

Appendices

Towards a Complex Third-Way Irony

A Critical Review of the Contribution of Organisational Studies to an Understanding of Irony as a Strategy for Living in Modern Organizations

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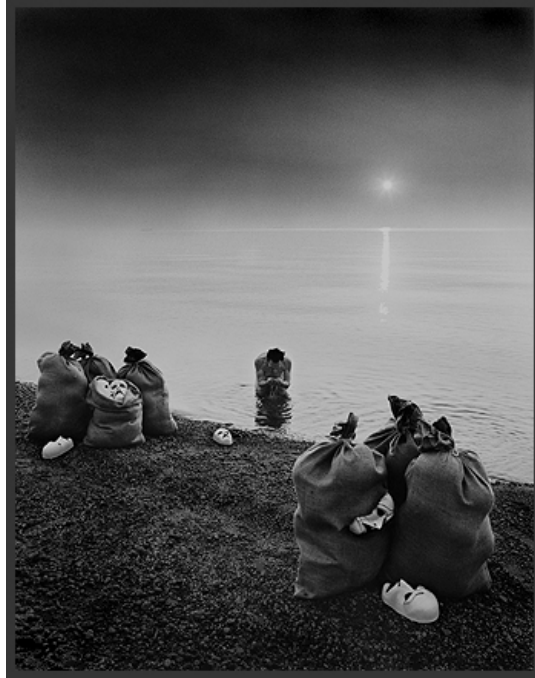
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1 The Dance of Identification: A Serious Play in One Act



'Fair Use'

Don't be fooled by me,

Don't be fooled by the face I wear
For I wear a thousand masks
That I'm afraid to take off –
And none of them is me.
Pretending is an art
That is second nature to me,
For God's sake, don't be fooled.
I give the impression that I am secure,
That all is sunny and unruffled with me
Within as well as without;
That confidence is my name
And coolness my game.
That the water is calm and I am in command,
And that I need no one.
But don't believe me, please.
My surface may seem smooth
But my surface is a mask.

Source: Lehmann, Peter (1974) *Lost in a Masquerade*, Celestial Arts

Scenes

Scene 1 Dance of Identification

Scene 2 Modernity and Ambivalence

Scene 3 The Response

Scene 4 Ironic Sensibility

Cast (in order of appearance)

Zygmunt Bauman: Polish sociologist best-known for his analyses of the links between modernity and the Holocaust and his critiques of late-modern and post-modern consumerist culture.

Erving Goffman: Canadian sociologist and symbolic interactionist best known for his work on the dramaturgical perspective of social interaction investigating how the self presents itself in everyday life.

Robert Merton: American functional sociologist who worked on the correlation between role-distance and ambivalence, specifically the ambivalence inherent in professional and managerial positions

Neil Smelser: American sociologist specialising in systems, conflict and collective behaviour who posited a theory of ambivalence based on Freudian psychoanalysis whilst President of the American Sociological Society

Catherine Casey: New Zealand born sociologist best known for her analysis of Post-Industrial organizations' corporate culture change as a 'colonization' of the self

Richard Rorty: American liberal pragmatic philosopher who abandoned foundationalist epistemology in preference of a conceptual schema positing no intelligible truths and with it the philosophy of Ironism

Gideon Kunda: Israeli sociologist best known for his analysis of employee commitment in designer or engineered cultures. Ironically, given his preferred perspective, he theorised employee irony as unstable and nihilistic

...ooo000ooo...

1.1 Scene 1 The Dance of Identification

OVERHEAD SIGN

Perhaps there are times when an individual does march up and down like a wooden soldier, tightly rolled up in a particular role. It is true that here and there we can pounce on a moment when an individual sits fully astride a single role, head erect, eyes front, but the next moment the picture is shattered into many pieces and the individual divides into different persons holding the ties of different spheres of life by his hands, by his teeth, and by his grimaces...

(Goffman, Erving, 1962, Encounters, p.143)

Enter the Chorus

The seven people in the chorus walk around wearing masks of Oscar Wilde. One by one they chant the following and, one by one, they put their masks in front of their faces after the names they are representing have been mentioned. In order, the masks are: Imre Lakatos; Bertrand Russell; Steve Woolgar; Kenneth Gergen; Frederick Schlegel; Milan Kundera. At the end, they all turn their masks around, and all become Oscar Wilde.

Player One: *What about getting the authors to play with a few ideas. Let's put it into their heads to write their paper as a conversation, a kind of simple play? What would they worry about? A bit risky? Won't be taken seriously?*

Player Two: *Well, give them the upside. Most theory papers are boring. People play more now. Everything is a narrative, after all, so you might as well make the story interesting.*

Player Three: *Yep, just look at their main argument. That modern organizations are staffed by ambivalent selves. That the ambivalences are rooted in modernity. That these may be denied or accepted. That the acceptance option has been inadequately explored. That it is best understood as an ironic sensibility. That established speculation on this sensibility has not successfully mapped out the complex and fluid nature of irony – as a gaze, face and temper. Great stuff, maybe,*

but it turns life into greyness, drama into analysis, and the ironic Kopakeli into a stuffed shirt.

Player Four: *They have to play. Encourage them. Emphasise this is not so new. The LSE philosopher of science, Lakatos, wrote his Ph.D as a play in the 70s. Plato thought poets were a dangerous challenge to social order, so they can't be all bad!*

Player Five: *But, and this is a big but (with one 't!'). Bertrand Russell said one had to write one serious and unreadable book, and then this leaves you free to be comprehensible later on. The authors haven't written the definitive incomprehensible theory piece yet. So it is risky.*

Player Six: *You are right. Remember that enfant terrible of the sociology of science, Steve Woolgar (now a Professor of Marketing at Oxford, is this what we mean by irony?)? He gave some entertaining papers but remarked after one of them that it still lowers one's reputation. People laugh at the presentation but don't take the person or the ideas seriously.*

Player Seven: *But look at what interesting people have done. Gergen uses the nice phrase 'serious play' to refer to the world of the postmodern saturated self. Schlegel, the romantic philosopher of irony, talks of 'everything should be playful and everything should be serious.' Kundera shows us the burden of our age: the unbearable lightness of being. Can we really pontificate meaningfully about irony from the academic pulpit in a language of sobriety and seriousness?*

Chorus: *As dear Oscar put it, 'Life is far too serious to talk seriously about'. There is only so much of the bureaucratic soullessness or Germanic angst that one can take. So, let them just do it. In the end, what do the results matter? The play is the thing!*

Stage Directions

Zygmunt Bauman (Ziggy) sitting in an armchair, enter Erving Goffman (Erv). Bauman gets up, interlocks his right arm with Goffman's left, they swing each other around in a brief jig, and then sit down in opposite chairs.

EG: Well, hi Ziggy! I can see you're OK, how am I?

ZB: That's an old one Erv. If you want people to forget you've been dead for 20 years, you need to update. The modern world is a liquid one; you are going to have to lighten up!

EG: Lighten up! Ziggy, remember how I began? I was in Edinburgh writing great stuff on Encounters. I used nice little examples to get people to pay attention to what they half-knew about themselves. Remember, the merry-go-round? Kids throw themselves into it, teenagers act nonchalant or try and bust the equipment by going around really fast, and parents act like they are really just doing it for the kids. It's a performance, a balancing act (excuse the pun), multiple audiences, multiple displays. Don't get me wrong, it is not a sacred individual dealing with the profane demands of something called society. Our distance from one role is the result of pressures from others, or even what the role prescribes as a natural or healthy degree of engagement. A valuable little illustration of what I called the dance of identification. What you do, it's the bloody Holocaust. Establishing community as stepping over dead corpses on the field, for God's sake! You say be 'light' because 'heavy' modernity is over, but, Christ, Ziggy, you're the heavy one! Give me the merry-go-round any time (Goffman 1961; Bauman 1989).

ZB: I should conform? Throw in a little post-modern jouissance? Remember I'm from East Europe, Erv. It's difficult to shrug off. It is no accident this area now seems to breed more world serious intellectuals than the Left Bank of Paris in the old days. Move over Jean-Paul (Sartre), enter Slavoj (Zizak). We have some heavy things to say about lightness!

EG: Post-modern jouissance! Whatever happened to pure 'joy'? Are we trapped in this pretentious jargon, surrounded by self-citing publication

machines? By the way, Ziggy, I don't include you in this. The way you write; quite remarkable! I love it. Maybe this is why they all know you without really grappling with your arguments. You're too understandable, maybe too humane and committed! I do yearn for the old days, when people wrote more clearly, were better versed in the subtleties of normal language. Remember Geertz? Now that guy could write!

ZB: We've moved on from the old days, Erv. Things are more complicated. Identities are shifting, new concepts are needed. You haven't had the chance to read Milan Kundera's *An Unbearable Lightness of Being*. That novel was great! It captured the angst over our new conditions – a lightness of touch, the ethos of the camp and peg communities. It makes Muhammad Ali a great post-modern figure, 'float[ing] like a butterfly, sting[ing] like a bee'. Pity the heaviness of boxing did his brain in.

EG: Fine, conditions might have changed, but I'm still going to argue for the merry-go-round. I think I captured some of your 'lightness'. You remember Loius Coser's phrase, 'greedy institutions'? Organizations that want 'all of you' and 'want you to want them' back. My ex-wife was a perfect example. Maybe I am too? Well, they can't have all of us. Even in my mini-version of your Holocaust, the mental asylum, people are making up, making out. You don't need to be 'light modern' to experience this. We are always 'holding company' selves, juggling multiple demands, making do in a series of situational encounters (Coser 1974).

Stage Directions

Enter a serious looking academic dressed in mortar board and gown, holding a clipboard, a stop watch and a pen. On the back of the gown is written 'Professor of the Bleeding Obvious'. She mutters loudly to herself while plodding heavily across the stage:

'Must get this article out. No time to look around. Let's recap. Downsizing. Outsourcing. End of the era of loyalty. A changing psychological contract. Trust based on effort and flexibility for security of employment. Now distrust and more open mutual manipulation. Now what were the figures from that survey? What

was it that idiot in the sociology department said? Sounds like a simplification of the 'orientations to work' literature? So, they talked about 'bureaucratic', 'instrumental', and 'solidaristic' orientations to work 40 years ago, so what? Debunked stereotypes. I'm creating new publishable stereotypes. Ring-a-ring-a-roses. Maybe, but in the long run we are all superannuated – and at different levels.'

Goffman and Bauman let out a deep sigh.

EG: Why don't they get it? Fortunately, some still do. A new book is about to come out on representations of organizations in popular culture arguing that they provide a more complex and sophisticated view of organizations than the one found in organizational studies!

ZB: Let's see what we *do* have, firstly by going back nearer to your era. As children of Weber (1968 [1922]), we know that organizations are structures of authority and control. Etzioni (1961) calls it a 'compliance' relationship. The means of control may be coercive, pecuniary or normative but they are control all the same. Every organization imposes demands on people to perform according to some idea of their requirements. At the same time, organizations tend to engender a degree of voluntary compliance. They appear, in part, to have a degree of real legitimacy or authority. And people believe that; like to believe that. You don't have to follow Karl (*Marx*) and Fred (*Engels*) to see the tension between the 'arbeitsgeber' (*work giver or employer*) and 'arbeitsnehmer' (*work taker or employee*). And you don't have to be a slavish follower of old Emile (*Durkheim 1984*) to believe that organizations, as mini-societies, are partly held together by shared rituals, people conforming and developing shared identities that give them a sense of meaning and purpose. People are both insiders and outsiders, conformists and critics, exploiters and exploited. We don't need questionnaires to discover this tension.

EG: People take the game so seriously! They don't see Peter's (*Berger 1991: 184*) 'comedy, in which men parade up and down with their gaudy costumes, change hats and titles, hit each other with the sticks they have or the ones they can persuade their fellow actors to believe in.'. Your Marxist friend Burawoy (1974) may be correct. Employees are actively critical and 'making out', both they and

employers collude in this activity, with the result that they all accept the underlying 'rules of the game'. Everyone is pretending. De Certeau's (1984) *la perruque* (the wig) is rife. But masks tend to stick. Remember *The Mask* and *Spiderman 3*, Ziggy?

ZB: Must have missed them, Erv. Are you saying that organizations make us oversocialised people, cheerful or angst ridden robots, despite the distance we feel or the games that we play?

EG: It might sound like that, but no, although the point is an important one. On the one hand, 'when they issue uniforms, they issue skins'. Arlie (Hochschild) (Goffman 1974; Hochschild 1979: 556) added, rather nicely I thought, 'and two inches of flesh'! Our identities *are* the product of who we are expected to be and how we play out our lives. On the other hand, things are far more fluid. People are little more than 'ambulatory units' moving from one encounter to another. They are not shaped by norms; they merely frame and reframe themselves and others in series of encounters or interaction rituals. They always adopt a stance towards what is expected of them, and what is expected is always mediated by the situation they are in. The juggling of multiple commitments is an active, complex and messy process. There is always this experience of being 'inside' and 'outside' in relation to the ritual at hand. As my faithful, if rather serious, follower Gideon (Kunda 1992: 213-214) puts it, 'organizational self is the stance'. But, how do people really experience this? Are we cynical game players, playful dilettantes, anxious fragmented selves, distracted and stressed survivors or reflective searchers for a coherent identity? I'm tempted to say we may become any or all of these things as our life-in-situ unfolds.

Stage Directions

A floodlight beams up to the roof, where Joanna Martin sits on a throne in high priestess garb. She reads from a stone tablet:

"Remember the three commandments. Thou shalt be an Integrationist, if you believe that organizations are purposive and orderly systems. Thou shalt conform to the strictures of the Differentiationist, if you believe that they are riven by fundamental inequalities and embedded conflict between

those with and without power. Thou shalt be a Fragmentationist, if you believe that organizational meaning and action is more complex, uncertain, contradictory, fragmented and emergent than Integrationists and Differentiationists allow. Which are you guys? What is the fundamental character of this 'organization'/'organization member' dynamic you are discussing?" (Martin 1993).

ZB: If I may? Let us get away from these frames, paradigms and commandments. I think our situations are all three. They are not frames but components, and they are components in tension. Organizational ideology, and practice, requires a purposive-rationality, a sense of common orientation, and deliberation on how this can effectively be brought about. Our rational selves, our social selves, are committed to this collective task. Inequalities of conditions, the exercise of power, and the self-interested pursuit of our own ends all create situations of conflict and control, domination and resistance, antagonism and struggle. Organizations and institutions are riven by such conditions within and between them. Our Machiavellian selves struggle to survive and develop in such a world. In living our lives, the way our selves and situations are defined, how we and others make sense of the uncertainties of interaction; these are all far more confused and ambiguous than simple unitary or conflictual ideologies suggest. Our sense-making selves have to struggle with such complexity. Our 'commitment' to the organizations within which we live and work will always reflect such tensions.

EG: Well put, Ziggy. I hate to agree with anyone but this time.... The dance of identification is a three-step jig on a tightrope. In any social encounter, we collude in keeping a common unifying narrative going. We also stand apart from this definition, assessing and manipulating it. How we experience and act it out is a dynamic and iterative process of uncertain framing and reframing of who we are and the situation we are in. It is this dance of identification that structures our response to our organizational lives. Gideon (*Kunda*), bless him, made the important point that 'commitment' and 'distance' are no longer opposite ends of a continuum of employee responses to organizations. In a sociological equivalent to the debunking of the Phillips Curve, he revealed that employees

were both committed *and* distant towards the organization. Where Gideon is doubly mistaken, I think, is in regarding this as a condition particular to a new 'ironic' group of employees. On the one hand, to a degree, it is a universal condition of social life. On the other hand, he appears to presume an angst ridden agony of the lonely crowd subjected to such conditions (more of this later!). This is far too impressionistic, too universalistic and too moralistic in its tone. We are all dancers in the dance but how these steps are performed, how skilled we are, how we experience it differ. These are topics worth exploring further (Kunda 1992).

1.2 Scene 2 Modernity and Ambivalence

OVERHEAD SIGN

Arbeit Macht Frei
(Work makes you free)

Source: Sign above the gates of Auschwitz and Dachau

ZB: Don't you ever wonder what would have happened if people researching organisations had taken up more of your ideas?

EG: Are we talking about me here or you? What's wrong Ziggy, feeling a bit of outside angst, part of the waste you talk about? (Bauman 2004a)

ZB: I have lived my life as an outsider. I think I quite like the place. Foucault once remarked that the traditional view of the intellectual is out in front but off to the side? To be off to the side may be less of a contact sport but you still experience the agony and ecstasy of the maverick. Enough of my digressions! Stewart (Clegg et al. 2006) and his mates have just argued that you have been unjustifiably neglected in organization studies, that your work on asylums, as with mine on modernity and the holocaust, goes relatively unnoticed, or at least not extensively used in mainstream work.

EG: Well, it's not quite the case with you, my old mate. Didn't you read Paul's (Du Gay 2000) book; a strange character, the head of Michael (Foucault) and the body of Isaiah (Berlin)? I'm not sure he's got it the right way round! What it was against was interesting. You and Tom Peters bundled together in the romantic anti-bureaucracy camp! How did you like that? Dilbert called Peters a 'spitter'. Are you a spitter, Ziggy, are you?

ZB: Not a spitter, Erv. More a 'splitter'. I occupy the same spot as the 'Popular Front of Judea'. Didn't you see Life of Brian?

Stage Directions

Enter stage left

Monty Python team playing philosophical soccer, dressed as Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Nietzsche, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Schlegel, Kant etc. They huddle together having a discussion.

Enter stage right

James March slides in uncontrollably on a slippery and icy surface, collides with the Monty Python team, and sends them scattering

ZB: James has made his point. And it symbolises what I want to say about modernity. He said that people deny uncertainty and ambiguity, and try to show that they are in control, when actually the opposite is the case. He has slid in on his own metaphor. He once told us that leadership was something akin to trying to steer a car when skidding on an icy surface (Cohen and March 1986).

EG: This is what I sought to uncover in face-to-face work. Everyone is trying to appear what they are meant to be, to keep the ritual going. People expect leaders to be in charge, to have control, to provide certainty. One of the authors of this piece told me a worker in the Australian steel plant he researched observed of management, 'they must have a cunning plan. They can't be this stupid!' So they all collude to keep up appearances. Can you hear what James is saying to Cleese? I bet he has a really good explanation.... (Badham (field notes)).

ZB: You can see this denial in these local encounters and your presentation of our selves to our selves is great. But the denial is rooted in something bigger. At the heart of modernity is a quest for order founded on an attempted elimination of ambiguity and ambivalence. This quest sees only two alternatives, order or chaos. An inadequate 'chaotic' present is compared to an ideal 'orderly' future. Progress is achieved by systematising language, developing science and technology, and creating new systems of administration to 'scientifically manage the defective human stock'. Modernity classifies, organizes, describes, analyses, deconstructs, reconstructs, to provide us with 'the order' that we want. It does it to nature and it does it to people. A Latin name for all flora and fauna and a Myers-Briggs typology for all people! In this world, ambiguity is not merely a

problem, it is a threat, it's sacrilege. Modernity compulsively searches out and seeks to eliminate ambiguity. In our organisational ideologies, at least, we live in Max's icy world of disenchantment. Little boxes, little boxes, all made out of ticky-tacky, all in a row (Bauman 1991: 33; Weber 1968 [1922]).

