses the term "footing" to describe when performers change the meaning of the situation. Goffman (1981) argues that footings are "very commonly language-linked" (p. 128), which makes it easier for the student to identify them. To illustrate this Goffman refers to a news story in which President Nixon comments on the attire of a reporter, when he implied that women look better in skirts. Nixon said, "but slacks can do something for some people and some it can't." He hastened to add, "but I think you do very well. Turn around." Goffman (1981) explains,

> When Helen Thomas pirouetted for the president, she was employing a form of behavior indigenous to the environment of the ballet, a form that has come, by conventional reframing, to be a feature of female modeling in fashion shows and she was enacting it—of all places—in a news conference. No one present apparently found this transplantation odd. *That* is how experience is laminated. (p. 156)

If a performer has created a false impression, the damage he incurs can extend into other areas of activity for the performer, afflicting future and past performances. Usually what makes a performance false is when the situation becomes altered (Goffman, 1971). For example, to continue to work at the same firm after accepting a job at a new firm would oblige the performer to "continue on in some role and guise which no longer would be viable were the truth known," (Goffman, 1971, p. 272). This risk of social performances can often induce anxiety in individuals; especially those who are trying to conceal something.

Often people think of "real" performances as sincere, authentic, and unintentional, and "fake" performances as contrived and intentional. Thus our assessments enter the moral arena, where an "authentic" performance is preferable. However even a completely honest performance can be judged morally inferior if it does not meet the audiences' expectations (see the case study below for an example of this). "Some performances are carried off successfully with complete dishonesty, others with complete honesty; but for performances in general neither of these extremes is essential and neither, perhaps, is dramaturgically advisable" (Goffman, 1959, p. 71). Indeed the risks are high—a poor performance can lead to more than just embarrassment and confusion. There exist risks of alienation, stigmatization, and even institutionalization.

Goffman (1967) uses the term "face" to describe the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself," (p. 5). It is the socially accepted mask that a person wears depending on the situation he finds himself in. It may be the face of a physician, a husband, a bus car owner, or a student. The face affords a person a small choice of lines depending on the performer. A person can be in the wrong face, be out of face, can lose face, and can work to save one's face. Goffman (1967) explores these performance concepts in his book *Interaction Ritual*. Basic kinds of face work include avoidance and corrective processes (apologies).

As Goffman (1959) points out in *POSEL*, a performance often involves others in the interaction. The team ensures the performance runs without a hitch. They do this by maintaining a set of agreed upon standards, which will form an "important relationship to one another" (p. 82). In a team any member has the power to give the

show away; therefore they rely on each other and need to cooperate to maintain a similar definition of the situation.

If the team members are said to be "in the know" then we can understand how the audience becomes segregated, in order for the performance to successfully define the situation. "In the know" implies that there are agreements that are made behind the scenes, away from the audience. Goffman (1959) uses the terms "backstage" and "frontstage" to help us understand this concept. An audience can also be segregated from another audience, and both devices are used to protect the fostered impressions generated during a performance.

Regions (frontstage, backstage) can influence both meaning and behaviour. To explore this concept, Goffman refers to a server working in a restaurant. In this situation the frontstage is where the server conducts his professional behaviour, serving his customers, exhibiting the appropriate decorum, dress, and manners that customers expect, for his own benefit (employment, tips). Backstage, the server engages in different behaviour, he may slouch, eat food, and joke with his co-workers, all considered appropriate within that region. For Goffman (1959), it is key that the two regions are cut off from each other; otherwise the performances experience "dramaturgical trouble," (p. 134).

Audience

As previously implied, there can be different types of audiences. There are those that are directly witnessing and responding to a performance, reading cues, and also providing feedback for the performer. There are also audiences that are separated from the performance either physically (as in lectures or "podium talk") or through technology (phones, television, radio).

Often the audience will try to collaborate with the performer to ensure a successful performance. They will refrain from wandering backstage, they will often overlook embarrassing gaffes done by a beginner, and will often employ "tactful inattention" to avoid embarrassing the performer. These characteristics all suggest that the audience, like the performer plays a crucial role in defining a situation. It is collaboration.

The audience represents the normative ideals of the society and the performer will try to behave in an appropriate way, controlling what is both conveyed and concealed from his fellow participants in the interaction. In a way a performance cannot come into being without the audience, and therefore its presence becomes a way for a person to emerge with an attached or assumed identity. It is a way for people to assume their personhood in social reality.