But my point is not merely to rail against this image as a threat to our inner humanity. Nor is it, like Tom Peters, to say we are witnessing the flowering of a new age where romantic creativity is both the Real and the Rational, a desirable ethos for living and a competitive requirement for hyper-modernity. My point is that while modernity creates the conditions for bureaucracy and order, it also undermines them. Modernity seeks to eliminate ambiguity and ambivalence yet ends up creating it. Our main problem lies in the attempts by the 'ordering' component of modernity to deny, deceive, pathologically neglect or obsessively campaign against ambivalence, plurality and diversity.

EG: I don't quite understand this. Are you saying that our very attempt to recognise and live with ambiguity and ambivalence is also a product of this all-embracing modernity of yours? What isn't part of this Leviathan?

ZB: First things first, Erv. Remember, I was being nice to you. Ultimately, yes, I am saying that modernity creates all this. It seeks to eliminate ambivalence but only ends up creating more. This occurs through three conditions: what I have called the 'pluralism of power', 'unintended consequences', and the 'human condition'.

EG: Sounds OK as slogans, but what do they mean?

ZB: The *pluralism of power* refers to conflicting authoritative opinions about who people 'should be'. This refers to conflicts within institutions (between bosses, colleagues, subordinates etc.) and between institutions (between family and work, private and public life etc.). It also manifests itself in contradictory formalised and expert statements about the 'appropriate individual'. The outcome is what Gergen characterises as 'multiphrenia'. This phenomenon is accompanied by the *unintended consequences* of attempts at control. To quote myself, just to add spice to my conversation. 'Problems are created by problem-solving, new areas of chaos are generated by ordering activity. Progress consists

first and foremost in the obsolescence of yesterday's solution.' Finally, the ordering impulse comes into conflict with all the ambiguity and ambivalence that inevitably accompanies the *human condition*, the agonies and the ecstasies that surround attempts to craft out a meaningful life in recalcitrant conditions, all the hopes and despair, achievements and failures and so on.

EG: So what does this mean for what we were talking about earlier, how we live our lives in organisations, how we manage the dance of identification?

ZB: We can go on to talk about how we 'should' be. But, for the moment, I am taking a leaf out of your book. This is analysis only, identifying the sources of ambivalence in the modernist quest. It applies directly to this organisational dance of identification. Our organisations, and ourselves, yearn for total certainty, order and identification. Yet we, and they, create uncertainty, disorder and plurality. So we are pushed and pulled. If we take Neil's view of ambivalence as "the simultaneous existence of attraction and repulsion, of love and hate", then we love and hate the organisational demand to have 'all of us'. How this plays out is another thing. My work on the Holocaust is about the dangers of domination by an obsessive pursuit of 'order' driven in part by a pathological repression of disorder and plurality. But that is for a later discussion about the responses to ambivalence.

EG: Before you climb out of this one using the old academic adage of 'this is another paper', can you quickly say how our organisations and ourselves could craft out a meaningful dance of identification, a successful ritual if you will?

ZB: I refuse to get embroiled in this yet. But I will provide a teaser, a little relevant self-quotation "The only consensus likely to stand a chance of success is the acceptance of the heterogeneity of dissensions".

Stage Directions

Enter Stage Right: a misty ethereal ghost of Emile Durkheim, dressed in 'wasp' like French T-shirt, beret, and smoking Gauloise.

Enter Stage Left: a darker and heavier looking ghost of Max Weber, bearded, besuited and with a pipe.

*They lock arms, like Bauman and Goffman did earlier, and spin each other around.
They speak, both at once*

<i>MW:</i>	<i>'I wish I had said that, Emile!'</i>
<i>ED:</i>	<i>'I wish I had said that, Max'</i>
<i>MW & ED:</i>	<i>'You will, Ziggy, you will'</i>

EG: Wow, Ziggy, did you see those ghosts? Are they you, or you them?

ZB: I think it was that nice liberal old stick Galbraith (1977) who said something about the plans of practical men reflecting ideas of long dead philosophers or economists. Did you see him on Parkinson with Bette Midler? She, how do the liquid youth put it, 'creamed him'! How to destabilise urbane poise in one easy lesson! Enough of Bette; the ghosts are grouching! Ideas live on, and I am proud to be part of a heritage of critical observers of modernity. Durkheim (1984) went into this. He pointed out how modern society was a highly diversified one, with different personalities, different people, different sub-cultures. Jobs and careers became more specialised, organizations more differentiated, and society made up of multiple regions, levels and sub-cultures. This led to a plurality of voices about who we should be, where we should be going.

EG: I suppose this is something that is reflected in my observations about the 'holding company' self that we are forced to become. With different specialisations, audiences, groups etc., we end up having multiple personalities, wanting to please different audiences, live up to different ideals. So where does this leave us, other than being superficial social chameleons with no 'inner direction'?

ZB: Durkheim went part of the way in trying to solve this. He was aware that there was a problem of order and guidance. And he realised that there could be industry ultimately provided no final authority or promised resting place. But rather than making an awareness of all of this part of a new desirable consciousness, he wanted us to search for an individualistic ethos and create corporatist style associations to solve people's 'anomie'. I want to create a greater knowledge of our 'elusive' or 'peg' communities, and how we should live in an ambivalent world. As we experience all these plural views and pulls, and

try to juggle them in our lives, we have an inner yearning for community, a one-dimensional resting place, slippers and a dog by the fire, where we can relax, and simply be. The more diverse, rushed and stressed our life becomes, the more that we are given views of what Donald (*Schön*) calls a stable state. We long for the domination of an uncertain and uncaring world, turning it to our own ends, and reaching some kind of secure Nirvana. It is present in yearnings for ecological communities, Buddhist retreats, passionate commitments to all-encompassing causes. Yes, we are creatures of modernity, but it is a modernity with inbuilt ambivalence. Just the other day, I saw a billboard outside Sydney airport advertising superannuation, 'secure your future' it proclaimed. It neglected to point out that in the long run we are all dead!

EG: Sounds depressing

ZB: Not necessarily, Erv. Our slippery friend James (*March*) (Cohen and March 1984) argued for a 'technology of foolishness'. Our organizations have multiple, competing and ambiguous goals which are given different interpretations by the various stakeholders and groupings that make up the organised anarchies that they are and become. As conditions change rapidly, we create what our German pal Ulrich (*Beck 1999: 19-48*) calls 'manufactured uncertainties', we cannot control the things that we have created. To dramatically paraphrase Goethe's Faust 'The phantoms I have summoned will not go'. But, as James recommends, we can accept this, and play with the dilemmas.

EG: If you are going to bring in Faust, then I have to play the devil's advocate. Surely, if we recognise this situation, then we don't have to be ambivalent about it any more? We can just rationally work out a solution.

ZB: Well played indeed, but we need to shift the answer onto another level. Modernity gives us just such a faith in knowledge and rationality. Surely we can think and plan our way out of anything! The problem is that we cannot think and plan our way out of the problems of thinking and planning! You see, science extended its scope to undermine its own certain assumptions. As facts began to disappear up their own microscope, historians and philosophers showed us, (rationally, using 'science' again) that science was uncertain and contested, a social, and political, construction, a source of ongoing conflict and

debate. In the work of liberal followers of science, the search for excessive certainty, and dogma about having grasped it, is a very non-scientific attitude. Great humanitarian liberals like Karl Popper and Bertrand Russell saw the rise of authoritarianism as being the result of not acknowledging what science has really given us – a critical, tentative and exploratory outlook. Science cannot tell us how to live, any more than it can tell us about the ultimate nature of the world or even its own provisional ‘truths’.

Increasing public scepticism against scientists and technicians is a witness to this. As Ivan Illich, the Catholic environmentalist, remarked, ‘what is an expert? An ‘ex’ and a ‘spurt’, the latter being a little drip with a lot of pressure behind it!’ Now we have a plurality of competing ‘scientific’ voices, each giving us different opinions about ‘reality’ and the ‘facts’. Do we believe the supporters of ‘hi-tech’ solutions or simple ‘low-tech’ remedies, the prophets of ‘global warming’ or their ‘critics’, the greater danger of ‘caffeinated’ or ‘decaffeinated’ coffee, the value of a glass or two of red wine or not? Science cannot give us the simple authority we yearn for. And, believe me, we yearn for it. This is the promise that modernity has given us. Even our doom-laden critiques appear as a ‘legislative’ knowledge claim. In reality, however, (and here we go again!) we are merely ‘interpreters’ of the inner cultural tensions of a modernity that is ambivalent about its own claims to knowledge. As our little jokester Rowan Atkinson put it, ‘There is certainly a lot of uncertainty around. Of that, one can be....certain!’

EG: So, let’s cut to the chase then, you agree with Max (Weber 1968 [1922]) rather than Emile (Durkheim)!

ZB: To be serious for a moment, Erv (you know I’m generally not!), I think Max said many really appropriate things about the disenchantment of the world, the rationalistic legitimation of organisational authority, the value of an ‘ethic of responsibility’ and so on. His idea that there was a ‘substantive’ rationality behind the ‘formal rationality’ that drives modern civilisation, but that all substantive rationales have been undermined as a hangover of pre-modern society is excellent. It goes far beyond the simple undermining of the religious ideal of the ‘calling’, and its replacement with personal or ritualised ‘psychological contracts’. He nicely grasps that this has left us with a

meaningless, albeit strenuous, quest for more rationality (more knowledge, more products, more control, more analysis and so on). This, in turn, takes directions that are influenced by the self-interested strivings of partial interests. They are also ignored by those who want to reject this world, and cope by adopting more fundamentalist searches for an alternative lifestyle. So we are locked into denial, short term self-interested manipulations, and a meaningless striving. I mentioned East European angst earlier on; well, it has at least its match in the German schadenfreude.

EG: So you are nothing but a set of footnotes to Max?

ZB: I hope a little more.

Stage Directions

Enter Stage Left: In walks a tweedy looking traditional male Professor type arm in arm with his wife and accompanied by a medical group of a nurse, intern, doctor and patient wheeled in on a trolley. Everyone apart from the Professor goes to different parts of the stage and start calling 'Robert'! Robert (Merton), for that is the Professor, walks quickly from one to the other, looking more bewildered and confused. Finally, he goes to his wife, and says: 'What do you want from me?' She replies, firmly yet pleadingly, 'I just want you to want me!' All the characters leave, and Merton sits down opposite Goffman and Bauman.

EG: Hi, Rob. How is your 'push me-pull you' life going as the world's greatest functionalist? Before your long answer, I have my own pressures and have to go. Apologies, but I mustn't let you keep me!

He gets up, shakes Merton's and Bauman's hands, and turns to leave.

RB: That's OK, so long Erv. Keep up my good work!

Goffman turns and gives Merton the finger while smiling.

RM: Hi, Ziggy, I know Erv must have been giving you a hard time, he does that to everyone. I apologise for him.

ZB: No apology necessary, Rob. I love his laconic style - citizen of light modernity in an all too heavy world.

RM: I'm glad you raised that. Can I just try out a little test?

ZB: Sure, just so long as it's non-discriminatory!

RM: *(pulls out a large and shabby red book, and opens it to the front pages)* Who said this and when "To the costly ideology of bureaucratic conformity is added the irony of conflicting and ambiguous directions"?

ZB: Was that me? I don't remember it.

RM: To quote a now popular line, 'You will, Ziggy, you will!' No, it was a group of American social psychologists at Michigan looking at organisational stress – back in 1964! (Kahn, Quinn et al. 1964). No post-modernism or late modernism here. Do you know how cold it gets in Michigan? Freezes your car's tyres to the driveway. But back to the main point, look what they had to say. "To the haunting question "Who am I?" answers are sought from an environment often unresponsive or itself in flux.' And they argued (somewhat reluctantly, apologising for the speculations, they were positivists after all!) this was due to the twin processes of the growth of the sciences and large organizations.

ZB: How so?

RM: They say both growth processes encourage and accelerate the rate of technological change yet also create dependence and conformity. Why? Because the complexity of science means that we cannot translate their findings any more, the use of simple 'billiard ball' metaphors is no longer enough. Rapid change in science makes the experience of the individual irrelevant. The craftsman (sorry, craftsperson) gives way to the scientist. Tried to repair your car lately? We become dependent on the 'experts'. Sound familiar? Ulrich (*Beck*), eat your heart out! And large organizations – let me tell you about large organizations! So complex, so interdependent. They produce diversity yet require conformity. If one cotton picker in a gang is missing, it just reduces the output by their contribution. But one person missing from the assembly line...it grinds to a halt! Large organizations need such people and it fits into their ideology. The conformity that science breeds is a different matter; it is the unintended consequence of an ethos that is often liberal and independent. Do you know what Bertrand Russell (2006: 119) said about large organisations? 'Mankind decided that it would submit to monotony and tedium in order to

diminish the risk of starvation'! These Michigan social psychologists quoted that. God, would I like to meet them again!

ZB: So, what's your point?

RM: The point is a simple one. On the one hand, they made similar arguments to you. Science, bureaucracy and large organisations create ever greater requirements for conformity, at the same time as they undermine the unity that they search for. Science challenges authority, creates multiple knowledge claims, yet its development encourages greater dependence on its knowledgeable authority. Large organisations possess and foster multiple goals, divisions and sub-cultures yet require greater degrees of cooperation and conformity. On the other hand, they did this within a framework of traditional functionalism and role theory.

ZB: OK, but how far can you push such an analysis?

RM: Quite far, actually. Sometimes with far more precision than many so-called contemporary theories of ambiguity and ambivalence in modern organisations. The background, of course, is the idea of a differentiated and plural society requiring new and more complex forms of integration. It also requires more flexible and plural individuals. Hochschild commented, for example, her concept of 'feeling rules' is something that could only have emerged in modern plural settings. My work, however, pointed in particular to the problematic 'sociological' ambivalences that this can create, i.e. 'conflicting normative expectations socially defined for a particular social role associated with a single social status' While many others had pointed to the ambivalences created between different positions or statuses (i.e. worker/family person; parent/child etc), I focused attention onto not only conflicts between roles within a status (i.e. boss, subordinate, colleague etc.) but also within these roles. Many of our roles contain contradictory requirements. Scientists frequently complain about bureaucratic responsibilities undermining their time and energy for creative work, academics about the conflict between their roles as teachers and researchers etc. I pointed out, a special favourite of mine, to the existence of tensions within a role, norms and counter-norms that specify how people should behave. One of the most noted illustrations is the idea of a doctor having

'detached concern', human empathy towards patients yet also professional distance. Some of these norms, as Louis (*Coser*) and Erving (*Goffman*) have pointed out, relate to what is regarded as a 'balanced' playing out of a role, not too 'fanatical', not too 'distant'. More broadly, I also pointed to ambivalence between internalised norms and situational demands, cultural values and institutionalised normative prescriptions, the demands of alternative (including past and present) reference groups and so on. The Michigan guys provided a more systematic look at 'role conflict' and 'role ambiguity' as the contradictory demands of alternative 'role senders' or 'requirements ambivalence, stress and frustration'.

ZB: Much of this sounds useful. It nicely grasps multiple sources of ambivalence. But isn't your analysis ultimately just arguing for the need for a utopian removal of such ambivalences, the design of a perfectly functioning organism that eliminates such sources of 'anomie' and distress?

RM: Thanks for the compliment. But, for the second point, no, not at all. I see the ambivalences that you point out, between unity and plurality etc., to be examples – at a macro level – of just what our analysis points out. What we add, however, is a rich set of concepts for exploring multiple levels of ambivalence. As to the old functionalist utopia illusion, we are probably as caught up in this as you are in the statement that the Holocaust is the outcome of modernity. Paul (*Du Gay*) sees you as a proto-romantic, unjustifiably seeing the Holocaust as the automatic outcome of the modernist project – and hence, you as providing a blanket romantic critique of an alienating bureaucratic rationalization (Bauman 1989; Du Gay 2000). You may, at heart or at times, be making such an argument. But you are also showing how the bureaucratic ethos, rooted in the quest and support for order and control, can be used for such ends. Also, maybe, you are pointing to the fact that the tension brought about by the ambivalence generated and surrounding the quest for order can lead to a pathological commitment to serving whatever functions the 'order' generators demand, however much this conflicts with other plural and humane values. Your analysis may, or may not, be a strong romantic critique of the inherent tendencies of bureaucracy, but it does not have to be. So, with our functionalism, we can accept the inevitability of

conflict and ambivalence, even its value and creativity. Also, the personal consequences are not necessarily seen as mere generators of anomie and angst. The Michigan boys, for example, talked about the response of individuals being mediated by their cognitive capacity for uncertainty and ambiguity. Rose (Laub Coser 1966) put a liberal case quite nicely in arguing that individuals who have passed through multiple stages, different careers, operated in multiple settings with competing institutional demands etc. etc., are capable of developing a 'mature' ability to juggle and integrate such differences. Back in the 70s, Peter made a similar point in his overview of sociology, as did Isaiah in his promotion of a liberal view of political theory. The 'mature' individual creatively coping with sociological ambivalence may have a dose of the 'lightness' that you talk about – not purely as a phenomenon of late modernity, but throughout modernity. But we are stepping ahead of ourselves here. We promised to stick to the causes of ambivalence.

ZB: Thanks for that, Robert. Another reason to go back to the greats! I think we have extended the dance of identification argument adequately. We both saw fundamental ambivalences in the person/organisation relationship in modernity. I raised the issue of the dance in modernity involving identification with, on the one hand, organisational conditions and demands for order, authoritative knowledge and a final community or resting place and, on the other hand, conditions and demands inside and outside organisations for plurality, competing knowledges, and ongoing dynamic journeys. You explore the myriad ambiguous demands within and outside the organisation. So, where do we go next? Much as I hate to admit it, Erv put this really well, "The model of man according to the initial role perspective is that of a kind of holding company for a set of not relevantly connected roles; it is the concern of the second perspective to find out how the individual runs this holding company.' This is our next destination (Bauman 1991; Merton 1976; Goffman 1961: 90).

Stage Directions

Robert gets up and ambles to a corner of the stage as if to exit. He hesitates and returns to centre stage. He then walks to another corner, hesitates and returns

again to centre stage. He is looking very confused. There is a round of deafening applause. From the opposite side of the stage strides Neil Smelser, resplendent in academic robes and carrying a Presidential seal. He walks purposefully to Robert, taps him on the shoulder and says, 'It's just that there are two exits, Robert.' before taking Robert's hand and leading him off-stage. He then walks over to Ziggy.

1.3 Scene 3 The Response

OVERHEAD SIGN

Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them...What is called resignation is confirmed desperation...A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

Henry Thoreau, 1845, Economy Part A, Walden (pp.1-3)

NS: Poor Robert. Always having to cope with competing demands!

ZB: My fault! We were talking about ambivalence. I should really know better by now. He never sorted out what to do about it.

NS: Old functionalists never die, they just keep on functioning!

ZB: I was hoping he'd stay. I wondered how he'd view your view of an ambivalence approach as an alternative to rational explanations of human behaviour.

NS: I have to be clear here, Ziggy. Considering ambivalence as a supplement not an alternative to rational choice. It is about dealing with the ambivalence that humans' feel towards parents, organisations and other things upon which they are dependent. And the anxiety this causes, the repression involved, the choices available and so on (Smelser 1998).

ZB: Oh, oh! Repression, I sense some Freud. I may have to repress my anti-Freudian feeling. *(laughs)*

NS: Well, if you are reluctant to deal with Viennese angst, let's use a Kiwi observing the Yanks (Casey 1995).

Stage Directions

A loud, clanging noise is heard as sparks of fire leap out from the wings. A powerfully built, yet obviously lame, young man walks to the back of the stage and sits on a golden couch with Imperial Hephaestus emblazoned on the side. In comes

a bespectacled, slightly aggressive and critical looking woman (Catherine Casey) with a notepad and pen. She sits next to the couch and starts interrogating the man. Spotlight is focused on Casey and the man.

CC: So, you think Hephaestus is held up as a real family company, a strong culture, a home away from home. Is it truly a 'real star' company?

Young Man: "It's like a moralistic, righteous parent. It's the kind of parent everyone should be lucky enough to have...It's a very moral company. It does the right thing" (Ibid: 104)

CC: What about the toxic waste dumping, the air pollution?

Young Man: No one mentions that. I'm not sure I remember....

Catherine writes down:

- (i) Reaction formation: repressing one side (negative commentary) and rigidifying the other (positive idealisation of the corporate parent) (Smelser 1998)

Catherine adds:

Note to self: evidence of widespread ambivalence and denial in Hephaestus. Indications of Freudian projection (projecting ambivalent feelings onto something or someone else, the problem lies not with the company but the supervisor, ourselves etc.), displacement (displacing or substituting a remote object or symbol for the real object (Smelser 1998) – note Bauman's (1989) contrast between the 'hypothetical Jew' and the actual Jew that people knew), reversing (turning a negative into a positive – stifling procedures, intrusive controls, may be for the greater good?), and splitting (transferring positive side into unqualified love of some people, groups, parts of the company etc., and the negative into an unqualified hatred of others). Explore further.

Spotlight returns to ZB and NS

NS: Just my point. As companies encourage dependence, they inevitably create ambivalence. And with ambivalence, comes potential anxiety, and hence denial.

Freud nicely captures some of our defence mechanisms, and these are displayed clearly in Hephaestus and other companies.

ZB: So, do you agree with my modernist view. Organisations managing culture. Everyone pruned into shape, becoming a flower in the corporate garden. All weeds, however beautiful, must pretend to be a flower or be pulled up. Ambivalence is being constantly purged and the psychological pressure to conform enormous. Catherine observed the 'troublemaker Tom' at Hephaestus being pressured to not 'ask questions'. In your words, organisations 'manifest the principle of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility'. Louis (*Coser*) said the same thing; organisations 'sacrifice everything for cohesion and maintain that cohesion by excluding dissent'. There are pressures to 'expel the rebels'. Where people fear the consequences of being expelled, they must deny ambivalence, as different ways of doing things are unacceptable, no matter what the culture (Bauman 1997: 128-138; Casey 1995: 140-141).

NS: I hate to agree so readily, but yes. I tried to capture some of this, using Hirschman's three choices of: exit, voice or loyalty i.e. to be a committed corporate citizen, a distant and withdrawn critic, or a more active and critical faithful dissatisfaction somewhere in between. Catherine has a similar threefold model – identifying 'capitulated' or 'conformist' selves, 'resistant' or 'defensive' selves, and 'dramaturgical' selves as more openly ambivalent players in between. I side with Catherine in seeing all these forms as wrestling with ambivalence, albeit in different ways. I am not so certain, however, about the negative pessimism of her overall analysis.

ZB: Let me suggest a heavy modern/light modern twist on your ambivalence ideas. In heavy modernity, the negative side of worker ambivalence was expressed through the union and their challenges to authority given official voice. Both employers and workers recognised a mutual interdependency, but they also institutionalised their admitted conflict. But light modernity has repressed and isolated this voice. Capital has become ex-territorial, unilaterally cutting its dependency on labour. The absent owner has been joined by the absent manager and the absent supervisor. There is no 1984 style panoptic synoptic control, the many watching the one, leaves the individual trapped

uncomfortably in ambivalence, with no avenue for voice. Even if (s)he has the courage to voice a critique, who does (s)he voice it to? Many of Jim's (Barker) team members voiced ambivalence towards the new 'iron cage' of peer surveillance, concerned at the intrusion but not wanting to 'go back'. So how do they voice this concern at intimate repression?

NS: This might be over-generalised but I agree with your basic point. And even if the ambivalent person does find someone to express his or her voice to, (s)he does so knowing the overwhelming temptation of organisations to punish those who don't conform. In the face of all those Freudian repressions of ambivalence, the projection, the splitting, the displacement, the reversing, the reaction-formation, there is a real danger of opening up the Pandora's Box of ambivalence. They can alleviate their anxieties, shore up their defences, by demonising you – in all your constructive and open authenticity! As the old Turkish proverb says, 'Those who would tell the truth should have one foot in the stirrup'.

ZB: But let's explore this 'voice' option a bit further. Agreed, nearly all commentators seem to argue for a threefold response to ambivalence, the bewitched, the bothered and the bewildered. The range of this acceptance has been nicely documented by one of the authors of this play (one has to be polite to the authors!) The extreme ends seem clear. The repression and costs of the rigid, conformist and potentially burnt out over-committed zealot. The self-destructive, defensive, stressed, resigned or apathetic existence of the distant, withdrawn and alienated cynic. But, in between, is there no room for Simmel's 'stranger', those with 'distance and nearness, indifference and involvement' (Badham and Down 2006; Simmel 1950: 403).

NS: No, it doesn't have to be only denial, or why would I bother to argue my case for integrating rational choice with ambivalence? Individuals and organisations can, as Peter (*Weigert*) argues, accept some degree of ambivalence by relaxing demands for behavioural conformity? I can see the point of those who argue that 'high levels of ambivalence may lead to distress, erosion or dissolution of the relationship, whereas moderate levels can enhance and revitalise commitment'. Ambivalence may be 'a necessary and perhaps cyclical element in continuing

involvements' (Weigert 1991: 131; Lorenz-Meyer 2001; Thompson nad Holmes 1996: 503).

ZB: We seem to be in agreement here. Indulgently quoting myself for a moment, the 'socio-scientific' concept of ambivalence requires a leap from thinking of ambivalence as competing experiential pushes and pulls towards a 'widening of horizons' (Bauman 1992: 133).

NS: Be careful, Ziggy, there's pride in your work, and then there's arrogance. Try to be a little more ambivalent (*smiles*)! My comment here is more than a little dig; however, there are real ambivalences and tensions in this 'voice' space. If we follow up the stranger/marginality theme, Adam's (*Weisberger 1992*) work can be useful. At one extreme, he argues, there is 'assimilation', at the other the 'return', but in between there are two options 'transcendence' and 'poise'. Transcendence is about overcoming the conflict between two 'cultures' by creating a third way that is supposed to surpass and reconcile them. Voice, in such a view, would be crafting out a relatively stable 'third way'.

ZB: (*smiling*) Stability?

NS: (*also smiling*) You might prefer the last option, 'poise'. This is a stance that abides in the ambivalence, refusing to resolve it, despite the cost of loneliness and anxiety. It is both the 'flight from dependency and the recognition of human limits'. The poise response keeps frames in a liminal state; one is always standing at the threshold of the freeze-frame but never quite willing to step over the line. Those who abide in marginality elect to be *heimatlos*, homeless in a cultural sense. The payoff, Adam argues, can be a high degree of intellectual originality because it frees one from attachment to established frames of thought. But there is a problem, the angst!

ZB: I suppose we must keep in mind that etymologically, ambivalence is the modern translation of agony. A modern can't abide the concept of agony. Agony has no cure; it is long-term torment. Modernity creates a lust for authenticity but this ends up creating a fear of insanity or lonely self-affirmation. Where moderns redescribed agony as ambivalence, this was sometimes taken to be a psychological complaint to be addressed, somewhere between

schizophrenia and neurosis. An object for therapy. But what is really needed is something else. The marginal person with 'poise' needs to 'walk a tightrope over an abyss, and is therefore in need of a good sense of balance, great reflexes, tremendous luck, and the greatest among them: a network of friends who can hold her hand.'

NS: OK, Ziggy, enough of the continental eloquence. What does this mean? Do we have transcendence and poise as alternative options? If the ambivalence creation/denial/purging/creation merry-go-round spins faster and faster and never stops, what exactly is the hope for those living in its midst? As your friend Tom (Peters) puts it, 'no checklists?'

ZB: Solutions, solutions! I suppose I am arguing for an initial recognition of ambivalence towards our organisations, our dependence on them and them on us. An avoidance of an uncontrolled and unreflective swing between love and hate, a more self-aware grappling with the tensions. I am offering a version of Schizophrenia Awareness Week.

1.4 Scene 4 Ironical Sensibility

OVERHEAD SIGN

The lightness with which the individual handles a situated role is forced upon him by the weight of his manifold attachments and commitments to multi-situated social entities. Disdain for a situated role is a result of respect for another basis of identification.

Source: Goffman, Erving, 1962, Encounters P.142

Enter the Chorus

Beautifully radiant dancing girls mill around the stage, each dressed in different costumes of different colour, each dancing their own steps and at their own pace. Waltzing between the girls are four couples. Through the whirlwind of joyous colour it is possible to make them out as Gilbert Ryle and Daniel Dennett, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Donald Davidson, Frederick Nietzsche and Georg Hegel, and Harold Bloom and Sigmund Freud. The dancers begin to move to each side of the stage, leaving a central aisle down which a white-suited, white-haired figure casually strolls to join Ziggy in front of the fireplace.

ZB: Nice understated entrance, Richard.....NOT!

RR: If it isn't Ziggy, my favourite social redescriptionist. How's the liquid lifestyle?

ZB: Ambivalent, Richard, ambivalent. Have you met Neil, by the way? Neil, this is Richard Rorty. Have you time to stay and chat?

NS: No, I want none of his fiddly expertise. He's only likely to instigate an ambivalent angst of needing to hear more and yet be free of him. I'm off. *(grins and walks off-stage)*

RR: *(grins)* And I thought I alleviated ambivalent angst! Redescribed again! What were you two chatting about?

ZB: We were discussing the problems of ambivalence, the near impossibility for a modern to walk the tightrope between commitment and distance without falling into the traps of disillusionment or opportunism. But what's with all the dancing girls? (Dewandre 2005: 308-309)

RR: Oh, they're my ironists. Each of them has their own idiosyncratic style. Pretty, aren't they?

ZB: Indeed they are.

RR: Christianity. Revolution. Liberalism. Nationalism.

ZB: Pardon me?

Strobe lighting flashes, and the words on the backs of the dancing girls all change, morphing into others – Freedom. Justice. Truth. Efficiency.

RR: Just showing the fluidity of the dance, and how we see the dancers. Your drawing our attention to dying gasps of the modernist project is a gateway into the contingency of language, of self, of community, and ultimately of late-modern society. There is organizational contingency too, a discipline in which you and I are familiar but not overly so.

ZB: As long as familiarity doesn't breed contempt – and children! But to return to our work. Would you see my writings as being relevant to organisational studies, to this dance of identification? Would my vocabulary be 'a half-formed one vaguely promising great things?'

RR: Yours is a great vocabulary, Ziggy, and in an organizational sense, yes. Your work could offer a release from the entrenched vocabularies of organisational control, be they panoptic or synoptic, and shape new possibilities.

ZB: So, if that is what my musings can do, what can you do?

RR: I'm already doing it. I'm already more incorporated than you, Ziggy. Even so irony is oft perceived as a dirty word; cynicism or larking about. I'm here to change all that.

ZB: To redescribe irony, as it were?

RR: Exactly. To rescue it from the 'funny, ha, ha' misassumption. An ironic sensibility reconfigures vision and speaking. It is about recognising that we are all entrapped within our 'final vocabularies', that there are no ultimate grounds for truth, morality and action – yet we still wish to craft out 'our truth'. No transcendental guarantees of our rightness and correctness. We then have to look at the world not through the theoretical gaze of the detached philosopher,

but with the childlike vision of one whose world is as much played out in us as we determine our world. Irony is play; it is a language game, redrawing rules, reinventing dramatis personae, pawn to knight, knight to queen. But it is also serious, an attempt to provide ethical alternatives, more acceptable solutions, better ways of doing things, ones in which no one gets hurt. If it is only playful it offers no substance other than playful deconstruction after playful deconstruction. If it is only serious it becomes earnestness. It is 'serious play'. As Schlegel said, for the ironist, 'everything should be serious and everything should be playful' (Rorty 1989).

ZB: I get the idea of no 'final vocabularies'. It's similar to my idea of being an 'interpreter' not a 'legislator'. But I think there is more to add here. Irony is not just about language and realising that, despite our yearning for certainty, we live in a world of Plato's shadows. It is also about life. It is as much about recognising that there is no 'final resting place' that ultimately gives our lives meaning, yet continuing to struggle at the same time. And what does all this have to say about our problem - the dance of identification. What does an ironic view on this dance look like? (Bauman 1987; Bauman 1991: 244).

RR: I suppose my view is that while organizational theory seems to understand aspects of irony in addressing this issue, it isn't grasping its complexities. If you want to dance magnificently, you have to know all the best steps. Let's watch some of the dancers.

Stage Directions

A soldier enters the stage, dressed in 19th Century Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army fatigues. He sidles up to the dancers and begins to meticulously copy their movements, step for step, although every so often, when the dancer is facing away from him, he throws in a completely different action and grins broadly (Fleming and Sewell 2002).

ZB: Hi Svejik.

RR: The *irony of resistance*; the ironist who seeks to hide from the gaze of the disciplining authority.

ZB: This is a radical, light modern reading of the heavy modern problem of capitalist versus socialist, owner versus labour. Svejek understands the boundaries of the capitalist/socialist divide only too well and deems them insurmountable. He wants (needs) to have fun with them, to play around with border guards and potential gaolers, if only to create moments of personal freedom. He uses ironic methods to mask his intentions from the panoptic/synoptic agents but does not consider rewriting his role or challenging the perspectives of authority.

RR: Svejek's irony is *stable*; one that builds cosy, safe havens in an accepted worldview, one in which capitalism exploits the worker and the worker resists the exploitation. It offers one deconstruction only: 'you cannot (totally) control me!' The form of resistance is the use of personal ironic and cynical action rather than organised unionism. Svejek plays around with irony to obtain degrees of personal freedom and make sense of the increased control of the synopticon but he is never serious about it. To him it is just a trope. He will always remain a foot-soldier.

Stage Directions

To a Wagnerian overture, the lights dim and hundreds of white shirted office workers scurry onto the stage and dance about hesitantly and disjointedly, with no sense of pattern. A throne is lowered from the rafters but remains far above the action. The man sitting in the throne uses a powerful spotlight to pick out an office worker. When he does the worker stops moving dancing aimlessly and dances confidently and fluidly. The man turns it off. The office worker starts dancing aimlessly again. The man does it with a different worker and the process repeats. After a few more repetitions, the stage lights brighten and the throne ascends. The aimlessness of the office workers suddenly evaporates and they start dancing in pairs and groups, each group or pair perfectly following a specific set of steps. They dance off-stage. Ziggy resumes his conversation with Richard (Kunda 1992).

ZB: And that would be....

RR: Gideon Kunda. His appreciation of irony is drawn from literary criticism, especially Booth's 'unstable irony'. He sees the irony in the gap between 'the

ideal member [of a culturally engineered organization] as driven by strong beliefs and intense emotions, authentic experiences of loyalty, commitment, and the pleasure of work' and the actual production of 'members who have internalized ambiguity, who have made the metaphor of drama a centrepiece of their sense of self, who question the authenticity of all beliefs and emotions, and who find irony in its various forms the dominant mode of everyday existence' (Booth 1974: 236-249; Kunda 1992: 216).

ZB: But he redescribed a cultural design program from an ironic perspective! Is he saying his irony is good and the employees' irony bad?

RR: To an extent, yes. His irony is stable, rewriting the idea of culture design from a different, more enlightened perspective. He is Apollonian irony, 'an all-embracing crystal clear and serene glance [...]: a glance of the utmost freedom and calm and of an objectivity untroubled by any moralism.' In that respect he is little different from the culture designers, although he operates from a different perspective. Ultimately, though, he sees his perspective as offering a better final vocabulary than that of the cultural designers, and undoubtedly that of the organizational actors (Mann 1960; 88, in Muecke 1983: 400).

ZB: Kunda operates on the heavy modern axis, so his redescribing of organizational culture and the interactions of the actors becomes a more precise, better categorised filing cabinet than the ones used by the cultural designers. The possibility that the workers' irony could be passionate 'serious play' is ignored. For Kunda, their irony is always unstable, ready to dissolve into a spiral of nihilistic deconstruction. The office workers could be in tune with the demands of a light modern organization, juggling rapidly shifting requirements, redrawing the rules of the game as they play it.

RR: Kunda's irony is the *irony of the lonely crowd*: and he sits apart from the crowd and redescribes it from an elevated throne. He remains forever remote. For Kunda, each actor can only be seen authentically through his sociological spotlight; without such a spotlight the actor spins in nihilistic confusion. As he is never part of the crowd, he risks not seeing the dance from the dancers' perspective. The dancers in the crowd are searching for dance partners; people

who dance the same steps, hear the same music. Kunda will remain either deaf to these tunes or unable to make sense of the dance

Stage Directions

The lights darken again. From one side of the stage walk a doctor, a teacher and a public administrator. They are followed by a bunch of black-suited managerial types, all carrying masses of paper work and measuring devices. On the other side a patient is wheeled in, a student sitting at his desk, and a stressed looking woman with 'customer' written on her back. The doctor, the teacher and the administrator take up positions between the two groups. The doctor happily dances towards the patient, the teacher to the student, and the administrator to the customer. But as they bend down to talk to them, the managers call 'time's up'. The noticeably less happy trio dance back to the managers to fill in their paper work, but before they reach them, duplicates of the patient, student and customer appear. The trio, more agitated now, dance back to the newcomers, and the process repeats. Eventually, the doctor, teacher and administrator stop dancing altogether and stand motionless between the two points.

RR: A perfect example of the paralytic response towards competing discourses. The poor public servants, trying to get the job done, are trapped between bureaucratic demand and professional duty; ambivalence in the different status sets. Robert should be here to watch this! (Merton 1976)

Stage Directions

From the rafters three ropes are lowered. On the end of each rope is a mask. The trio puts them on and grasps the ropes. They are hosted above the 'clients' and managers but can still touch their heads. They swing from one side to the other whilst dropping prescriptions, textbooks and material to the 'clients' and documents into the hands of the managers. Some of the swings are long and languid, some quick and sharp, but as the managers and clients always look downwards they can't tell one from the other.

RR: More of my scene this, a radical redescription of a contradictory situation in which both sides benefit and neither side gets hurt. They are practising what Mike and Eric (Wallace and Hoyle: 2007) call *principled infidelity*, masking their

actual intentions and actions, and crafting out their solutions in the space that they create. They don't just dance the tune of others: they write and listen to their own music.

ZB: So, they are pragmatic pluralists, recognising the impossibility of aligning two contradictory heavy modern commands: the needs of their 'clients' ('heal me', 'teach me', 'serve me') and the managers' ('adhere to the gospel of the performance metric'). They inhabit the space between competing discourses, public expectations of service and governmental definition of duties.

RR: This is the *irony of the outsider-insider*, of the person who spends his or her work life straddling the boundaries of two competing worlds. They wear the compassionate mask as well as the dispassionate one. They lean in both directions but don't lose their balance.