Frame

Audiences' and performers' understanding of what it is that is going on in a social interaction can be misinterpreted or misread. In *Frame Analysis* Goffman (1974) writes:

> I start with the fact that from an individual's particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance and so forth. And attention will be directed to what it is about our

> sense of what is going on that makes it so vulnerable to the need for these various misreadings." (p. 10)

Goffman (1974) was interested in the organization of experience and he used the term "frame" to refer to a particular definition of a situation that is constructed out of a set of principles that govern social events. Meaning and reality are socially generated, and if we can understand something about a specific social instance (frames of reference), then we can explore how meaning is influenced. Goffman (1974) argues that this understanding, while perhaps elusive, is a worthwhile feat for those seeking to combat a "false consciousness." He writes:

> I can only suggest that he who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interest has much to do, because the sleep is very deep. And I do not intend here to provide a lullaby but merely to sneak in and watch the way people snore." (p. 14)

If we can understand the complexities and vulnerabilities of the frame, then we can see how meaning can be subjected to doubt and misinterpretation. To control the frame is to influence the conduct of others and manipulate how others interpret what it is that is going on. It can become a play for power, as Goffman (1959) points out in POSEL:

> Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interest to control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation." (p. 3)

By studying the various vulnerabilities of frame Goffman is also examining how the authority of situations can be influenced. When the meaning of a situation has been transformed, Goffman says it has been subjected to "keying." Goffman lists five basic keyings (make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical re-doings, and re-groundings), and suggests that they can be re-keyed as well as layered. To control the frame then is to influence the conduct of the people involved. If the situation is exposed as a joke (make-believe), then we can predict the appropriate behaviour to accompany the situation (laughter and sighs of relief).

CDA-Goffman method of investigation

In the manner of Annika Beelitz & Doris Merkl-Davies (2011), an adductive approach was taken in developing this method of investigation, which entailed analyzing the text and oscillating between Goffman's dramaturgy and Norman Fairclough's CDA framework (2013). The object of a critical discourse analysis is not merely an analysis of discourse but it is an exploration of the relationship between discourse and "non-discoursal elements of the social, in order to reach a better understanding of these complex relations," (Fairclough, 2010, p. 602). Speech acts are considered to be micro-analytical, while the social norms that support dominating behaviour are called macro-analytical. The framework used for this critical discourse analysis includes three levels of analysis, namely 1) micro (the text), 2) meso (the context of producing/receiving/distributing the text), and 3) macro (the socio-economic context) (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012).

The press conference was transcribed to include both verbal and non-verbal communication. It was analyzed on a line-by-line basis to detect grammatical themes, and subsequently coded for any recurring patterns.

The micro-level analysis focused on the specific language used during Ed Burkhardt's performance that is indicative of his goals (restore credibility of organization), his role (CEO, backstage vs. frontstage, team members), and the audience (how do they react to him?).

The meso analysis examined how the situation (press conference) was defined, and legitimized through discourse, giving certain people privileged access to power and forcing performers to behave within expected norms. Contemplations of Goffman's frame (indications of peoples' understanding of what it is that is going on) and the roles social actors inhabit within this restrictive context were considered.

The macro analysis examined the discourse used to indicate a wider social context in order to better interpret and understand the text.

Case study

This case study includes all three components of Goffman's dramaturgy: frame, audience, and performer. It is a 29.27-minute video clip produced by the Canadian broadcasting company Global News (2013).

This case garnered international attention from the public relations (PR) community. As the public relations profession is supported by communication theory, it seems appropriate to use a case that invoked such a strong response from the PR community. By analyzing this particular case using Goffman's dramaturgy in conjunction with CDA, this article seeks to demonstrate the applicability of his dramaturgy to communication theory.

On July 6, 2013, in a small Québec town called Lac-Mégantic an unattended train carrying 72 cars of petroleum crude oil ran away and became derailed. An explosion killed over 42 people and the town lost more than 30 buildings to the fire and explosion. It has been called the fourth-deadliest rail accident in Canada's history (Maclean's, 2013). An American company called Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway (MMA) owns the railway line. After 20 hours, firefighters still could not access the centre of the fire (Hutchins, 2013).

On July 10, 2013, MMA CEO Ed Burkhardt arrived in the Québec town. *Maclean's magazine* wrote that he was the most hated man in Lac-Mégnatic (Hutchins, 2013). Québec's premier said his actions were, "deplorable," and local residents called him a "rat." The *National Post* ran an article titled, "Rail Boss Goes from Industry Legend to Canada's Public Enemy No. 1 in Under a Week after Quebec Train Disaster" (Catts, 2013). Most of these comments were written after Burkhardt's performance during an impromptu 43-minute news scrum. Burkhardt told reporters he was not wearing a bulletproof vest. "I hope I am not going to get shot," he said (Brumfield & Newton, 2013). After the fourth-deadliest rail accident in Canadian history, Burkhardt, formerly referred to as a "railway legend," quickly became the target of this story.

Burkhardt was criticized for not arriving on site until four days after the explosion (company officials were on site the first day), releasing a poorly translated press release, and for suggesting firefighters and a company engineer had a role in the disaster (when

asked who might be responsible.) Burkhardt's comments, which have run in many media outlets including social media, were spoken in a crowded and "impromptu 43-minute news scrum," during which the CEO was heckled and jeered at. Using Goffman's dramaturgy in combination with a CDA, this article examines the functionality of Burkhardt's performance, audience, and frame. What is unique about this performance is that it is unscripted and documented, and generated a significant response from the public and media.

Results: Analysis of Burkhardt's press conference in Lac-Mégantic

Micro analysis

Beelitz and Merkl-Davies (2012) point out that after a crisis, an organization often becomes concerned with "legitimacy construction," and how the organization is portrayed in the media. Examining the text with this performative lens will enable us to contemplate the performer's point of view; how Burkhardt views the situation (Goffman's frame) along with his potential goal—to restore the credibility of his organization. Often in these situations CEOs will use pronouns to refer to the company, will interpret the event, use "verbal remedial strategies," and try to provide explanations and information "designed to rectify a predicament" (Beelitz & Merkl-Davies, p. 106).

The predominance of keywords such as "responsibility" and "obligations," "our financial resources," "rail safety," "industry practice," "our insurance," "investigation," suggests Burkhardt's word choice is predominantly what Beelitz & Merkl-Davies (2012) label "technocratic discourse." This discourse emphasizes "facts and figures and rules compliance" (p. 107), it is instrumental and opposite to normative and engaging discourse, which CEOs often use in front of stakeholder audiences. Beelitz and Merkl-Davies also point out that technocratic discourse emphasizes "rationality, rather than emotion" (p. 111). Which is very interesting as a significant portion of the reporters' questions inquire about Burkhardt's emotional state.

A micro-level analysis of the transcript revealed four dominant semantic devices or "themes": 1) influence 2) impersonalization (referential vagueness) 3) evaluation (blame and defensiveness), and 4) emotion.

INFLUENCE

Often power and dominance can be measured by the amount of control or access one has to discourse, in this case the media (van Dijk, 1993). Burkhardt dedicates a lot of his talk to controlling or influencing the reporters' behaviour. In a situation where the media are firing loaded questions at the CEO, it is no wonder then that the CEO would direct his efforts at controlling the stream of questions directed toward him. An analysis of the text illustrates the prevalence of words used by Burkhardt to control: who asks the questions, which questions are answered, and who gets a turn at talking.

When reviewing the text, what is initially noticeable is the way Burkhardt's talk is populated with a variety of "ums" and" uhs." Goffman (1981) calls these "subvocalizations" response cries. They function as placeholders in the conversation, so that the listener will not cut into the person's speech. The speaker will use them when he is searching for an adequate word to use to effectively hold his "claim on the floor" (p. 110). When understood this way, we can see how these small utterances are used

to influence and control others' behaviour during the speech, as they work to fill a void that would otherwise be filled by someone else.

Burkhardt begins talking to the media by directing them how to behave ("be respectful"), and attempts to control what questions will be asked of him by asking himself questions: "Why have I not been in Mégantic earlier this week? How do I feel about this?" Essentially he is doing their job; he takes their voices away and asks himself their (imagined or real) questions. This way he can control what he is asked and what he responds to. But he also causes them to remain silent. He decides which reporters get to speak: "I'm going to talk to this lady … NO … wait a minute now. I'm going to talk to the lady … lady in yellow … No. No … no … I think I've answered … I'm going to allow this gentlemen and then you come back … I'll take this gentleman here," and which ones do not: "NO … I think I already answered your questions … you have asked too many questions."

According to Goffman (1959) the performer's primary objective is to "sustain a particular definition of the situation" (p. 85) to affect how others respond to him. When Burkhardt states, "I … I … I hope you have heard my apology uh about a dozen times in the last ten minutes," he is defining the past ten minutes of the press conference as an apology. This is a keying technique used to attempt to "sustain a particular definition of the situation" and press this definition onto his audience. As the transcript reveals Burkhardt's statement is false, however, in the context of a press conference, it could be possible for a newcomer to not know this. Burkhardt continues, "I'll issue it one more time. We own an … we are making an abject apology to the people in this town." Goffman (1955) writes, "In its fullest form, the apology has several elements: expression of embarrassment and chagrin; clarification that one knows what conduct had been expected and sympathizes with the application of negative sanction; verbal rejection, repudiation, and disavowal of the wrong way of behaving along with vilification of the self that so behaved; espousal of the right way and a avowal henceforth to pursue that course; performance of penance and the volunteering of restitution" (p. 122). Arguably Burkhardt wants his audience to believe that his organization has appropriately apologized when the transcript suggests otherwise.