Stage Directions

The lights darken again. Svejk, Gideon Kunda, the office workers, the doctor/teacher/public administrator, the managers, and, the dancing girls all dance around the stage, each lost in their own steps, moving to their own private music. Despite all the different steps and speeds, the dancing seems beautiful; composed amid the chaos.

ZB: I can see the beauty in the complexity of interaction, the fluidity of the dance. But isn't this a utopia? Surely an ironic stance cannot reconcile very real problems?

RR: The point is well made; irony is not a solution but a way of life. What could be described, using Adam's (Weisberger 1992) terms, as a 'transcendental' solution has been given by my more pragmatic US counterparts. Debra (Meyerson 2003) has given us cases of what she calls 'tempered radicals', juggling commitments to their organisation and careers as well as 'external' commitments to women's rights, racial equality and so on. Janice (Klein 2004) has talked to us about the 'outsider-insiders' working inside organisations to bring about change to a new way of thinking. Rosabeth (Moss Kanter 2006) has described the 'confidence' that she wishes to engender in turnaround organisations as being 'the sweet spot between arrogance and despair'. In each case, there is a recognition and awareness of dilemmas, contradiction and

ambivalence, and no relapse into simple zealot like commitment to one agenda or the distanced and cynical withdrawal of those who take their toys and go home. This does not mean that they will succeed. It also doesn't mean that they have the 'poise' that we talked about earlier. When I asked Rosabeth about how ironic her successful leaders were, she admitted 'I have not thought about it.' But they do possess the kind of critical engagement, the ability to be both 'in' and 'out', that characterises those able to dance more lightly in the face of ambivalence.

ZB: This begins to make more sense.

RR: But don't get me wrong. These ironic exemplars are only partial. They do not incorporate the full complexity of meaning and action that make up irony.

ZB: So, what does it involve?

Stage Directions

From the chorus one of the she-ironist dances to the front of the stage. She is holding a sign, on which is written 'the ironic gaze'. She quotes the following:

The ironic gaze recognises situational irony, unintended consequences, the clash between aspirations and achievements. In its more 'unstable' form, it recognises the potential for redescription in all thought and interaction.

RR: The *irony of resistance* notes the discrepancy between the rhetoric and actions of those in power, and seek to create situational ironies, ensuring that the actions of the powerful have consequences that they did not intend; the *irony of the lonely crowd* is less stable, it also recognises the gap between rhetoric and reality, but it generalises this to all of our multiple rhetorics, and perceives no secure or authentic pass to follow; the *irony of the outsider-insider* gazes at two opposing legislatures, and sees both as unable to achieve their goals, without recognising their contradictory other.

ZB: Yet irony is richer than that, surely. Is it not more than simply observing incongruities in words and actions?

Stage Directions

From the chorus one of the she-ironist dances to the front of the stage. She is holding a sign, on which is written 'the ironic performance'. She quotes the following:

The ironic performance goes further. It extends the traditional view of verbal irony, saying one thing but meaning another, into a masked performance. It uses ironic communication, indirect speech and action to simultaneously reveal and hide meaning. It assumes a knowing and unknowing audience. It is maiutic, creating solidarity amongst the 'knowing' audience or leading it to a new perspective. It also has an edge, a put down, a masked deceit, towards the unknowing audience. It allows the performer to be more than one thing at a time, to work on different levels. As dear Oscar put it, 'The man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one. It is the only thing he is fit for.'

RR: The *irony of resistance* performance has an unknowing audience (ironic victim) in authority, while binding together the dispossessed in mocking or challenging that authority. The *irony of the lonely crowd* performs to multiple audiences, each of which is unknowing, unaware of the insincerity and lack of conviction in their performance. The only knowing audience are those who are aware that all is performance and nothing is purposeful. The ironic performance of the *outsider-insider* to two main audiences, either one being in a position to be a knowing audience if they accept the validity of the other, but being an unknowing audience if they ignore or seek to repress it.

ZB: But your view of irony seemed somehow to be more engaged than that. Is irony nothing but a wry look at the world and a playful mask?

Stage Directions

From the chorus one of the she-ironist dances to the front of the stage. She is holding a sign, on which is written 'the ironic temper'. She quotes the following:

The ironic temper is a philosophy of life, an underlying orientation towards knowledge and the world. It is not just about using irony as a trope within a local language game, but being aware of the relativity of all such language games. It is not just about recognising local paradoxes, contradictions and unintended

consequences, but about understanding the comedy and the tragedy of inevitable gaps between human aspirations and achievements. When someone has an ironic temper, they stand back from the local 'finite' games to embrace the more fundamental 'infinite' game, acknowledging endless redescriptions, the absence of a final resting place. It is about recognising the disjunction between hopes, ideals and aspirations on the one hand, and achievements, results and outcomes on the other – and simultaneously embracing and distancing itself from the striving to close such gaps (Gergen 1992: 196-198).

RR: In different ways, the ironies of resistance, the lonely crowd and the outsider-insider each capture elements of the ironic temper but only partially so. The irony of resistance gives up on the striving to engage in transforming organisations, and fails to question its alternative stable source of authority and meaning. The irony of the lonely crowd gives up on all aspirational commitments, and does not question the meaningfulness of its own enterprise. The irony of the outsider-insider provides us with a two-dimensional focus for action and reflection, but does not reflect on that basic focus itself. In short, while hinting at some dimensions, none of these organisational studies stereotypes captures the full complexity of the ironic temper.

ZB: Does our analysis stop here, then? In accepting and addressing the ambivalence in the dance of identification, is your argument that we should adopt an ironic temper, of a kind not yet recognised in organisation studies? Or is complex irony even more than that?

RR: It is more than that. Complex irony recognises the fluid interconnections between the *ironic gaze*, the *ironic temper* and the *ironic performance*. It embraces the multiple concepts and usages of irony. Moreover, it does not simply stigmatise any of the particular uses of irony as being 'wrong', to be replaced by a 'superior' form of irony. Irony is far more unstable than that. Each of the positions adopted within organisational studies captures a dimension of irony but then appear to fix it within a particular zone. It prescribes a restricted form of irony, without understanding the tensions and dilemmas that make it such a fluid orientation. Irony is more than a smirk and a sneer, cynicism and larking about, but it has all these dimensions. It can have a

more elitist ridiculing or collaborative bonding element. It can be more stable, authoritative, serious and fixed or more unstable, playful, self-critical and fluid in its orientation.

ZB: Again, trying to pull you back to our central concern – the ambivalence towards our organisational lives, and our dance of identification. What contribution do you see irony as playing?

RR: Well, Erv has nicely shown us that our organisational commitments are a dance of identification. We depend on, identify with and commit to the collaborative endeavours of the organisations we are part of but we also identify with other social commitments. The balance may vary but the tension exists, particularly within modern plural settings. We are, inevitably, holding company selves. In performing the inevitable dance, we are faced with ambivalence. Our organisational commitments are both a source of self-realisation and a threat to our autonomy and independence. Modernity fosters, in us and organisations, a unitary commitment to organisational order, adherence to authoritative knowledge and a quest to attain a stable 'resting place'. Yet it also creates multiple commitments within and beyond the organisation, plural and uncertain knowledges and knowledge claims, and a recognition of ongoing struggle and change. And this is not a case of one 'sacred' truth facing a 'profane' other – either as autonomous individuals exploited by organisations or as organisational champions dealing with disruptive unproductive people and conditions. We are caught in ambivalence that, to varying degrees, we accept or repress, and which makes us anxious and stressed or playful and creative.

ZB: But, how exactly do people respond to this ambivalence? How do they interpret and act on it? I would say that it is at this point that organisational studies is at its weakest. Most of our attention has been focused on documenting ambivalence. Those who have sought to interpret its effects have all too quickly leapt into premature judgments about what this ambivalence 'means'.

RR: Agreed, and so it is with the discussion of the ironic response. I would say there are good arguments for acknowledging rather than denying ambivalence – ranging from the costs of repression to the benefits of acceptance. If so, then an ironic awareness of these contradictions, that we are inevitably caught up in

ambivalence and dilemmas, and have to craft out a response that acknowledges this situation, seems eminently sensible. An ironic gaze allows us to accept that our plans inevitably go awry, that we undermine one set of ideals by pursuing others. An ironic performance allows us to create a community with others in a similar situation, acknowledging the pressures that are on us, and to act effectively in situations where a degree of deception is inevitable. An ironic temper enables us to recognise and directly address the comic, and tragic, nature of our dilemmas. But, how this is all done, is another thing. Ironic awareness can take many different forms, from a background semi-conscious liberal playfulness to a foreground angst ridden sense of purposelessness. We need to explore further how people are actually responding, and what appear to be the costs and benefits of different forms.

ZB: So, after all this, you are not taking a stance. It is just 'more research'. Don't you have a preferred ironic position, from which you suggest we analyse and evaluate how people conduct their dance of identification?

RR: I do, and it is linked to the old Socratic view of the critical ironist, 'a gadfly constantly agitating a horse, preventing it from becoming sluggish'. My ironist knows gadflies are swatted by irritated horses but persists anyway. Horses do not recognise the benefit of the stings; they just want to stop the pain. They are unlikely to recognise an ironic sting as engagement, rather an unneeded and uncalled for agitation. As Socrates discovered, punishment can be swift and merciless (Plato et al. 1901).

ZB: Which is why the performance is so necessary? To anesthetize the sting?

RR: On the proviso it doesn't risk the goal of challenging sluggishness in ourselves and others. As you mentioned earlier, the greatest need of the contingent person *was a network of friends who can hold her hand*. As the *ironic performance* plays towards *knowing* and *unknowing* audiences, the ironist needs to find out who is going to hold her hand, and who will slap it away. Any ironic strategy is inevitably high risk – but is there any other way?

ZB: So, you do have an ironic model? Organizational theorists like models.

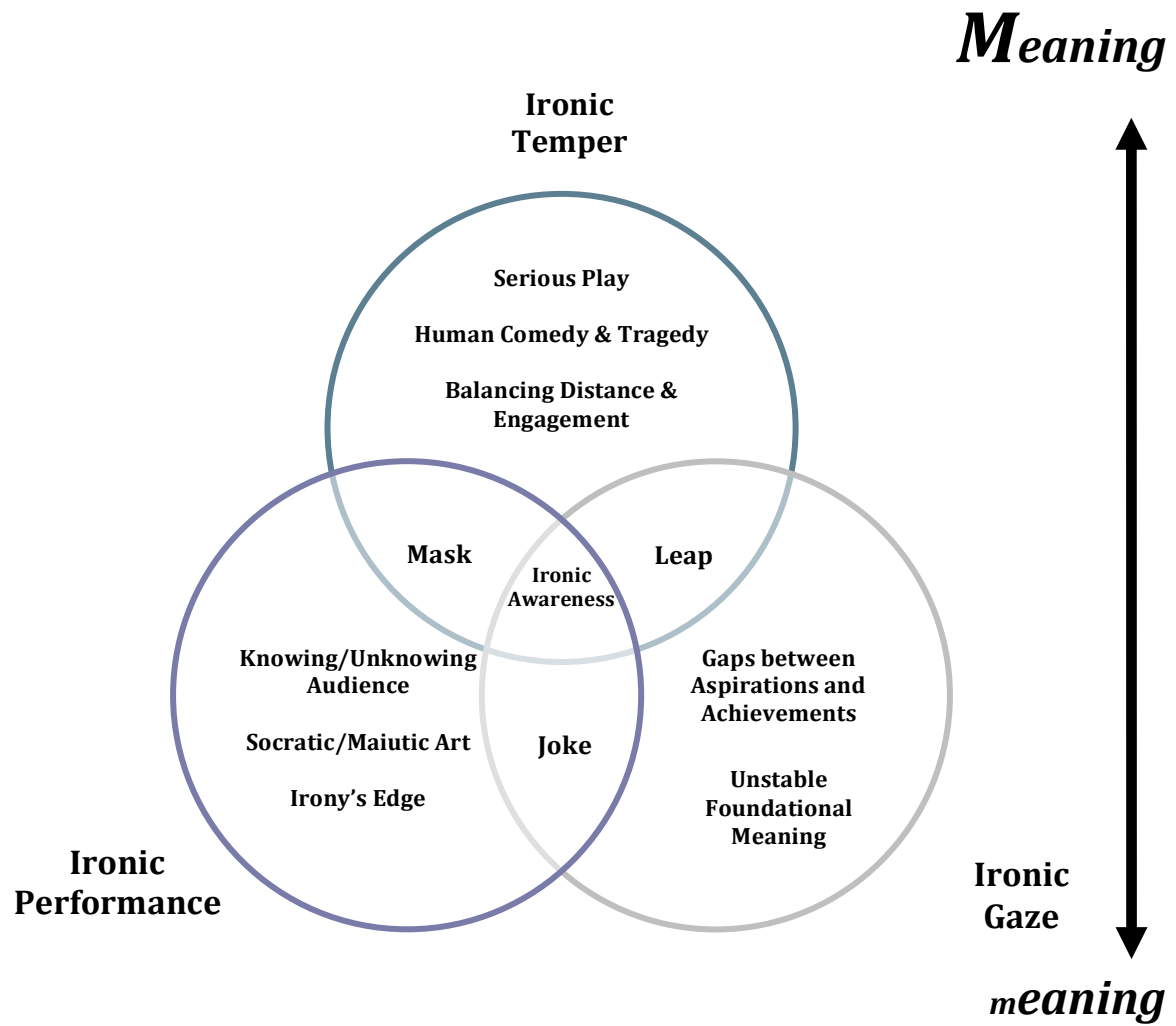
RR: Ziggy, the last thing an ironist needs is a model of irony.

Stage Directions

Both ZB and RR stand up. They are joined by the other actors. All bow. As they rise, they pull back masks from their faces, revealing what we knew all along – they all look remarkably similar to the authors of the play

The Curtain Comes Down

On the back of the curtain is the following model of irony:



Any resemblance to any person living or dead is purely coincidental. They are all academics!

1.5 Credits

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2 The Ambivalence Paradox in Cultural Change

2.1 Introduction

Managerial culture change programs are expected to integrate employees into the organisational 'family', align their performance with organizational expectations and improve competitiveness. To achieve these aims, such programs identify a set of organizational practices contributing to poor performance and, in a sense, conceptually 'freeze' them into a 'bad/irrational' conceptualisation of organization (Weick and Quinn 1999). In classic Enlightenment terms, this conceptually frozen 'irrational' past (Age of Unreason – Position 1) is then contrasted with an alternative concept: a 'good/rational' organizational future (Age of Reason – Position 2) (Badham 1986). To enable Position 1 to become Position 2, change programs often initiate a series of processes designed to 'un-freeze' current 'bad' practices, 'move' the organisation through the change, and 're-freeze' them into new 'good' ones (Brown 1998). In a dangerous caricature of Kurt Lewin's original, considered and provocative three-stage model of change (Badham 1986: Chapter One; Burnes 2004) Ch.1), planned cultural change is presented in one-dimensional terms as a rigid, sequenced and autocratic process. As illustrated in Barker's (1993) description of the early stages of change in ISE, however, the subsequent 'betwixt and between' experiences of liminality awaken critical reflection upon all aspects of such processes. The managerially initiated program attempts to whip up enthusiasm for the 'good/rational' organizational future, seeks to restrict and direct these reflective abilities, yet inevitably fails in this task.

Managerial attempts are made to create an emotional attachment to a restricted view of the 'journey' (Dunn 1990; Grint 1994) that potentially disables more generalised reflection. It is no coincidence that the first major study of deliberate psychological processes of 'unfreezing', 'moving' and 'refreezing' by Schein (Schein, Barker et al. 1961) was undertaken as an investigation of the brainwashing of US citizens captured by the Chinese in North Korea. The very nature of this 'three step' process mirrors the ritualised conversion processes of 'rites of passage', in its symbolic 'separation' from the past, movement through a

'liminal' state and 're-incorporation' in the future (Turner 1982; Turner and Turner 1985; Brown 1998). However, while doubt and reflectivity are important parts of any transition ritual, the goal of many planned cultural change initiatives has tended to be to enforce and reinforce a different unitary mindset that aligns committed, motivated, hardworking and, importantly, uncritical employees to the process and practices of the new cultural regime.

As Bauman (1991) explores in some depth, these very attempts to order, control and align human subjects are inevitably unsuccessful in eliminating uncertainty and ambivalence. They paradoxically end up increasing the very ambiguity and ambivalence that they sought to purge. The attempt to plan cultural change leads to unexpected consequences. Implementation in practice is a (non-trivial) complex affair. The quest to achieve order and unity through the imposition of new classifications and ordering devices creates new ambiguities and ambivalences as they require further interpretation, detailing and application.

One traditional breeding ground for routine organisational ambivalence is the tension generated in employees trapped between a reliance on the organization for continued existence and resentment towards the organization for its limitation of their freedoms and the imposition of its practices. The ultimate aim of the type of planned change programme outlined above is to combine emotional, cognitive and volitive methods (Smelser 1997) to purge this ambivalence and align member motivations and emotions with the interests of the organization. However, by encouraging critical reflection on the old practices, change programs inevitably open up criticism of the change process itself – yet often attempt to restrict or even forbid such reflections. Influenced by exhortations to critically reflect on existing 'bad' organizational processes, those subject to change programs often extend their criticism to perceived ambiguities, contradictions, paradoxes and gaps in the new 'good' ones. While liminality allows and encourages employees to recognise the arbitrary and restrictive nature of cultural authority (Turner 1982; Turner and Turner 1985), and enables the voicing of discontent, imposed requirement of new regimes for total commitment and loyalty attempt to restrict this reflection in an attempt to guide a commercialised 're-incorporation'. Consequently, overt critique of the new

regime is often condemned as resistance, and extended critical reflection then tends to become covert, unvoiced backstage ambivalent critique accompanied by irony and humour.

Caught within an underlying ambivalence towards the organisation, and corporate ambivalence towards critical reflection on organisational practices, managers and employees attempt the uncomfortable task of grappling with its meaning for themselves and the organisations within which they work. In this way, an ambivalence paradox is created. Change programs that seek to purge ambivalence, are in the paradoxical position of actually enhancing it.

As we will argue below, for many radical critics of such culture change programs, the resulting ambivalence is captured, positioned and stigmatised as the empty 'irony' or 'bewildered' wanderings of 'capitulating' organisational 'dramaturgs', characterised as one organisational 'position' contrasted to the engaged enthusiasts ('colluded', 'conformist', 'bewitched') and the distanced critics ('defensive', 'resistant', 'bothered'). However, as we will seek to show, it is arguable that there are significant elements of ambiguity and ambivalence in the mindset and practices of many (if not all) managers and employees, promoters and targets of change. Given that critical reflection is brought into being and then repressed by the processes of change, it is not surprising that this occurs. It can, in a sense, be seen as the inevitable outcome of the lived experience of an extreme version of what is arguable the general 'liminoid' nature of late modern existence (Turner 1982).

How all managers and employees grapple with such ambiguities, and the ambivalence they generate, is an important site for research and investigation (Badham and Garrety 2003; Badham and McLoughlin 2005). In exploring this theme, this chapter draws on a case study of the complex subject positions adopted by organisational actors to help open up the intellectual space for such explorations. It is the argument presented here that in order to help inform future studies, the initial tri-partite positioning of managers and employees as 'zeolots', 'cynics' or ironic 'dramaturgs' should be used in a more reflective and nuanced fashion (see, for example, the discussion of 'positioning' in (see, for example, the discussion of "positioning" in Davies and Harré 1990; Harre and

Langenhove 1998) It should be explicitly understood as an initial guide and orientation for exploring subject positions not as a set of typecast characters. A central characteristic of the lived experience of those caught in the 'blender' of culture change programs is embedded uncertainty (Badham and Garrety: 2003). In order to capture this experience it is necessary to provide a fluid, processual and interactive investigation of change program participant's positioning of themselves and others. Such an investigation does more than capture the inevitably fragmented, multi-dimensional, and fluid character of organisational change(ing) (Weick and Quinn: 1999). It also, most importantly, provides the intellectual space for reflection and voice about the experienced ambiguities, ambivalences, uncertainties and paradoxes on the part of those involved in such change. In so doing, it helps create the conditions for a more intimate dialogue between those experiencing and those studying what are inherently complex and often harrowing change experiences.

2.2 Planned Culture Change Programs

Planned organisational development initiatives stemming from the innovative and critical work of Kurt Lewin and his followers are broad ranging, complex and multidimensional in character (Gallos 2006). One particular form, widespread since the 1980s, are managerialist 'strong culture' initiatives advocating a more deliberate and systematic engineering of the subjective and emotional dimensions of employee experience. (Ouchi 1981; Deal and Kennedy 1982; Peters and Waterman 1982; Ray 1986; Willmott 1993). Such initiatives at cultural re-engineering draw on a long, established and arguably cyclical tradition of recommending organisational regulation through normative control (Barley and Kunda 1992; McLoughlin, Badham et al. 2005). This tradition continues to be influential in initiatives informed by discourses of enterprise (du Gay: 2000), ranging from arguments for greater empowerment and engagement to exhortations for employees to 'be themselves' in a more fun and authentic work culture (Fleming: 2009).

Such prescriptive managerial initiatives have been accompanied by a proliferation of critical analyses within organisational studies, arguably originating with Ray's (1986: 293) argument that the demands of corporate culture were generating a 'love of the firm and its goals' engineered by 'manipulation of culture including myth [and] ritual'. Subsequent critiques have expanded upon these themes, drawing attention to the seductive nature of organizational culture, with its tendencies towards totalizing and inescapable normative control (Casey: 1995).

Following this lead, managerial and critical perspectives on normative cultural re-engineering developed into significant but largely incompatible literatures. In crude terms, early approaches tended to fall into dichotomous categories of 'consensus' v 'conflict' (Burrell and Morgan 1979) or 'integrationist' v 'differentiationist' (Martin (1992; 2001) paradigms. The former is unitarist, functionalist, consensual and managerialist, assuming and/or pursuing a common and benign organizational culture, creating committed corporate citizens. The latter assumes an embedded inequality in organizations, domination by the most powerful, and conflicting ideologies reflecting different interests, generating resistant practices and sub-cultures. In a sense, these perspectives reflect the common sense 'dual code' within organisations themselves, a bi-polar pattern of alternative organizational languages and moralities about organisational life and experience, identified by Dalton (1961) and Burns (1961).

While these perspectives have traditionally dominated much of the literature on organisations and culture, Martin (1992; 2001) has identified a third influential tradition in culture studies, that of 'fragmentationism'. This perspective emphasises the complex, multi-dimensional, messy and emergent nature of culture and its transformation. Within studies of cultural re-engineering, this perspective is reflected in studies of the inherent ambivalence and ambiguity in such programs (Badham and Garrety 2003, Mcloughlin, Badham and Palmer 2005), as well as in observations of the lived experience and discourses of a class of emergent 'ironic' (Kunda 1992), 'capitulated' (Casey 1995), 'dramaturgical'

(Collinson 1992), and 'bewildered' (Knights and McCabe 2000) set of organizational actors.

The latter descriptions of a new category of organisational actors are embedded in tripartite classifications of responses to cultural change programs: as 'colluded', 'defensive' or 'capitulated'; 'conformist', 'resistant' or 'dramaturgical'; or 'bewitched', 'bothered' or 'bewildered'. Such tripartite descriptions have stimulated far-reaching discussion and debate. It would, however, betray the intentions of their originators if these were to become a somewhat stereotyped tripartite classification, replacing a restricted bi-polar model with an equally rigid tripartite alternative. Taking the insights of the fragmentationist perspective seriously means that any such crude classification is unlikely to capture the complexity of organisational life. As we shall illustrate below, the lived experience and discursive interpretations of those involved in cultural re-engineering is far more ambiguous and ambivalent than this simple trichotomy suggests.

Are we, however, caught in a double bind of either uncritically accepting an overly-simplified classification or relapsing into a relatively undirected and uninspiring appeal to recognising complexity and ambiguity? The answer is that we are not inevitably trapped in such a dichotomy. Rather than viewing this tripartite positioning as a comprehensive account of lived experience, they may be viewed as cultural 'typifications', part of the established narrative positioning adopted by organisational actors involved in change programs. As argued by Sturdy, Schwarz and Spicer (2006), the experience of ambiguity and uncertainty in 'liminal' spaces such as those encountered during such programs does not mean that these events are not structured by narrative, ritual and ceremony.

As social encounters, all change situations are characterised by the interactional dynamics of actors and audiences as they iteratively present and receive definitions of the participants and the situation they are in (Edgley 2003). Change agents are thus involved in handling multiple expectations and counter-expectations, conflicting and shifting frames, and contested and emergent accounts and motives. As social episodes, however, such situations are more or less ritualised in character, interpreted through more or less established

narratives and stories, and involve plots and ceremonies marking their beginning, middle and end (Badham, Mead et al. 2012). It is the argument of this chapter, that in the context of cultural re-engineering programs, the tripartite academic characterisation of actors' responses *is* reflected in the experiences and interpretations offered by the actors themselves. At the same time, however, the actors *go beyond* such simple typifications, tacitly and at times explicitly, recognising the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in their situation and their responses to it. The main purpose of this chapter is to capture some of complexity and sophistication of how organisational actors grapple their experiences, in ways that draw on yet go beyond the simplistic narratives embedded in organizational ideologies, and the analyses and prescriptions of many consultant, and even academic, observers.

2.3 Culture Change at Steelmaking Oz

Drawing on a longitudinal ethnographic study of cultural change in an Australian steelworks (Steelmaking Oz) (Badham, Garrety et al. 2003; McLoughlin, Badham et al. 2005) (Down and Reveley 2009), this chapter explores the interesting and complex ways in which actors whose interpretations and self-definitions conform to the tripartite classification, also reveal a more or less reflective ambiguous and ambivalent response to such narrative positioning. In conclusion, the implications of this phenomenon for future studies of cultural re-engineering are explored.

The ethnographic standpoint employed in the study is driven by assumptions that an organization is a socially constructed system, the cultural reality of which is actively created and maintained through the symbolic practice of its members. To draw out this lived experience, the research team immersed themselves in the everyday life of the organization to gain 'some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by the members of the written-about group' (Van Maanen 1988: 13)13). In describing the attitude to the research project it is perhaps also useful to reference Kenneth Burke's exhortation to 'use all there was to use'. These perspectives on research are highlighted by the nature of the research team, managed by the first author,

which comprised people with a diverse range of academic backgrounds—sociology, work psychology, engineering, organizational learning and occupational health and safety. During the six and half year project, running from 1998 to 2004, some team members directly contributed to the change initiative, giving the intervention an action research flavour, seen by Lewin (1946) as facilitating academic access to valuable data that they would not otherwise collect. This includes basic access to those who are seen as providing potential benefits to the client, confidences given to ‘insiders’ and insights gained from first-hand experience of dilemmas and problems of change, and more formal forms of collaboration in testing academic theories and hypotheses in real-world experiments. In managing the team, the first author was very aware of the dangers of this method, arguing that action ‘researchers [often] become overly client-centered and focus only on action, not research; they do not define problems from the perspective of the client; they do not study the processes of their own interventions; they neglect to test hypotheses; and they continue to work within the paradigm of “normal science” ’ (French and Bell 1999: 183). 138). To avoid this the broader project also employed more traditional observational ethnographic research, such as in the Utilities project conducted by the third author. Overall, data was therefore collected from a number of interrelated projects using a range of techniques and in a range of settings. The quotes selected below derive from a number of these projects and include: formal taped interviews at work; field notations of informal one-on-one talks at work; off-site one-to-one informal talks; formal taped group meetings at work; and informal non-taped meetings at work. Notations in square brackets after the quote denote which type of data and the setting. The strong themes of ambiguity and ambivalence presented below emerged as these relationships matured over the six and a half year intervention and undoubtedly contributed to the later direction of the research and its related publications. The following three sections document these experiences amongst what initially appeared to be different ‘conformist’, ‘resistant’ and ‘dramaturgical’ groups.

2.4 Integrationism and Conformist Selves

The integrationist perspective on organisational life views cultural change programs as reflecting the interests of their developers. These cultural redesign programs are seen as seeking to introduce a new form of emotional (Kunda and Van Maanen 1999), normative (Barley and Kunda 1992), personal (Hochschild 1983), concertive (Barker 1993) or intimate surveillance based (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992) forms of control to replace or supplement traditional direct, technical, rational or bureaucratic forms (Delbridge and Ezzamel 2005). Such programs are regarded as deliberately and systematically seeking to rationalize the organizational self in a manner that (a) generates intellectual and emotional commitment to the goals of the organization and (b) develops ways of organizing and rewarding work that supports and mobilizes discretion in the pursuit of these goals. To achieve these aims, they are seen to explicitly deploy a legitimising rhetoric of freedom that seeks to create commitment to the program's goals and the forms of work that they espouse. Organizational members are exhorted to care about the new culture and related corporate goals and values.

Whereas culture change gurus claim such programs improve employee commitment through notions of improved empowerment, self-efficacy and task ownership that lead to increased autonomy, critics of their totalising effect frame this in terms of loss of independence and responsibility: "Once people over-align themselves with a company, and invest excessive faith in the wisdom of its leaders, they are liable to lose their original sense of identity [and] tolerate ethical lapses they would have previously deplored" ((Tourish and Vatcha 2005: 476)476). This loss is accompanied by the effects of being subordinated to an inherently contradictory change rhetoric, a rhetoric that it is difficult for organizational members to challenge. In his influential critique, Willmott (1993) cited the following two passages from the guru text *In Search of Excellence*:

There was hardly a more pervasive theme in the excellent companies than *respect for the individual* ... These companies give people control over their destinies; they make meaning for people (Peters and Waterman 1982, 238-9, quoted in Willmott 1993, 526; emphasis in original).

A set of shared values and rules about discipline, details and execution *can provide the framework in which practical autonomy takes place* ... The institution provides the guiding belief and creates a sense of excitement, a sense of being a part of the best (Peters and Waterman 1982, 323, quoted in Willmott 1993, 524-5; emphasis added)

Within the rhetoric of normative control, freedom is allowed and even encouraged, but only within strict constraints. Individuals are respected only if they 'buy into' organizational norms. Work, generally a mundane necessity comprising a mix of boring and interesting tasks, is artificially inflated into a source of 'excitement'. Employees are consequently plagued with a debilitating sense of ambivalence and confusion.

Within Steelmaking Oz's Cokemaking Plant, the overall rhetoric was that of a culture of enterprise (McLoughlin, Badham et al. 2005). Discussions of the change 'journey' involved the plant manager's highly personalised spin on classic themes of individual 'self-expression', the significance of an 'integrated self' that links the self 'at work' and 'at home', the creation of an 'expressive community', and the establishment of a 'tight-loose' structure of individual and group autonomy (Badham and Garrety 2003; McLoughlin, Badham et al. 2005). This rhetoric was cascaded through the organization and the managers from different sections of the plant were tasked with instigating the changes. As illustrated in the commentaries of Garry, the Plant Manager, and Albert, the Manager of Utilities, the section that maintains and repairs the doors and ovens of the 'coke batteries', the attempt was being made to impose a new corporate ethos on a workforce divided by the long standing identification of employees as 'wages' and 'workers' and management as 'staff'.

Management was frustrated by the resistance to the new culture, which was exhibited by an unwillingness to work overtime, backed up by manipulative and false unavailability, and a loss of morale on the part of those feeling they were having to do more than their fair share. In response, they drew upon metaphors

of family and parenting to illustrate the differences between mature commitment and immature selfishness. In Utilities, buy in to the ideals informing the change program was clearly exemplified in the rhetoric of the manager. Albert applied a deliberate policy of hiring new employees from 'greenfield' sectors and backgrounds with higher skills, education levels and more enterprising attitudes. Cultural change at Utilities included the division of the workforce into 'higher level' Technicians and 'lower level' Specialists. The Technician designation, taking on project work and some supervisory responsibility, had been used by Albert as an opportunity to put 'five or six best performing people' into more responsible roles: self-motivated and entrepreneurial individuals keen to develop and learn at work. Albert was, however, experiencing problems that he defined in terms of the more 'selfish' lower selves of his employees conflicting with what he perceived as their more desirable higher selves. As Albert put it,

'You have got to understand where our people are at, at the moment. Our people on the shop floor [...], they're not demonstrating the maturity of being an active self-managed workforce [...]. We've got some issues within Utilities because individuals can't see that it's got to be a win-win relationship. [...] I have people that I could trust with my life... and then I've got others that are Battery Specialists that are so self-absorbed that I can't depend on them... [I'm] personally absolutely devastated with what's going on [...]. So they're very, very selfish to me'

[Formal interview with third author in Albert's office].

This 'immaturity,' often seen in terms of selfishness and personal disappointment, required the use of threatening behaviour or responsible parenting of 'immature' children. Following an incident involving a lost key to a shared toolbox that required the use of bolt cutters to cut through the padlock, a Technician kept the padlock remains on top of his computer, 'Michael explained that the broken lock was going to stay as a symbol of the mentality of people that work here. The point was that Michael didn't believe that they had lost the key. He believed that they were playing games. Damien [another Technician] said that

“it must have been one of the children; kids are like that”. Damien said [to the researcher], “you think I’m kidding? They are kids”. Michael agreed.’

[Third author field notes of informal non-taped meeting at work]

Managers emphasised that employees were being taken on a ‘journey’ not of their own choosing but were going to be ‘cared’ for along the way. On the one hand, this issue was put clearly and forcefully. As Garry commented,

‘the issue is getting them to move, and the way is to show them that there will be no accommodation. They have to change. At present this is seen as uncaring, but there is no option. The challenge is to care for them during the process. The question is when is the appropriate time to reveal that there is no option?’

[first author, informal interview at work]

Much of the discussion about caring has explicit overtones of parental ‘tough love’. Garry was critical of managers who were scared of being honest and confronting people with unpleasant realities of job losses and changing conditions, and ‘caring’ acted as an excuse for deceit, covering a concern that imposing hardships on people would destroy their relationship with them. As Garry said,

‘How do we make a change when wages and salaries are blown up with overtime and shift allowances? Management has allowed this to happen. Now is the time to “take the lollies away”’. [First author, informal reflective meeting at work]

Although Garry and Albert were committed to the new ‘caring’ ethos and signed up to its promises of delivering an organization staffed by ‘committed, loyal and hard-working employees’, they were continually having to balance this perspective against the necessity of bullying, cajoling or forcing members to accept the new direction. To pursue the integrationist vision, they were required to employ authoritarian practices that were in opposition to its supposed values

and vision. To cope with the contradiction and ambivalence, they employed oxymoronic concepts such as 'uncaring caring' or 'tough love' to wrestle with the necessity of transforming selfish, immature lower selves into the self-motivated, entrepreneurial higher selves the change programme promised to deliver. Although they were committed to the pursuit of an integrated organizational milieu, they regularly had to undermine their own espoused beliefs in order to achieve it. Some idea of the frustration and ambivalence that this generated in those promoting the program is indicated in one of Garry's intimate reflections,

'Maslow's hierarchy may be passé but how real it is. I go with everybody wanting self actualization. Some want a good job for today to pay the bills for today, yet you are making assumptions about what people want in life and what is good for them. [...] 500 individuals with agendas for themselves and difficult to manage. They are like vampires sucking the energy out of you, and then I have no energy left for my family, and I don't want to deal with their problems. I have negotiated all day. I don't want to negotiate any more'.
[First author, formal reflective interview at work]

2.5 Differentiationism and Resistant Selves

The problem inherent in the integrationist perspective is highlighted in Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) critique: "What is problematic about many current accounts of corporate culture, teamworking or TQM is not the argument concerning what those who design the systems want, but the bizarre belief that they have almost no difficulty getting it" (pp. 160-1). Gabriel (1999) agreed, stating that many critiques of normative control 'exaggerate the magnitude and totality of organizational controls, generating over-managed and over-controlled images of individuals, organizations and societies' (p. 179). This perspective can be partially explained by Foucault's insights into the capacity of discourses to effect power through subjectivity, which have led to some scholars, seduced by images of panopticons and disciplinary apparatuses, giving precedence to the content of managerial discourses, at the expense of careful observations of interactions between managers and workers in real-life workplaces. As a result,

‘the distinction between the intent and outcome of management strategies and practices is lost’ (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995, 629). In doing so, they tend to neutralize distinctions among different types of control, and how different categories of workers, through historical circumstances and the differential possession of skills and other resources, are differently placed with respect to managerial powers (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995; Gabriel 1999).

Some scholars (e.g. Hochschild (1983), Casey (1995), Kunda (1992)) have argued that the nature of such change programs is inescapable, invasive and totalizing, despite finding that employees were by no means uniformly receptive to the prescribed norms and values. It is not the homogeneity of effects that makes the culture totalizing, but the fact that employees cannot escape its intrusions, no matter what they do: “In such a colonization, self-constituent processes of self-regulated emotional experiences and expression, and self-determined judgment and effectivity, are altered and usurped by the practices of the designed corporate culture” (Gabriel 1999:159). Indeed, Hochschild (1983), Kunda (1992) and Casey (1995) did not find homogeneity and simple obedience in such organizations, but complex, subtle, and often contradictory responses. Nevertheless, in exploring these responses, they appeared to many readers to homogenize the mechanisms of organizational control, depicting them as unified, pervasive and ultimately quite effective, despite their sometime recognition of resistance and diversity.

Despite this conclusion, the more critical insights of these scholars have been taken up in different readings of the capacity of individuals to manoeuvre within and against the power relations in which they are enmeshed (Starkey and McKinlay 1998; May 1999). Drawing from Foucault’s later works, focusing on self-knowledge and the management of desires through ‘technologies of the self’ (1982; 1988), these studies draw a non deterministic link between discourses/power and subjectivity. It is thus possible to remain faithful to critiques of attempts to impose totalitarian, authoritarian regimes while exploring diverse and contradictory responses to control among employees. Empirical work supporting this perspective has revealed that while many employees are indeed ‘sucked in’ by cultural engineering, many others are

cynical, resistant and/or only superficially compliant. The following segment examines the mindset and actions of the workforce 'resisting' the authoritarian 'caring parenting' imposed by Cokemaking management.

The first area of resistance concerned the effects of the 'call out' system. While having agreed to overtime being included in normal pay, in the Utilities section, many Specialists strongly resented the intrusion into their home lives of being 'on call' when required. The tensions raised are illustrated in field notes from a monthly 'Team Day'.