His performance throughout the press conference renders this apology ineffective. Burkhardt states, "We can't roll back time," along with a couple of non-verbal shrugs, which suggest an inconsistency with the sincerity of a genuine apology. Perceived sincerity is one of the hallmarks of a successful performance according to Goffman, no matter how studied or contrived it may be. Burkhardt attempts to influence his audience's evaluation of his own performance during the press conference by replaying the events using a method that Goffman calls "keying."

In many ways both Burkhardt and the reporters are defining the situation. It is a press conference, and they both have props. The reporters are equipped with microphones, cameras, and questions; Burkhardt is equipped with information ("facts") and the star role. He is afforded a privileged position within the press conference and the reporters exercise what Goffman (1959) calls "dramaturgical discipline" (p. 216). The reporters and Burkhardt work as a team to enable him to put together a performance that is believable for a corporate CEO. The yellers in the background do not get

the same privileged position as Burkhardt, as they are not part of the team. The cameras do not pan over to the yellers to give them screen time, nor do the reporters walk to the "yellers" and ask them questions with microphones pointed toward them. However, when Burkhardt knocks over few of the microphones on the podium three reporters quickly rush in to fix them without comment. When Burkhardt moves away from his podium and out of frame the reporters request that he move back to the podium ("Can you just turn this way because the camera's back there"—"Sir! Sir! Can we just get you to come back here?").

However the camaraderie of the team does extend into the actual questions that the reporters pose to Burkhardt. His performance as a CEO and the face work that accompanies that role faces dramaturgical trouble when the audience (reporters) attempts to ask Burkhardt backstage questions. These questions include: "Did you sleep last night or not?" "Why [did it take] you so long to get into town," "What you are feeling about it (the pictures of the city)," and "How much are you worth?" So while Burkhardt attempts to define the situation, so too does the audience. For Burkhardt it is a press conference and an apology; for his immediate (and perhaps distanced) audience it is quite possibly a trial—one that inevitably situates Burkhardt on defence.

IMPERSONALIZATION

Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) argue that impersonalization excludes or obfuscates social agents in texts. In this text it is accomplished by the use of referential vagueness and passivation. Referential vagueness is defined by Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) as involving the use of pronouns such as "we" and "our" to refer to a collective social actor that is often not clearly defined. In the transcript Burkhardt refers to MMA as "this company," as well as "our company," and regularly it is referred to as a collective company ("our company," "we're going to stand up to our responsibility," "we're working with insurers"). It is clear that the media and the victims are not included in this "we" and "our," and neither are the "dozen railway managers that descended upon Lac Mégantic," the mayor, the insurance workers, the first responders, "the people in this town," and the engineer, who "worked for us." Significantly Burkhardt never refers to MMA as "my company."

It is possible that Burkhardt is considering MMA's stakeholders when he speaks, as everyone else seems to be excluded from this collective. When asked by a reporter "Why would *you* allow this train to go unmanned?" Burkhardt responds with the collective, "We've actually had, I think, a quite reasonable safety record, up until Saturday and then we blew it all." When pressed by the reporter on the same question, "Why would *you* let it go unmanned," Burkhardt replies, "We're not going to do that anymore." He is using this tactic to evade personal responsibility for the train derailment and is attempting to defuse the anger by hiding behind the organization as a collective. But it also indicates how the reporter views Burkhardt as being personally responsible for the accident. The fact that the question is repeated means that the reporter did not receive satisfaction from Burkhardt's first response to the same question. Another reporter states, "There is a questionable track record of *your* company in the past the ten years since *you* have been chair."

Burkhardt seems to have difficulty distinguishing himself from the company, while at the same time acting as the company's representative. Blame is easier to assign to one individual, rather than a collective. But it is not easy for an organization to have feelings, which may perhaps explain one reason why Burkhardt has difficulty expressing emotions about the disaster. Burkhardt is placed in a non-compossible situation: his audience is asking him to display feelings and take personal blame and apologize for the disaster, but also to represent the organization and provide information about the insurance policy and any future plans.