'Michael raises the issue of the overtime/call out coverage. [...]. Jokey comments are made about the laziness of Technicians, or how people were hiding or playing golf when called by Production. Michael responded when the hubbub had settled by saying that the Production Controllers don't want to have to call ten people. A specialist replied "tell them to get fucked". Another said "get them to phone the Technicians [...]". Some of the older Specialists clap and laugh in agreement and enjoyment at the vociferousness and abandon of these interjections. Someone says "Why wake people up at 2am in the morning?"

[Third author field notes of formal non-taped meeting at work]

The problem of poor coverage and a perception of unfairness continued, and as a result an extraordinary meeting between Albert, Technicians and Specialists was called. After this meeting two of the Specialists were talking to the researcher. One explained that he didn't like the idea of being on call, despite understanding that they received more money than the hours worked. As was written down in the field notes:

'For some it's a matter of principle that management now have control over much more of their time. For others they see it as easy money.'

[Third author field notes of informal non-taped meeting at work]

The second source of resistance was with regard to a perceived intrusion of a private 'inner world' of work. An example of this attitude can be seen in what a Battery employee Zoran said at the Team Day,

'I come to work as a Battery Specialist, not to kick the arse of Production. I am a skilled craftsman. I have no authority, I can only ask them. I'm here to work, not to chase after everyone: chasing adds up to a day'.

[Third author field notes of formal non-taped meetings at work]

This desire to work, not manage, was a common attitude that informed worker 'resistance'. For some, this was linked to the unwelcome stress it created. One Specialist explained that he wanted to do a good job, but the recent changes and the current call out situation created a lot of stress and guilt about his work. For other Specialists, the concern was voiced more in terms of the impracticality of the lack of external supervision and control. On the one hand this was based on a view of the need for the traditional 'autocratic dickhead' style of management: 'there is a need for close supervision. The guys won't do the work unless they are supervised', was one Specialist's informal response to the changes being discussed at the Team Day [third author field notes of informal non-taped meeting at work]. These worker observations were grounded in a perception that the success of Utilities work depended on Production, and that higher authority was needed to enable them to get their work done.

This idea of taking responsibility for 'self-management' was linked to the problems of the call out system, as the idea of that system is that the employees themselves, rather than the managers, manage their own time. An example of the frustration about this issue can be seen in a special ad hoc meeting that a Battery Specialist team had with Albert to discuss a call out problem:

Tony – '[Production were] ringing people on Sunday, people said 'I've got golf tomorrow'.

Manuel – It's frustrating.

Tony – It's always the same fucking guys, I'm getting really pissed off.

[...]

Albert – Are we documenting whose refusing?

Michael – Yes, lots of people are not answering the phone, or are simply not there. One person said they were playing golf.

Tony – I’m really stressed and fed up with it, I wasted my Monday. [...] I won’t be doing it until everyone does their fair share.

Manuel – None of us are perfect, but I came in. People make all these excuses, they scramble everything up, holidays get in the way. It’s all bullshit, I get a headache. It’s frustrating. It comes down to people chipping in.

Tony – Can’t force them.

Manuel – It’s the same pattern.

Tony – Same pattern’.

[Third author field notes of formal non-taped meeting at work]

In part, the reluctance to undertake ‘managerial’ work was resistance to the stress that came from having to undertake ‘mental’ work. Another dimension, however, is the belief that the ‘real work’ was the manual craft work they had to perform, in contrast to the ‘managerial shit’ that consumed the time of the ‘autocratic dickheads’: a third defence from intrusion. At a Team Day for example, Albert talked about a new corporate wide change initiative which was pulling the change initiatives of the plant manager in a different direction and was going to have significant implications for all:

‘Albert explains that in the ‘New World’ everyone has accountabilities and responsibilities. (I notice that many have newspapers in front of them and seem to be reading and not paying much attention. Later in Albert’s talk, Michael says something to Angelo about whether he is listening). [...] As a general thing, the guys don’t really seem that interested or responsive to the – in Albert’s eyes - seemingly momentous changes taking place and being reported. Their responses are much more about battery specific technical - what they actually do - type things, and constructive to boot’.

[Third author field notes of formal non-taped meeting at work]

One Specialist said that the management rhetoric of ‘the era of change’ had increased dramatically, and all that ‘bullshit’ was just about ‘softening us up’ for

the 'change'. It was also seen as 'simply a ruse to get more work from less people' [third author field notes of informal non-taped meeting at work]. Even some Technicians saw continual change as 'flavour[s] of the month'. Many felt that the 'us and them' culture was really deep and wouldn't change overnight.

At this level, the rhetorical conflicts observed in Utilities correspond to the explicit or implicit prejudices of many critical management studies. The enterprise culture is imposed on a workforce with a combination of dogmatism, paternalism and more or less hidden threat. The workforce, defending traditional privileges, also draws on long standing liberal values against the imposition of arbitrary authority, in particular the value of the 'separation of powers' (between 'home' and 'work', 'conception' and 'execution' and so on), and the blend of craft romanticism and bureaucratic work ethic in the commitment to doing 'real' manual work. This critique of the new enterprising culture also represents qualified support for a particular defined set of authoritative relationships – the kind of 'autocratic dickhead' arrangements that characterised the old work culture. The old forms of work and the old public/private split were relatively unquestioningly presented by many of the Specialists as an alternative, ahistorical, and unquestionable ethic. At various times, however, different groups of operations and maintenance employees gave voice to critical comments about other groups' self-interested defence of inefficient, unhealthy and boring forms of work.

Whereas the differentiationist perspective may regard such actions as evidence of its thesis (either as an expression of effective cynical resistance or as a delusionary appearance of freedom while conforming in practice), the lived experience of the actors is more ambiguous and unclear than such a simple version of this perspective allows. Employees were at times not resisting the change per se, but expressing frustration at how it could restrict their effectiveness and efficiency in their day-to-day activities, i.e. stop them from working well. There were also different degrees of reflection at play, ranging from classic Marxist-style criticisms of losing control of the self in the face of managerial dictates to the necessity of dealing with the increased stress levels at having to undertake 'mental work'. Lack of sign up to the new ethos was not

necessarily motivated by an anti-management sub-culture, although something along those lines certainly existed. At times it was guided by views that reduced direct control and supervision, opened up departmental divides and generated practices of laziness that could not be addressed without the use of the 'traditional-style' managerial intervention's that management proclaimed it was removing. Whereas an anti-management sub-culture was undoubtedly present, there was another form of resistance that was pragmatically engaged with and reflective of the change vision and processes, aware of its values but doubtful of its usefulness.

2.6 Fragmentationism and Dramaturgical Selves

In contrast to traditional analyses of the committed citizen and distanced critics, ethnographies of culture change programs have claimed to uncover a substantial degree of ambivalence, irony and theatrical role-playing. For some, the resulting 'ironic' (Kunda 1992), 'dramaturgical' (Collinson 1992) or 'capitulated' (Casey 1995) self has been a major source of concern. Kunda framed his analysis in terms of role embracement and distancing. In role embracement, workers accepted and enacted the beliefs, emotions and behaviours allocated to them by the cultural engineers (Kunda 1992: 156). In distancing, they 'assume[d] a reflective and openly self-conscious stance' in order to comment, often cynically, on the culture and its effects on themselves and others (ibid: 157-8). Distancing 'is a declaration of autonomy ... a hint that the self behind the role is not coterminous with the role' (ibid: 188). However, because embracement was necessary for career advancement, Kunda found that many employees combined the stances, and were able to switch deftly between them, depending on the circumstances (ibid: 158). Casey's 'capitulation', a stance that 'contains elements of both defense and collusion' (2005: 175), is of a similar ilk. Capitulated employees conform to the behavioral norms of the culture, but maintain a distance that is often ironic and cynical.

A different 'spin' on such actors is provided in analyses of the 'Svejkian' employee by Fleming and Sewell (2002) and the 'bewildered' manager by

Knights and McCabe (2000). For the former, the dramaturgical and performative selves examined by Kunda, Casey and Collinson may actually be involved in a highly personally effective form of resistance to corporate authority. In contrast, for Knights and McCabe, the characteristics of the 'bewildered' are their difficulty in comprehending mixed messages or consequences. Although these critiques have traditionally found their place as variants in the differentiationist perspective, if such employee behaviour is viewed through the 'dramatic' lenses of Mangham (Mangham and Overington 1987) and Burke (1957; 1962), the more 'positive' ability of such a stance to react and adapt to the requirements of its immediate audience gains focus. Organizational actors adopting such stances might well be 'using all there is to use' to craft effective performances within the chaotic, messy and emergent changes

A pertinent example of fragmented readings of management definitions is in how the 'caring' perspective was understood and used quite differently in different contexts in Cokemaking. As two operators put it,

Peter – 'Garry says care for people, but what is this meaning of caring. I really don't know what caring is. Different people might want different types of caring.

Tony - There are a couple of interpretations about aren't there!

[laughter]'

[First author, observation of work redesign group meeting]

Echoing Garry's 'stakeholder' rhetoric, Tom, a manager, pointed to the 'dilemma between caring for yourself, for others and the business, and how to draw the balance, that is the problem' [first author, observation of work redesign group meeting]. On the one hand, managers and employees were often given narrow choices – to accept job loss or adapt their attitudes and behaviour in the required manner. This form of caring, whatever its nuances, is thus put forward as the 'one best way'. This authoritarianism was far from opaque to the workforce and management: As one worker sarcastically commented on being disciplined, 'thank you for caring for me' [first author, observation of work redesign group meeting].

On the other hand, changes were also conducted in a more liberal 'caring' manner. Cokemaking is no 'total institution', and attempts were made to resolve disputes in an inclusive manner. Extensive consultation and participation were entered into during the change process, giving people an opportunity to change, but where they did not, a generous Voluntary Redundancy Scheme was in place. Garry, and other managers, spent long periods of time supporting people before decisions were made about the incompatibility between their capabilities and desires and that of the change. For some managers, such 'caring', in its many forms, was perceived as excessive. As Peter (a Supervisor) put it, 'we [...] spend so much time on caring, and making sure that we are sharing, that we all feel too much' [first author, informal personal interview at work]. There was a common feeling that too much 'caring' took place. Many in the company remained broadly 'on-side' because the plant was what Garry explicitly referred to as 'a slack company'. It remained an 'indulgency culture' (Gouldner 1954). Small wonder, from this ambiguity surrounding the positive nature of caring, and the degree to which it imposed constraints on people "in their interests", that a degree of confusion and angst was observed amongst many of the more committed promoters of the change.

What was apparent amongst a number of employees in Utilities, especially amongst the Technicians, was a sustained grappling with the contradictory nature of this situation, recognising the value yet limitations of the change ethic, the desirable yet restrictive nature of the 'old order' and the overall ambiguity of (and their ambivalence towards) the cultural change. One Technician (Danny) was unsure whether the new management and its philosophy really represented a move to a collaborative, high trust, mutually enterprising regime. Discussing the plant manager, Garry, he states:

Danny – 'Yeah - he's different I don't know, I don't know if he's, compared to some of the managers he's very different. [...] doesn't seem to be a hidden agenda I don't know with him, he seems, he tells ya, you know Researcher – right, and you think that like, senior managers sort of have always, have a [hidden agenda]?

Danny – I think years ago yeah. Oh there's probably still one, I don't know

[laughter]'

[Formal interview with third author at work]

In these examples, the actors have juxtaposed traditional perspectives of management against the new, caring ethos, and created ambiguous spaces. Cynical, sarcastic and ironic commentary, drawn from and interpreted via a variety of non-work sources, is employed to enable them to make sense of what they are experiencing. For some, the caring metaphor was deconstructed and employed as a criticism of the change, either in the one dimensionality of the change programme's deployment of 'caring' or through worry that 'over-care' could harm performance. In contrast, others were unable to detach the call for 'caring' from older management practices, wondering if practices of manipulation, surveillance and control underlay the rhetoric of trust and enterprise. As with much fragmentationist critique, the ambiguities and contradictions are voiced but not managed, left hanging as explicit reminders of how day-to-day organizational complexity overpowers managerial expectations.

The more general critical response to the day-to-day ambivalence about the new forms of work is revealed in the following comments from Brett. For him the idea of becoming a Technician 'had its negatives yeah. Positive part was moving on, negatives part was trying to get the employees on side'. Moreover, in regard to working conditions he said:

Bret - 'the bigger the business the um the freer you are, less responsibility, less pressure. But it's just yeah when you're here I'm just a number floating around the system here.

Researcher - but one aspect of that you like cause you know you're sort of sitting around and you know but I mean a fairly relaxed time but I mean on the other hand you don't like it

Bret - exactly. Yeah some ... I'm going against each other here, I'm arguing with myself. [...] like sometimes I like to be freer and then other times I want the responsibility'.

[Formal interview with third author at work]

The ambivalences, tension and contradictions involved in becoming a more responsible employee were most clearly evident in interviews with Michael, the lead Technician. He grappled with the conflicts between his desire to be enterprising, and the bureaucratic conditions and politics that actually typified his work. Did he feel good about his new roles in being responsible for managing himself and others?

Michael – ‘if you’re asking Michael Hughes I’d say yes. [...] Because it’s just worth it for me because it challenges me, it got me out of a very depressive situation where I was just doing repetitive [work], and it drove me [crazy body language sign] in the head.

Researcher – so that’s Michael Hughes, so who the fuck are you then [laugh]?

Michael – I don’t ... Haven’t figured that out myself yet.
[laughter]

Michael – but yeah [...], it is worth it because you know it’s changed me, and I’m learning something new and it’s making me think about myself more, which I quite like. For me, that’s like a continuing improvement thing for my own personal um self but um if you were to look at a bit more objectively I would sometimes say no.

Researcher – and what does objectively mean? I mean what criteria are you using for that?

Michael – [...] we talk about isolation, [...] when I was a protected species out there, I was, I mean not that I ever needed protection but it was always there, I was a protected species because of um union, unionism’.

[Formal interview with third author at work]

These ambiguities were exacerbated when Cokemaking started changing in a different direction as a result of a new corporate wide change initiative. Michael found himself now having his roles and responsibilities more clearly defined but in a situation that left him somewhat in a ‘no man’s land’ between a team member and a supervisor. In response to a question about whether this was a desirable situation to be in, he responded,

'I'm torn between yes and no [...] I understand this idea about the Requisite Organization [from consultants using Jacques (1996)] and therefore [...] the way that I rationalize things is that I'm not responsible for their actual performance, I'm there to assist Albert to gather the information so he can make decisions, [...]. [...] it makes it quite disjointed because I'm here in no man's land [...], I know what they're getting away with and I also know what they're doing well [...] what do I do? [...] I can't reprimand them because according to Requisite Organization I have to go to Albert and get the authority [...]. If they're doing well why should I have to go to Albert and say look let me, let me commend these people. It's silly'.

[Formal interview with third author at work]

Michael provided an overall understanding of his situation as being a conflict between the 'dark' (rule bound) and the 'light' (enterprising). Michael explained that there was of course a need for the 'dark side' because of the 'hierarchy above me' and because of the 'legislation that we work around'. However, there was a degree of angst that any bureaucratic slip-up would be exploited by colleagues:

'gradually more and more this job is forcing me to have a dark side look [laugh] because [...] I'm forever aware that I have to cover my arse [...]. I now have an expectation that someone down that road is going to fuck me over. [...] it's not coming from Albert, it's coming from these guys'.

[Formal interview with third author at work]

A number of recent analysts have put a positive spin on such struggles, and associated interpretations and actions by managers and employees grappling with the desire to improve both personal and work life, yet aware of the contradictions between the two. Meyerson (2003), for example, praises the 'tempered radicalism' of middle-managers able to integrate private political passions, such as gender, sexual or racial equality, into their traditional managerial endeavours, thereby merging commitments to corporate and ethical

goals. In contrast, Fleming and Spicer (2003; 2007) introduced a differentiationist slant to this stance, identifying 'Enlightened Cynics' who understood and knowingly contributed to the strategies and techniques of control and domination, but used ironic techniques to detach from them when overburdened. More recently, Clegg et.al. (2006) have explored the character of 'creative resisters' employing localised readings of the culture to influence and change central directives. Wallace and Hoyle (2007) also describe the 'principled infidelity' of public sector middle-managers grappling with the desire to address the 'service' requirements of local audiences that come up against the contradictory 'managerialist' expectations for centralised 'accountability' and 'budgetary' control. Badham and McLoughlin (2005) and Badham and Claydon have also explored the nature and desirability of 'ironic engagement' and an 'ironic temper' amongst those seeking to proactively craft out a meaningful response to such circumstances.

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“ironic engagement” and an “ironic temper” amongst those seeking to proactively craft out a meaningful response to such circumstances. Arguably, these fledgling oxymoronic concepts, allowing for simultaneous attachment and detachment, loyalty and critique, and action and reflection, have the potential to extend research and understanding of the complex nature of ambivalent “dramaturgical” organizational actors.

2.7 Conclusion

One-dimensional views of ‘strong culture’ change programs fail to capture the fluidity, uncertainty and ambiguity that inevitable dog cultural transitions. Stereotyped views of ‘champions’ and ‘resisters’, and categorisations of respondents into ‘zeolots’, ‘cynics’ and ‘dramaturgs’, also fail to communicate the complex positioning and inherent ambivalence of the lived experience of change. The purpose of this chapter has been to give recognition and voice to the ambiguity and ambivalence experienced by the actors involved. Similarly to Beech et.al.’s (Beech, Burns et al. 2004) argument for ‘serious play’ in the face of embedded organisational paradoxes, the aim is to raise to prominence the dilemmas of the ‘ambivalence paradox’ and encourage more open and critical discussion of how this can and should be handled.

This is not a critique of ‘culture change management’ per se but, rather, an appeal to a return to the more critical, experimental and committed dimensions of the work of Kurt Lewin and his followers (Cooke 1999; Burnes 2004). It should not be understood as a simple rejection of tri-partite stereotyped categorisations of actors into zeolots, cynics and ironists but, rather, a critical look at how actors grapple with ambiguity and ambivalence in such positioning of themselves, as well as the change programs that they are involved in. Finally, it is not a rejection of Martin’s (2001) categorisation of integrationist, differentiationist and fragmentationist frames on organisational culture. It is, rather, an appeal for a focus on how, in their lived experience, actor’s wrestle with the ambiguity and ambivalence brought about by: (i) a degree of commitment to and dependence on the fulfilment of organisational goals; (ii) a level of awareness of the clash of interests existing between themselves and the institutions on which they depend; and c) a varying yet often acknowledged

experience of uncertainty, ambiguity and even chaos in how these commitments and interests are understood and play out. The documented experiences of actors involved in cultural change at Steelmaking Oz has hopefully drawn out some of these themes, and will encourage further reflection on how managers and employees grapple with the dilemmas of the 'ambivalence paradox' in cultural change programs.

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3 Jon Stewart: The Modern Socrates

3.1 Introduction: Reflexions of the Age

In chapters four and five of the thesis, I examined the notion, posited by Kierkegaard, that trickster-eiron driven dramas can be seen as a kind of reflexion, an artistic imaging of an age dominated by a type of public irony that is, on one hand, dissembling, sly, deceitful, often Machiavellian, and, on the other, apathetic and nihilistic. This is contrasted with the emergence of a “third-way” ironist who employs an exemplary ironic performance to combat the deceitful and nihilistic excesses of wider society. Employing Kunda’s *Engineering Culture* to examine how different eironic types can be seen in organizational literature, and Fleming’s decadent organizations to examine this theme across a wider and more contemporary cultural example, these chapters lead into a theoretical discussion of how such an ironist has been perceived during different cultural epochs over the last two and a half thousand years.

While these “reflexions” of a cultural wide ironic consciousness and related tensions are in literature are useful examples of the potential power of the eironist, it would be more useful to find an actual, living example of somebody critiquing society through a mastered public ironic performance in the Kierkegaardian/Socratic mold. In this chapter, I suggest that the American satirist and comedian Jon Stewart performs this role in the contemporary public sphere, combining an acute ironic perspective and a nuanced ironic performance in a manner that has, at times, produced some transformative power. To illustrate Stewart’s public sphere performative role while remaining true to the tradition of reflexive comedic theatre, I examine the parallels between contemporary American and Ancient Greek social conditions, draw attention to the similarities in the critiques of Stewart and Socrates by powerful others, and illustrate successes Stewart has had in stinging American alazons into humility. Employing Stewart as a publically influential exemplar for organizational behaviours also contributes to the debate surrounding comedy, humour and irony in organization studies, more especially a more recent turn to comedic theatre and comedic television.

3.1.1 Comedic Theatre and the Ironist in Organization Studies

Over roughly the last half century, there has been an increasing interest in research into humour in organizations. Initially, Bradney {, 1957 #1634} and Blau {, 1955 #1636} analysed how humour could relieve boredom and cement in relations in bureaucratic environments, and Coser {, 1960 #1638}, Lundberg {, 1969 #1640} and Traylor {, 1973 #1642} have dealt with the relationship between humour and power relations. Since then, theorists have argued that humour can signal trust {Vinton, 1989 #1644}, reduce the problems of difficult communication ({Dwyer, 1991 #1646; Kahn, 1989 #1648; Ullian, 1976 #1650}, enhance social influence ({O'Quin, 1981 #1652; Powell, 1977 #1654}), bind groups tightly together {Duncan, 1982 #1656; Duncan, 1990 #1659; Jack Duncan, 1989 #1660; Holmes, 2000 #1662}, improve creativity and innovation {Consalvo, 1989 #1664; Smith, 1965 #1666}, reduce stress {Buckman, 1994 #1668; Martin, 1983 #1670; Yovetich, 1990 #1672}, change culture {Deal, 2000 #1674; Dwyer, 1991 #1646; Kahn, 1989 #1648}, and facilitate effective leadership {Avolio, 1999 #1676; Crawford, 1994 #1679}. Critical scholars have pointed towards humour being subversive and evidence of employee resistance {Ackroyd, 1999 #92; Collinson, 1988 #1681; Linstead, 1985 #1682}.

A related trend has examined the relationship between humor and comedic theatre {Westwood, 2004 #1683} or television {Westwood, 2012 #1684}. In terms of organizational practice, the focus has been on humour consulting agencies {Caudron, 1992 #1686; Collinson, 2002 #1685; Gibson, 1994 #1687}, the role of corporate jesters {de Vries, 1990 #1688}, and the development of humour-informed management tools or textbooks. To deepen the level of knowledge, Westwood (2004: 785) delved back into the origins of comedy, exploring the Dionysian-Apollonian relationship in Greek theatre, etymologically tracing the origin of comedy to *komos*, “the name of the frenzied crowd taking part in the orgiastic rites of Dionysus”. He shows how Dionysius, opposed to Apollonian reason and order, violates the “convention and notion of decency: the sacred is invaded by the profane, sexual mores overturned, and gender boundaries blurred” (ibid). He extends this into the modern milieu by examining comedy through Balkin’s carnivalesque lens, illustrating how fools and jesters

could “attack authority figures and the powerful from behind the covert of humour” and the Harlequin and Pierrot were employed to criticize the establishment on stage (ibid: 786-787). Ultimately, Westwood rejects carnival, vaudeville and burlesque as containing any power per se, following Bakhtin’s argument that their “transformative power is not realized until embodied in the high literature of Rabelais” (ibid: 786).

More recently, Westwood, in collaboration with Allanah Johnson (2012), has turned to Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant’s BBC TV show, *The Office* to illustrate how humour can be transformative, at least to some extent. Employing vignettes from the show to illustrate the “dualistic dynamic nature of humour; that it has resistive, subversive and ordering effects, but at the same time has system-maintaining and ordering effects” (2012: 804), Westwood argues that humour reveals organizational paradox, inconsistency and ambiguity, and can play a not inconsequential transformational role. While accepting the usefulness of such examples, employing a wider lens to examine *The Office’s* plot and characters reveals a nuanced comedic structure that a micro-analysis of specific scenes misses. This macro-structure facilitates a move beyond the transformative-light carnivalesque, letting us approach comedic theatre as a form of high literature that might have a greater transformative force.

By employing the character types of Frye’s ironic mode comedies as our analytical focus (see *Chapter Four*), we can treat the four central characters in *The Office* as proud and foolish alazons and the blank cypher heroes of sophisticated ironic mode literature. The alazons, David Brent and Gareth Keenan, are colourful and exaggerated stereotypes of an out-of-his-depth manager and sycophantic employee. The heroes, Tim and Dawn, are, however, far more nuanced characters. On one level, they are blank cyphers, whose potentially loving relationship is constantly blocked by the actions of others. At another level, their reactions are intended to mirror a sophisticated audience’s incredulity and disdain at the foolish antics of Brent and Keenan. At another level still they are sarcastic-eirons, poking fun at their proud and foolish office companions, at times directly commenting on the craziness of their environment to the audience.¹

Gervais and Merchant are ultimately writing a comedy in the ironic mode in which the frustrated lovers eventually unite and the vainglorious alazons get, at least partially, redeemed, as revealed in *The Office's* Christmas special finale, in which Dawn and Tim get together, Gareth is settling into the management role with some degree of success, and David Brent finally recognizes and responds to the sarcastic-eirons that had long mocked him without his realising. However, in its lack of trickster-eirons, it is perhaps not the best example of ironic mode comedy in respect to the themes of this thesis. There are, however, many other examples of trickster-eirons in critically acclaimed and commercially successful contemporary television. *Yes Minister* introduced the suave Sir Humphrey, *The Thick of It* the viciously manipulative Malcolm Tucker, and the *House of Cards* the charmingly duplicitous Francis Urquhart and Frank Underwood in the UK and USA respectively, both of whom speak directly to the audience to reveal their machinations and contempt of other characters. The two recent revivals of Sherlock Holmes (*Sherlock* in the UK and *Elementary* in the USA), in which Holmes is a master manipulator, have been critical and commercial successes. Likewise, the clownish but eccentrically brilliant *Doctor Who* has become a worldwide hit since its 2005 reboot.

Whilst any character might provide an exemplar for a sketch of an organizational eironist, they are, as Kierkegaard notes, “reflexions” of a wider societal and cultural irony {Kierkegaard, 2000 #1321: 252}. In combination, these characters sketch out the dimensions of a societal ironic consciousness including dissembling charm, wit, clever-cleverness, brutal self-interest, faked buffoonery, and nihilistic despair. They are, however, literary reflexions of the Kierkegardian “apathetic reflection” of a decadent culture. They are not examples of a living trickster-eiron, such as a Kierkegaard, Swift or Socrates, who is actively trying to make a transformative difference to the society through an ironically charged strategy for living. In this chapter I position Jon Stewart as illustrating how a Socratic or Kierkegardian ironic public performance is making a not insignificant difference to American public life. In doing so, I first reflect upon the similarities between contemporary American culture and the culture of Socratic Athens, before examining dimensions and outcomes of Stewart’s public performance.

3.2 Societal Conditions in Classical Greece and Contemporary USA

3.2.1 The Cultural Conditions of Socratic Athens

The noted Greek scholar, Robert Waterfield, revisited the death of Socrates in a study that focuses on the politics and environment of Athens {Waterfield, 2010 #1579}. Unlike many Socratic scholars, Waterford is not hugely interested in the exact details as to who wanted Socrates tried and executed and whether the accusations were fair and instead turns attention to the social conditions of Athens and the demand that somebody be made a scapegoat for its increasing shift from powerful super-state to a starving, plague-ridden, violent dystopia. Waterford paints a compelling picture of vain, greedy, over-confident, charming but ruthless politicians wrestling for power amidst increasing societal strife. Reviewing his book, *The Times* sums up Waterfield's Socratic Athens as

A society in crisis. Greedy expansionism brings the superpower of the West to its knees. A city, once great, is crammed with bankrupts. Citizens squabble, some starve. Class conflict is rife. There are many scapegoats {Hughes, 2009 #1582}.

Waterford draws attention to the elite's resentment of democracy, the increasing decadence of art, the development of rampant individualism and the clash between cooperative and competitive values. *The Times* reviewer joins the dots, pointing out that "Socrates's story is destined to become not less but more relevant to all of us as we move through the 21st century" (ibid).

Comparisons between Socratic Athens and contemporary America also litter a work examining Jon Stewart's role in contemporary American society, *The Daily Show and Philosophy: Moments of Zen in the Art of Fake News* {Holt, 2007 #1393}. Likewise, Barad draws attention to how difficult it is to separate descriptions of Classical Athenian society from that of contemporary America, noting that "John Stewart plays the role of reformer in America today much as Socrates did in Athens long ago" {Barad, 2007 #1569: 69}. Likewise, Michels and Ventimiglia {, 2007 #1570: 83} discuss Stewart's relationship with American Democracy,

calling him the *Gadfly of Gotham* and illustrating the nuances of his relationship with the American model of democracy, acutely aware of “the difficulties involved in forging and maintaining a democracy”, referring to it as a “delicate balance between lofty ideals and human fallibility.” Although lack of space prevents me from analyzing these parallels in great detail, it is useful to arrange the conditions of the two cultures around a couple of themes; the problems and clashes between political, religious and philosophical factions after a long and costly war, and the way in which cultural values, in their transmission to the populace, shifted from tragic to comedic form.

Problems and Clashes: Between 480-440BC, Athens conclusively defeated the Persians and became the dominant military and trading power in Ancient Greece {De Souza, 2004 #1288}. Munn (2000: 46) writes that “Athens at the height of its empire, by the middle of the fifth century, was a community endowed like no other of its day with opportunities for its members to enjoy both material prosperity and communal glory.” The outcome of the war, in which Athens lost its Empire, its prosperity and, briefly, its democracy {see \Munn, 2000 #1285: 195-246;De Souza, 2004 #1288: 101-183 for an overview}, initiated a period in which religion and rhetoric clashed with the emergent philosophical movement {see \Monoson, 2000 #1286: 206-238}. Munn (2000: 95) writes, “Each catastrophe left the Athenians questioning previously accepted wisdom, and, purged by failure, they looked to a residual core of what seemed to be more reliable truth”. Educated Athenian society fragmented into four distinct groups, the aristocratic democrats, who were motivated by the popular imagination transmitted through the dramatic theatrical enactments, and the aristocratic oligarchs who “had rejected Athenian developments”, lamenting the introduction of “unfortunate ambiguities into Athenian law” and pining for “common ancestral ideals” {Munn, 2000 #1285: 259} {see \Munn, 2000 #1285: 95-246 for a comprehensive overview of the democratic and oligarchic tensions}.² In addition, the rhetorical techniques of the Sophists {Vlastos, 1994 #673;Irwin, 1979 #1248;e.g. in \Guthrie, 1975 #1244} clashed with the Platonic-Aristotelian strand of philosophy and its supposed better character and moral intentions {e.g.

in \McCoy, 2008 #1289}.

Cultural Transmission of Values: Prior to the trial of Socrates, Athenian cultural knowledge was praised, celebrated and transmitted through poems, songs, dances, plays and ceremonies.³ According to Wilson {, 2007 #1284: 5}

theatres were ‘engines of honour’—sites where the very act of conferring honour on individuals or groups was a performative event that made that honour real. As such, theatres were also the pre-eminent site for communication between men and gods, between the constitutive elements of a city-state and, with increasing importance in the Hellenistic period, between city-states and the succession of powerful forces outside them.

The events surrounding the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.E) changed the nature of Athenian society and its cultural transmissions. Consequently, as Scodel (2010: 60) notes “the collapse of Athenian power is not reflected in tragedy.” During this collapse, Greek Old Comedy, which examines the antics of eirons (ironists), alazons (boastful fools) and bômolochi (foul-mouthed buffoon) {Janko, 1984 #1290: 45`, 170; Carlson, 1984 #1291: 23; as discussed in \Frye, 1957 #434}, had largely superseded tragedy. Public figures were ridiculed and once revered gods made comic.⁴ Furthermore, the classical dithyrambic structure of the tragedies had been succeeded by “agonistic pairs of speeches modeled on the latest techniques of argumentation from the law-courts or assembly; rapid-fire dialogues of questioning, supplication, persuasion or mockery; and (in comedy) ribald slapstick, invective and political satire {Griffith, 2007 #1292: 23}.

3.2.2 The Cultural Conditions of Contemporary USA

Problems and Clashes: The USA developed into the major economic power in the world after ending its isolationist policy after World War II {see \French,

1997 #983 for a comprehensive overview}. This culminated in America achieving lone “superpower” status in the post-Reagan political environment {Huntington, 1999 #986; Brilmayer, 1996 #987}, which was again characterized by a period of rapid economic growth {Gordon, 2000 #984; Stiglitz, 2004 #985}. The notion of America as the lone superpower is being increasingly challenged {Reid, 2004 #988; Soderberg, 2005 #989; Fishman, 2005 #990; Scobell, 2012 #991} and, post the Global Financial Crisis of 2007, we have seen a wealth of recent publications reflecting on rising domestic poverty and the death of the American Dream {Lewis, 2011 #981; e.g. \McClelland, 2010 #980; Reich, 2010 #979; Reich, 2012 #978; Rivlin, 2010 #977;, #988}.

There has recently been a surge of interest in the idea that contemporary USA is experiencing an attack on democracy by an oligarchic class {Frank, 2008 #963; Schlozman, 2012 #964; Winters, 2011 #965; Karpf, 2012 #966; Hacker, 2005 #967; Dean, 2006 #971}. The Occupy and Tea Party demonstrations in 2012 have ostensibly followed similar democracy / oligarchy divisions as those of Ancient Greece. The Occupy movement reacted against the political influence and financial holdings of the richest “1%”⁵, whereas the Tea Party demonstrated against liberal, pluralist policies in favor of the traditional cultural values espoused by the Republican Party {as described in \Williamson, 2011 #993}. Billionaire property mogul Donald Trump reacted to President Obama’s 2012 reelection with a series of anti-democratic tweets, stating that ‘We should march on Washington and stop this travesty’, ‘this election is a total sham and a travesty. We are not a democracy!’ and ‘Lets fight like hell and stop this great and disgusting injustice!’

The level of religiosity in the USA is unique in the Western developed world.⁶ Although this religiosity is not a recent phenomenon, there has been a surge of interest in the religious influence in American politics {Conger, 2009 #973; Friedman, 2005 #970; Greeley, 2006 #969; Kiracofe, 2009 #974; Phillips, 2006 #968; Ryan, 2009 #972; Williams, 2010 #976}. At its most extreme, American Conservative Christianity rejects any and all scientific knowledge contradicting the Bible and works towards “the final reunion of Church and state

... at the end of time, when Christ will claim definitive political power of all creation, inaugurating an entirely new society based on the supernatural.”⁷ Paradoxically, the USA is also home to some of the most revered academic and scientific institutions in the world. According to the *Times Higher Education University Rankings* methodology, 15 of the top 20 universities in the world are located in the USA.

Cultural Transmission of Values: Barber (in Sharp 1998: 154) argues that the narration of American popular culture is aimed at producing “an image so generic, so affecting, so ubiquitous, and so empty that it will no longer be recognized as American, it will just be.” Sharp illustrates how the transmission of American cultural values do not just permeate the more overtly patriotic films such as *The Patriot*, *Independence Day*, or *Armageddon*, but also provide the themes for films ostensibly about other nation’s cultural values, such as *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, which contain narratives on freedom from colonization, the power of heroic figures over feminized elites, and the foundation of heroic citizenship in the protection of women {Sharp, 1998 #960: 155}. Seagrave {, 1997 #961} illustrates the disquiet European critics have always had over the levels of patriotism in American movies and Spring {, 1992 #962} overviews the extent to which these patriotic themes were ideological and politically influenced.

These highly patriotic, somewhat one-dimensional portrayals of American culture are being increasingly challenged by darker, perhaps more dystopian, films. *Three Kings* examines the paradoxical consequences of America’s withdrawal from Iraq after the first Gulf War. *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo* position American successes against the increasingly sophisticated instruments of torture used to support them. Accompanying these more serious investigations are a raft or satirical offerings, usually, but not always, television programmes. For example, *Seinfeld* exposes the ironic nihilism of a decadent society, the show *South Park* attacks anybody and anything that takes itself too seriously, *The Simpsons* affectionately parodies contemporary American society and *Community* reveals and parodies the techniques and tricks of American film and

television. Other TV shows satirically attack politicians and the media. In *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart is the urbane, sophisticated, humourous, satirical critic whose motivation is to keep an ethically informed conversation about the direction his society is taking open and ongoing. His *Comedy Central* colleague, Stephen Colbert, is a comic fool, producing displays of bumbling ineptness, hubristic pride and self-worship to illustrate the alazonry of others who behave like this without self-reflection. Bill Maher is a crueller satirist who is willing to directly confront those he sees as hubristic alazons of self-interested deceivers.

In recent years, these tensions have informed a highly active and often extremely antagonistic “debate” between an array of Sophist-icated pundits and commenters employed by the right-leaning *Fox News* network and the liberal pluralist presenters of the fake or faux news or commentary programs shown on Comedy Central, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*. The Fox commentators privilege a jingoistic, patriotic, religiously-informed Americanism, claiming that atheism, feminism, homosexuality, science, liberalism, pluralism and socialism are dangerous evils that will undermine and destroy American values. For example, in 2000, Ann Coulter unleashed an attack on American conservationism in favor of a Biblical interpretation of the oil industry:

The ethic of conservation is the explicit abnegation of man's dominion over the Earth. The lower species are here for our use. God said so: Go forth, be fruitful, multiply, and rape the planet — it's yours. That's our job: drilling, mining and stripping. Sweaters are the anti-Biblical view. Big gas-guzzling cars with phones and CD players and wet bars — that's the Biblical view⁸

The political pundit Glenn Beck has regularly compared progressivism with Nazism and Communism, explicitly comparing embryonic stem cell research to the theory of eugenics and the extermination of the Jews.

Remember, those great progressive doctors are the ones who brought us Eugenics. It was the progressive movement and its science. Let's put

science truly in her place. If evolution is right, why don't we just help out evolution? That was the idea. And sane people agreed with it! And it was from America. Progressive movement in America. Eugenics. In case you don't know what Eugenics led us to: the Final Solution. A master race! ⁹

Fox's most watched pundit, Bill O'Reilly, has also explicitly compared people who criticize Fox broadcasts with Nazi propagandists, claiming that

These people use propaganda techniques perfected by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of information. They lie, distort, defame all the time.¹⁰

Likewise, the Fox News contributor Jonah Goldman wrote a New York Times bestselling "non-fiction" book that placed modern liberalism's origins in early 20th-century fascist politics. Similarly, the subjugated role of women in the Bible is juxtaposed against feminism, which is packaged as anti-Christian, anti-family, anti-capitalist, anti-Patriotic activities, furthered by a claim that feminism and liberalism are undermining women's natural position in the world and stopping women from being happy. The hugely popular radio jockey, Rush Limbaugh, states

I'm a huge supporter of women. What I'm not is a supporter of liberalism. Feminism is what I oppose. Feminism has led women astray. I love the women's movement — especially when walking behind it.¹¹

The most highly visible supporter of a contrasting, more liberal viewpoint is the satirist, comedian, actor and writer, Jon Stewart.