EVALUATION (BLAME/DEFENSIVENESS)

Evaluative statements convey the speaker's attitude toward another person, an entity, or an event (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). The qualities that are ascribed by someone can help us to understand the normative values of a person and the attitudes of an organization. They can be implied (e.g., "The engineer has been suspended") or explicit (e.g., "I think he did something wrong").

Evaluative statements made during the press conference mostly fell into two categories: blame and defensiveness. Blame and defensiveness seem to be used strategically to downplay MMA's role in the disaster. When Burkhardt speaks of MMA, he uses strong positive evaluations, such as "Our financial resources are going to be devoted to this," "We're going to stand up to our responsibility," and "We were following industry practice." This contrasts the implied negative evaluative language used to describe the mayor and the engineer.

Burkhardt's evaluative statements about the mayor are mostly negatively implicit. For example when he states, "I find my movements around town to be pretty constricted," he is implicitly blaming the mayor for his lack of free mobility in Lac-Mégantic. Other implicit negative comments directed toward the mayor include "It won't be me denying it, it will be the mayor's office," and "I'm not sure I'm going to get an approval from the mayor's office to do this." This implicit way of expressing judgment enables Burkhardt to present his opinions subtlety, as though they were objective (Merkl-Davies & Kooler, 2012). It is a strategic maneuver to present an evaluative statement without directly owning it.

Burkhardt also places blame on the train's engineer, both explicitly and implicitly. As the press conference progresses, Burkhardt moves from implicitly blaming the engineer ("I think it's questionable whether he did [follow company policy]") to explicitly blaming him ("I think he did something wrong … and if you think I said he did nothing wrong then you haven't been listening here"). That Burkhardt is more direct when he blames the engineer, suggests a stronger attitude and perhaps an agenda.

Burkhardt's defensive comments are used to exonerate both himself and the company (MMA) from any wrongdoing. At a personal level Burkhardt tries to defend his own actions (not arriving on the scene earlier) when he says a dozen railway managers tried to meet with the mayor, but "it took a couple of days for that meeting to occur." He further explains that he would be "more effective" working in his office than "trying to work out of a cell phone." Plus, he rationalizes the first responders had the community "basically occupied," and they "didn't need me getting in their way." As a defence technique Burkhardt tries to appeal to logic and presents himself as the victim

of circumstances and other people's actions. Later he states that, "it was easier" for him to remain at his office rather than run "around here with a cell phone in my hand."

But the impression he attempts to form for himself (and MMA) is incongruent with the way people often think of CEOs of large corporations. Further, Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) write, "the language used in corporate narrative documents is never 'innocent,' because it is used to achieve a variety of economic, social and political goals" (p. 179). Thus we must look at Burkhart's defensive claims through this purposeful lens and try to notice when language is used to impress a specific (innocent) impression upon the audience.

When Burkhardt states, "this company has never had a significant mainline derailment on its own," and "leaving this train unmanned was standard industry policy," and "this was a failure of the brakes," he attempts to present MMA as a responsible and rule-following organization. When a reporter suggests that MMA has "ten times the average uh number of accidents per mile," and is a "low-cost sort of company," Burkhardt challenges the statistic and rationalizes that it has been MMA's object to "hold our costs down."

Goffman wrote, "the gestures which we sometimes call empty are perhaps in fact the fullest things of all" (Goffman, 1956, p. 30.) This is the reason why Burkhardt's shoulder shrugs are coded, not because they are numerous but because they represent sentiments that are inconsistent with the utterances they accompany. Often the shoulder shrug is used in North American culture as a way to express some sort of defeat or hopelessness. Burkhardt uses the shrug as a way to punctuate an evaluative comment. For example, when Burkhardt states, "We were following industry practice. Was the industry practice adequate? I would say not. [Shrug]." The shrug suggests that Burkhardt and MMA are not only innocent, but are also victims, because they were just following the rules. Burkhardt does not say that MMA should have taken extra precautions for this particular freight, due to its explosive properties.

When Burkhardt is asked to respond to the angry people of Lac-Mégantic, he says "I would feel the same way if if uh something like this happened in my community. Beyond that [shrugs] I don't know what to say." This feeling of helplessness and self-victimization threads through the press conference but becomes more pronounced again when Burkhardt says that he "understands the extreme anger," but that "we can't roll back time." This comment is the word equivalent of a shrug and further illustrates how Burkhardt includes self-victimization in his performance as a CEO of a company during a crisis. The effect is similar when Burkhardt responds "then let the chips fall where they may" when asked if criminal negligence could be found against the engineer.

EMOTION

The reporters' interest in the emotional state of Burkhardt indicates a disconnection between Burkhardt and his audience. Burkhardt seems to realize this when he asks himself "how do I feel about this? Am I a compassionate person?" Burkhardt describes himself as feeling "absolutely awful," "devastated," and that "it has [his] utmost sympathy." Yet when he is further questioned if he understands why people are mad at him he explains, "I don't think that's any secret. Yes I understand why they are mad

and because I happen to be the chairman of the board of directors of the company uh I guess its my role to uh collect the uh all this this criticism and so on." Later when he is called a murderer, Burkhardt responds, "I understand the extreme anger. And uh, and uh … uh, beyond that uh I uh we'll do what we can to address the issues here. Uh we can't roll back time." When pressed a third time if he understands the anger Burkhardt says, "If I lived here I would be very angry with the management of this … of this company." Burkhardt's inadequacy to respond to these emotionally based questions can be measured by the number of times the same question is repeated.

Burkhardt answers questions about his emotional state evasively and passively. He obfuscates the agency when he states, "I understand the extreme anger." It indicates that they are not the focal point of the message he wants to convey. Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012) write, "using the passive voice constitutes a way of putting the information the author considers important into subject position" (p. 185). By this rationality we can see how Burkhardt gives his company a privileged position in his speech patterns. The performative role that he is committed to is not the caring and wise grandfather or the angry environmentalist; he is committed to playing the role of the CEO of an American railway company. As such, it is difficult to display feelings when representing a non-human entity, and we can see evidence of this struggle when Burkhardt attempts to convey emotions during the press conference. Any displays of emotional release could jeopardize his credibility to perform as the CEO, and vice versa. For example if Burkhardt were to openly weep and was unable to coherently form words because he was so overcome with emotion, his performance (and future career) as a CEO would be undoubtedly jeopardized.

Meso analysis

Burkhardt indicates what it is that is going on when he states, "I guess we're holding a press conference." We can think of the press conference as an event that is organized by a set of established rules that affect each participant's conduct. For instance, it is expected that reporters will ask questions, take photos/videos, and take turns when asking questions. The person at the podium is considered to be an expert on the subject matter, and answers reporters' questions usually in a methodical and patient manner. The CEO of an organization is often the person who represents the company and can be perceived as the formal head of the company. In many ways he is a symbolic figure that serves as the mouthpiece for the organization and its members (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012). Generally his inferred target audience includes stakeholders and the media.

Therefore we can think of the press conference as a mediatized interpersonal ritual. It is an activity that is governed by both deference and demeanor and therefore is similar to many other interactive activities. As Goffman (1981) points out, there are rules or "ritual constraints" that govern how people behave during these interactions. The podium speaker is required to conduct himself with proper demeanor and show deference to the reporters by answering their questions, but without speaking too long. Goffman points out that often people will "show proper demeanor in order to warrant deferential treatment" (Goffman, 1956, p. 28). To do this the performer must learn to conceal certain aspects of himself that "might make him unworthy in their eyes," (Goffman, 1956, p. 28).

Burkhardt's statements suggest that the role he seeks to perform is the CEO who was thrown into the situation, but is not responsible for it. While he is "willing to stay here as long as it takes," he only "happens to be the chairman of the board," whose role it is to "collect … all this criticism and so on." He represents himself as a hard worker, a man who can sleep anywhere if he's tired enough, who is not a "particularly wealthy guy." Notably Burkhardt is not wearing a three-piece suit surrounded by handlers; instead he is dressed down, has messy hair, and generally looks unkempt. Therefore we can see that being a rich, successful CEO was an inferior face choice for Burkhardt. Goffman (1959) argues that the performer will often try to present an idealized version of himself and will "conceal or underplay those activities, facts, and motives, which are incompatible with an idealized version of himself and his products" (p. 48). The face that Burkhardt has attempted to portray (humble, hard working) contrasts with his performance, and affects how others behave toward him. If he had appeared in a three-piece suit with handlers in tow, the success of his performance and the behaviour of the reporters likely would have been different.

As the performance of the speaker is often filmed, the podium performer usually practices patience and maintains a sense of cordiality while he or she provides information to his or her audience(s). While it may appear to be impromptu, the podium performer has often prepared a set of key messages beforehand, in anticipation of the reporter's questions.

Burkhardt breaks several of these conventions when he verbally lashes out at reporters ("Well you're asking a lot of questions that I wish I had the answers to," "I think I responded to that already," "Alright may I answer that?" "Were you here a few minutes ago when I answered that?" "You're saying that we have said that we're not going to help the business people in this town. That is not correct," "I've answered that question an number of times," "You have asked too many questions," "I hope you have heard my apology uh about a dozen times in the last ten minutes," "And if you think I said he did nothing wrong then you haven't been listening here." Goffman (1955) would call these verbal reprimands a failure to contain "creature releases" (p. 112). Goffman (1955) writes, "To engage in situational impropriety, then, is to draw improperly on what one owes the social occasion" (p. 112).

When Burkhardt lashes out at the reporters he is demonstrates the press conference is not significant enough for him to conform to the rules of the engagement. But it also gives us clues about who Burkhardt considers to be his primary audience. When Burkhardt speaks with chagrin to reporters it's meant (presumably) for them only, not the wider audience who will watch him during the 6 o'clock news. But because this press conference is televised, audiences not immediately present also have access to Burkhardt's performance.

Macro analysis

A macro analysis of the transcript considers the extra-linguistic functionality of the discursive performance and the linguistic options available to Burkhardt (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). In this analysis two dominant themes were noted: 1) rationalization and 2) CEO discourse.

RATIONALIZATION

Rationalization is a linguistic device used to appeal to logical thought in order to persuade others to view a particular event with less emotion. As the mouthpiece for MMA, Burkhardt provides an account for the disaster, which he calls "a failure of the brakes," in a way that paints the organization as a rule-following company that was forced to cut costs due to economic pressures (a "difficult market"). When we view the events through this capitalistic lens we can follow Burkhardt's logic that a railway line will need to be re-established in Lac-Mégantic despite this disaster, because it is good for the economy. When asked about this Burkhardt explains, "a railway runs through this town … uh as a … we have a number of shippers that depend on rail service. We have one right in town … uh Tofessa, it's a very good customer. These guys uh have to have rail service. And … or else they are going to lay their people off and uh … have more problems than we we create." According to this logic, the economic benefits of having the railway through the town outweigh the risks (environmental, human, etc.).

Capitalism not only decides the options for MMA, but it also narrows the speech options for Burkhardt, who just "happens" to be the CEO of the company. And Burkhardt tells the story of MMA acting as a rational player in a tight economic climate (a "big financial meltdown") that provides jobs and security for its suppliers. Burkhardt assures his audience that MMA, as a responsible company, has a solid "insurance backup," with staff working "elbow to elbow," to "stand up to our responsibility." It is a tactic used to marginalize the real victims of the disaster, and to deflect moral blame for the disaster by highlighting the company's positive attributes.

As previously mentioned, rationalization does not give Burkhardt the vocabulary to express emotions when referring to the real victims of the disaster. Thus in the manner of the "yellers," the real victims of this disaster are marginalized by the organizational rationalization discourse that Burkhardt uses as the CEO of a large railway company.

CEO DISCOURSE

Beelitz and Merkl-Davies (2012) define organizational legitimacy as being "vital for an organization's survival as it attracts resources and the continued support from its constituents," (p. 101). During a crisis or controversy corporations will use language to attempt to restore this legitimacy as quickly as it can. Often this entails persuading audiences that the organization upholds the same normative values as them despite what has occurred. Therefore it would be incumbent upon MMA to assure its audience that it values both human life and the environment, things that the explosion destroyed. However the CEO, as the mouthpiece for the organization, is restricted by what he or she can say. Burkhardt is placed in a difficult situation. While he must talk the talk of a corporate CEO, he must also try to create an impression with his audience that appeals to their values.

Discussion

Burkhardt uses discourse as a means to influence how the audience will view both him and his organization. He uses defensive and blaming statements to direct the audiences' attention away from himself and MMA. He also attempts to construct a reality

in a way that benefits himself and his company, but not the real victims of the disaster. He puts together an account of events that serves his organization, rather than being accountable to the Lac-Mégantic community.

Goffman's dramaturgy helps us to understand how people behave and how social limitations can affect the function of a performance. Goffman teaches us that social roles are formed and performed in a co-created space that is defined (and redefined) by language and communication. Often what we think of as "real" is a symposium of words used to project an idea of a self in response to perceived norms of an audience, within an agreed upon (or not) definition of the situation.

An analysis of Burkhardt's performance in Lac-Mégantic illustrates the point that Burkhardt is restricted by what he can say because of the role he has chosen to perform. For example when Burkhardt states, "Yes I understand why they are mad and because I happen to be the chairman of the board of directors of the company… I guess it's my role to … collect … all this criticism and so on," he not only indicates his chosen role to perform but he also displays passive resignation and acceptance of the negative responsibilities that this role has for him.

And because the audience is in the unique position of being hypercritical, this presents a significant challenge to the success of Burkhardt's performance. Burkhardt attempts to deal with this by redefining the situation using a technique that Goffman calls "keying." Burkhardt describes the situation as an apology, he attempts to present himself as a victimized and passive CEO, and he attempts to obfuscate the real victims of the explosion with the words he chooses to portray himself and MMA. Burkhardt is expected to behave as a CEO, and he attempts to do this, while also exhibiting that he personally shares the same (presumed) values of his audience: hardworking, responsible, and humble. Further he is wearing casual clothing, has a pen in his pocket and sports a disheveled look. The effect would be different if Burkhardt appeared in a suit, with handlers by his side and speaking notes. It is likely that he does this so that the audience will accept his view of the events, and will decide to treat him in a favourable way. It is suggested that dramaturgical trouble occurs for Burkhardt when he does not adequately display the emotional response that both his immediate and distance audience expects of him. Further when he criticizes the reporters he fails to respect the rituals of the press conference by not exhibiting the proper deference to his immediate audience. This creates a binary in Burkhardt's performance—he is trying to apologize for the disaster's occurrence and represent his organization in a favourable way, yet he cannot display the proper demeanor of decorum to his immediate audience, the reporters. These specific challenges are perhaps exacerbated because Burkhardt does not have access to his distanced audience, nor is he able to adequately assess his audience's reception to his performance, and thus is unable to make the performative adjustments that Goffman suggests is necessary to ensure a successful performance.

When Burkhardt waivers from the typical crisis communication script he sets himself up for dramaturgical trouble. During a crisis, the audience has come to expect the CEO to arrive immediately after an accident, be polite and available to reporters, be knowledgeable, show proper deference, display an appropriate emotional response

and issue an effective apology. Goffman teaches us that people are motivated to behave in ways to influence how they are treated. Those CEOs who conform and adopt accepted crisis communication behaviour and scripts are not morally superior to Burkhardt, they are perhaps just more cognizant of their role and their audience's expectations. But when one deviates from the expectations of the audience, however minor, often the reaction is a moral one.

The situation (press conference) begins to unravel when Burkhardt does not perform as expected. Goffman teaches us that when this happens participants will often try to make sense of the tenuous situation by manipulating the frame, affecting how others can behave in the new situation. In the case presented in this article we can see indications of this when the reporter's questions become focused on Burkhardt's backstage persona (his emotions), which alters the situation and situates Burkhardt on the defence.

Admittedly, it is unlikely that scholars will be contemplating Ed Burkhardt's performance ten years from now. However his performance has given us the opportunity to contemplate some of Goffman's dramaturgy with practical vigour. This article has attempted to fill in a gap in the literature and represent Goffman's ideas on dramaturgy in a more comprehensive way to illustrate the potential for Goffman's work within communication theory studies. It is suggested that an understanding of Goffman's dramaturgy enables communication scholars to more fully contemplate the purpose and use of specific communication artefacts in social settings. In the case outlined above such artefacts include the apology, facework, keying, the relationship between authority and language, teamwork, and influence over what it is that is going on. Goffman lends us a vocabulary to document and subsequently understand the micro-world, things that we often take as a "given." Through his work, he manages to deconstruct assumptions that what we perceive of is real, and helps us understand the way that the social self is constructed—with language. Communication scholars will benefit with this knowledge as it promotes reflexive thinking in a time when technology is enabling communication to occur at unprecedented rates.

This article found that a CDA methodology proved to be a suitable match for Goffman's dramaturgy. In the manner of Goffman's dramaturgy, the CDA encourages scholars to contemplate the ways that power and authority are depicted and enacted in discourse. And while both approaches include a micro-level analysis, the CDA methodology also encourages a macro analysis, which considers discourse at a larger socioeconomic level. Often power and authority are linked to larger socioeconomic factors, such as capitalism, and the performance of these macro qualities can become institutionalized in discourse. Goffman, whose work was influenced by the social rights movement, was interested in how authority and institutions can exercise power over others (Scheff, 2006). And his dramaturgy helps us to understand and question this socially manufactured authority, much like the CDA methodology.

While this article suggests one way of applying Goffman's dramaturgy as a method of investigation to offer a richer insight into a communication case study, and perhaps to make Goffman's work more accessible, it does not propose a dogmatic approach. Goffman himself resisted being "boxed in," and described stereotypical thinking as

lazy. The findings of this study indicate Goffman's concepts are an inspiring resource that can be further developed and applied to communication research.

Acknowledgement

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