3.3 Jon Stewart: The Modern Socrates

Jon Stewart has been hosting *The Daily Show* since 1999, transforming it from a largely irrelevant satire of celebrity, to a finely honed, no holds barred, and biting ironic attack on self-interested, partisan and irresponsible politicians and media

practices. *The Daily Show* reveals the hypocrisy, contradictions and irrational statements in American politics and condemns the American media for failing to take them seriously, abdicating their responsibility to the public discourse in attempts to attract and influence viewers through theatrical sophistry. Stewart has been praised and condemned for his influence on youth, considered elitist and anti-democratic, and treated as a foolish clown and satirical gadfly. In comparing Stewart to Socrates through these lenses, I provide a sketch of how Stewart, comfortable living with complexity, ambiguity, paradox and inconsistency, employs an acute ironic sensibility to challenge those that argue for partisan certainty. In doing so, I argue that he is not just the critical jester of American politics and media, but akin to the jesting Socrates that inspired Erasmus {Erasmus, 1967 #1253: 78-79}, Rabelais {Rabelais, 1955 #1252: 37}, Swift {e.g. in \Traugott, 1961 #1259} and Kierkegaard {Kierkegaard, 1989 #890}.

3.3.1 Fool or Figurehead

Socrates was heralded on one side as ‘the wisest man in Athens’ by some but regarded as a foolish fraud and dangerous agitator by others. Plato’s defence of Socrates’ wisdom is well known. However, in Aristophanes’ Clouds, the caricatured Socrates is a petty thief, fraud and sophist. Aristophanes’ attack on Socrates influenced his trial in which he was charged with corrupting the youth.

Stewart’s early stewardship of *The Daily Show* was described by Dan French as ‘masturbatory, nearly apolitical, only barely satirical, and without larger purpose’ {French, 2005 #1572}. It is now reviewed as ‘an absolute essential source of sanity, a coming healing of our injuries’ {Lavery, 2005 #1573} that has won sixteen *Emmy Awards* and two *Peabody Awards*. The 9/11 attacks were the turning point of Stewart’s *Daily Show* career, turning him from marginal funny man to an iconic cultural figure. As Stewart re-evaluated his show post 9/11, it became increasingly sophisticated, employing razor sharp satire to challenge official interpretations of reality.

Over time, the show's deconstructions grew increasingly sophisticated. Its fascination with language, for instance, evolved from chuckles over the president's verbal gaffes ("Is our children learning?" "Subliminal") to ferocious exposés of the administration's Orwellian manipulations: from its efforts to redefine the meaning of the word "torture" to its talk about troop withdrawals from Iraq based on "time horizons" (a strategy, Mr. Stewart noted, "named after something that no matter how long you head towards it, you never quite reach it") {Kakutani, 2008 #678}.

By 2009, Stewart, with 44% of the vote, topped Time magazine's online poll entitled 'Now that Walter Cronkite has passed on, who is America's most trusted newscaster?'

Reports have said that young people get most of their news from Jersey guys Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's Comedy Central programs. Bob Holt, *New Jersey Newsroom*, 28 Dec, 2010

he gets a relatively modest 1.3 million viewers, in a nation of over 300 million, on TV, but internet viewers magnify his reach exponentially... easily digested into YouTube-length clips, it is also perfect fodder for influential websites such as Gawker and the Huffington Post, which stream those clips almost daily. In effect, this has made him the Crown Prince of gotcha journalism, 2.0. Guy Adams, *The Independent*, 30 December, 2010

Likewise, the *New York Times* suggested Stewart should be regarded as "the modern-day equivalent of Edward R Murrow", widely regarded as one of the greatest journalists in American history and noted for his honesty and integrity. The UK newspaper, *The Independent*, went even further, comparing Stewart to the President of the USA, suggesting he should be called the "satirist-in-chief".

Others argue Stewart is a “dangerous” influence on America’s youth. Naming him as the 28th most dangerous liberal in America, *Townhall* magazine stated:

A 2007 media survey revealed that more than one-in-10 young voters relied on Stewart’s show as a primary source of political news—a share that has undoubtedly swelled since. It’s no small coincidence that voters aged 18-29 backed Barack Obama for president by a breathtaking 2-to-1 margin {Rayfield, 2011 #682}.

Likewise, a study from Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris of East Carolina University ‘found that young people who watch Stewart’s faux news program, “The Daily Show,” develop cynical views about politics and politicians that could lead them to just say no to voting.’ {Rayfield, 2011 #682; Morin, 2006 #683}. The Student Activism website writes that Jon Stewart’s “public persona is profoundly disingenuous, and ultimately toxic to American political discourse.”¹²

3.3.2 Anti-Democratic yet Virtuous Democrat

Plato’s Socrates openly espoused an ‘anti-democratic’ perspective, arguing that majority opinion cannot yield appropriate policy, which requires authentic knowledge and professional expertise, attributes possessed by a select few {in Xenophon, #668 1.2.9; Plato, #669 Crito 47c-d; Plato, #684, Laches 184e}. Others (e.g Vlastos {, 1983 #860;, 1991 #674}; Popper {, 1966 #740}; Waterfield {, 2010 #1579}) argue that Socrates’ unconventional methods, rather than being ‘anti-democratic’, were endeavours aimed at resolving the administrative confusion in Athens.

Stewart’s relationship with American democracy is saturated with critical tension. On one hand, Stewart is a torch holder for liberal democratic plurality. Indeed, he places the possibility of doing a comedic and satirical political broadcast like the *Daily Show* alongside the notion of democratic freedom and an open society:

The show in general we feel like is a privilege. Even the idea that we can sit in the back of the country and make wise cracks... which is really what we do. We sit in the back and throw spitballs—but never forgetting that it is a luxury in this country that allows us to do that. That is, a country that allows for open satire, and I know that sounds basic and it sounds like it goes without saying. But that's really what this whole situation is about. It's the difference between closed and open. The difference between free and... burdened. And we don't take that for granted here, by any stretch of the imagination. Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show*, 20/11/2001

On the other hand, Stewart damningly condemns the qualities of those partaking in the public discourse, arguing that they are undermining the vigour and potential of the American public sphere. Among his regular targets are policies determined by religious dogma, corporate self-interests and idiosyncratic personal beliefs being “sold” as being in the “public good”. Stewart deconstructs American policy from a comedic or satirical vantage point, illustrating their paradoxes and contradictions, and returning them, properly humbled, for public debate.

Stewart's influence derives from the fact that declaring leaders or policies funny is to criticize them, to point out their irrationality or the incongruence between our expectations regarding good leadership and the reality on the ground.” ... Comedy requires a certain detachment from society, an ability to grasp and communicate the quiet absurdity or contradiction in people's actions, commitments and habits, which would otherwise go unnoticed and unexamined. {Bronsther, 2011 #685}

Stewart views people as holding inconsistent views, following contradictory dogma, living messy, flustered, compromised and compromising lives, akin to Vlastos' understanding of Socratic understanding of good human life as “chancy,

patchy, provisional, perpetually self-questioning, [and] endlessly perplexed” (Vlastos 1991: 64)

I reject the idea there are just two sides. I think that with the amount of ideas and thoughts there are, it’s not even going to be consistent with the same person. People can hold liberal and conservative dogma points at the same time. They’re not living their lives via platforms. They’re living their lives. The whole thing is an awfully tired construct. Jon Stewart, Bulger, Adam (2008-06-12). No News is Good News. *The Hartford Advocate*. Retrieved on 2009-04-12.

Most Americans don’t live their lives solely as Democrats or Republicans or conservatives or liberals. Most Americans live their lives that our just a little bit late for something they have to do. Often it’s something they do not want to do, but they do it. Impossible things get done every day that are only made possible by the little, reasonable compromises. *Jon Stewart, Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear, Closing Speech, 30/10/2010*

3.3.3 Biased Trickster or Stinging Gadfly

Xenophon and Aristophanes both portray Socrates as being an arch-Sophist who is unsurpassed in the ability of artfully styling words to win an argument. Indeed, Xenophon’s Socrates is characterised by his unsurpassed ability to win arguments, not by his search for the truth. In contrast, Plato describes Socrates’ relationship with Athenian political scene, as akin to a “gadfly” stinging the slow and dimwitted Athenian horse into action. In his trial, Socrates argues that he, like the gadfly, could easily be swatted, but if a society silenced dissenting and infuriating voices, the social cost would be very high.

An ongoing criticism of Stewart is that he is a voice-piece of the left and uses his comedy show to promote liberal, plural values. Whereas Stewart is makes no

secret of his liberal leanings, he argues that he takes no definitive position in his shows and simply illustrates hypocrisy, contradiction and absurdity wherever it may lie. The authenticity of *The Daily Show* is its continual uncovering of inauthenticity in the pronouncements of others, Republic or Democrat alike. Stewart repeatedly argues that his influence is purely comedic, an attempt to open eyes through satire and humour, not to establish any kind of meaningful agenda.

We are not warriors in anyone's army. And that is not trying to be self-deprecating. I'm proud of what we do. I really like these two shows. I like making 'em. I like watching them. I'm really proud of them. But I understand their place. I don't view us as people who lead social movements. Jon Stewart, *Rolling Stone interview*, October 31, 2006, on the role of The Daily Show and The Colbert Report

Stewart's exposing of contradictions or hypocrisies in the stances of the "wise" or powerful is similar to Socrates' undermining of Sophist wisdom through exposing the contradictions in their conceptual definitions. Unlike Socrates, who had to partake in serious debate around the concept before he could expose its contradictions, much of Stewart's material is served to him on a plate. He shows media evidence of the contradictory arguments presented by his targets and merely pulls funny faces or makes wisecracks for the point to hit home, as the visual evidence is so powerful. His technique of presenting politicians contradicting themselves by airing side-by-side video clips showing what the politician said today contradicting what he said a few weeks or months ago is Socratic method for the digital age.

Stewart has a similar relationship with the news media, arguing that the American press is allowing political spin and sophistry to run unchallenged, instead focusing on the puerile and irrelevant.

A free and independent press is essential to the health of a functioning democracy. It serves to inform the voting public on matters relevant to its well-being. Why they've stopped doing that is a mystery. I mean, 300 camera crews outside a courthouse to see what Kobe Bryant is wearing when the judge sets his hearing date, while false information used to send our country to war goes unchecked? What the fuck happened? *Jon Stewart, America (The Book)*

In an appearance on CNN's *Crossfire*, Stewart repeatedly tries to illustrate the gap between the show's intended purpose (to provide nuanced, political debate) and its actual purpose (to provide politicians with a platform to spout spin and rhetoric). When Stewart tried to illustrate this gap, he was met with resistance and anger.

We decided to go to this place, *Crossfire*, which is a nuanced public policy analysis show... named after the stray bullets that hit innocent bystanders in a gang fight. [...] I had always in the past mentioned to friends and people that I meet on the street that I think that show... um... blows. So I thought it was only the right thing to do to go say it to them personally on their program, but here's the thing about confronting someone with that on their show: They're *there!* Uncomfortable! And they were very mad, because apparently, when you invite someone on a show called *Crossfire* and you express an opinion, they don't care for that. Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show*, 18/10/2004

The highpoint of Stewart's attacks on an irresponsible media "selling certainty" in the midst of uncertainty and exposing the hypocrisy of their saying one thing and doing another, and perhaps the best example of a contemporary Socratic performance destroying a target through the revelation of multiple contradictions, came in his *Daily Show* interview/debate with the host of CNBC's *Mad Money*, Jim Cramer. Stewart had repeatedly criticized CNBC's financial commentary as being exaggeratedly confident or worryingly biased when

discussing featured companies, which he illustrated by juxtaposing their defence of AIG's financial position as being "very manageable" and not needing capital against the billions of dollars of bailout money it subsequently received (Daily Show, March 4, 2009). In the same show, Stewart showed a number of CNBC analysts, including Cramer, arguing that Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch were safe weeks to days before their collapses or buyouts. Interviewed by David Letterman the next day, Stewart made his feelings about the financial networks clear:

The thing that upsets me the most, honestly, there are three 24-hour financial networks. All their slogans are like, 'We know what's going on in Wall Street.' But then you turn it on during the crisis, and they're like, 'We don't know what's going on!' It'd be like turning on The Weather Channel in a hurricane, and they're just doing this: 'Why am I wet? What's happening to me? And it's so windy! What's going on, I'm scared!' How do you not know, man? *Jon Stewart, Late Show with David Letterman, 5/3/2009*

On Monday 9 March, Cramer replied that the clip was taken out of context, arguing that he was only stating that Bears Stearn stock was safe and not that people should invest money into the company. He further damned Stewart's analysis, with an attack on NCB's Today show on 10 March 2009, stating "The absurdity astounds me. Jon Stewart is a comedian, and he's decided to focus on some calls I made during a bull market. The guy is a comedian." Two days later, Cramer appeared on *The Daily Show*. Stewart opened the segment by detailing the contradiction in CNBC's stance.

So, let me tell you why I think this thing has caught some attention. It's the gap between what CNBC advertises itself as and what it is. And the help that people need to discern this.

He furthers this by illustrating the difference between Cramer's show and his own.

Look, we're both snake oil salesman to a certain extent, but we do label the show as snake oil here. Isn't there a problem selling snake oil as vitamin tonic?

In observing the contradictions between what CNBC says it does (provide expert financial news) and what it actually does (entertains and gives the companies it covers a relatively free ride), Stewart disarms Cramer, forcing him to accept the contradictory position. Stewart further examines the contradictions in Cramer's knowledge, providing illustrations of the differences between Cramer's own investment actions and the advice he provides to viewers, stating that he wants the "*Mad Money* Jim Cramer to protect me from that Jim Cramer." Caught in repeated contradictions, Cramer has little option but to accept Stewart's arguments. Stewart continues by detailing the contradictions between the "market as sold on TV" and the "actual market."

CNBC could be an incredibly powerful tool of illumination for people that believe that there are two markets. One that has been sold to us as long-term: Put your money in 401Ks, put your money in pensions and just leave it there, don't worry about it, it's all doing fine. And then there's this other market, this real market that's occurring in a back room where giant piles of money are going in and out, and people are trading them, and it's transactional, and it's fast but it's dangerous, it's ethically dubious and it's hurting that long-term market. And so what it feels like—and I'm speaking purely as a layman—it feels like we are capitalizing your adventure by our pension, and our hard-earned—and that it is a game that you know, that you know is going on, but that you go on television as a financial network and pretend isn't happening.

He then argues that CNBC reporters knew what was happening but were couching it an “entertaining language” that helped them attract viewers and make money, not interested in presenting useful information, but only in making it look fun. He also argues that the presenters of these shows are aware of more than they let on, letting the finance industry get away with acts of near criminality that the news channels knew were happening.

I understand you want to make finance entertaining, but it’s not a fucking game. And I, I—when I watch that, I get—I can’t tell you how angry it makes me. ‘Cause what it says to me is: You all know. You all know what’s going on and you can draw a straight line from those shenanigans to the all that stuff that was being pulled at Bear, and at AIG. And all of this derivative market stuff that is this weird Wall Street side bet. [...] You knew what the banks were doing and yet were touting it for months and months. The entire network was. So now to pretend that this was some sort of crazy, once-in-a-lifetime tsunami that no one could have seen coming is disingenuous at best and criminal at worse.

By this stage, Cramer is reduced to saying that he was let down by CEOs that were personal friends that he had trusted and that it was not his fault. Stewart does not let him off the hook, stating, “The CEO of a company lied to you. But isn’t that financial reporting?” Stewart signs off with a further condemnation of financial sophistry hiding the contradictions between the “real” and “televised” market, arguing that the financial reporters at CNBC knew exactly what was going on but failed to report it.

It’s very easy to get on this after the fact. The measure of the network and the measure of the man is—CNBC could act as [...] nobody’s asking for them to be a regulatory agency. But whose side are they on? It feels like they have to reconcile: is their audience the Wall Street traders that are doing this for constant profit on a day-to-day, short-term—these guys at these companies were on a Sherman’s March through their companies,

financed by our 401Ks, and all the incentives of their companies were for short-term profit. And they burned the fucking house down with our money and they walked away rich as hell. And you guys knew that that was going on.

3.3.4 Conclusion: The Transformative Power of the Elegant Jester

Stewart employs a razor sharp wit, a mixture of sophisticated media techniques and inane fart-jokes, immense charm, intelligence and urbane elegance to expose false or rigid beliefs, illustrating flaws and contradictions within, returning them, fully ambiguous and loaded with ambivalence, to the debating floor. He supports his role as comedic anchor with repeated calls for civilized, intelligent debate in the mainstream US media. He argues that his own role has only become important because of the mainstream media is uninterested in confronting that rhetoric, instead employing its excesses to improve ratings and audience. He condemns the mainstream media as having “a responsibility to the public discourse, and [failing] miserably”, “helping the politicians and the corporations”, being “part of their strategies” and “partisan hacks” {Stewart, 2004 #693}. On one level, Stewart takes on the role of the jester in medieval societies as a figure whose capriciousness exemplifies the chaos and contingency of the margins, undermining stable categories and knowledge, creating reflexivity and self-awareness, a source of wisdom as much as laughter {Jacobs, 1997 #692}.¹³ However, at another level, he does much more. He is “one of the most beloved political figures in media, as more than a court jester to his fans but an almost infallible rhetorician with a gift for leaving those who challenge his wisdom regretting they ever tried” {Martel, 2012 #1571}. He can close down television programmes, influence elections, interview presidents and, through contemporary technologies, speak to millions of people worldwide.

As Kunda suggests, a new type of organisational man, an “ironic” organizational man, might have risen. This type of man has been honed by access to ironic mode films, dramas and cultural critiques. Although, as Kunda suggests, he might be merely a sarcastic eiron, nihilistically undermining organizational

values for the sake of undermining, as this thesis has presented, he might be much more. As the ironic jester extraordinaire, Jon Stewart provides a provisional stereotype towards understanding a more nuanced, Socratic-esque ironic man. Like Kierkegaard's or Nietzsche's Socrates, he employs ironic performance against the deceptive ironic performances of sophisticated and self-interested others, bettering their own rhetorical techniques to highlight the inconsistencies of their rhetoric, pointing out their hidden motivations, and pricking the hubris of vainglorious fools who suggest their opinions are reality. Like Socrates, Stewart has risen to prominence because his mastery of the performance makes those less mastered look foolish and fallible, ironic victims of a temper and technique that they were involved in generating themselves. More importantly, and again like Socrates, his influence on a generation is significant.

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3.5 Notes

¹ Although Tim does occasionally step in to save Brent from total humiliation, he turns down the offer to take his place when Brent is fired. Likewise, Dawn is only interested in becoming an artist and is only working as a receptionist in support of that dream.

² It is interesting to note how similar conditions occurred during the period immediately preceding the English Civil War.

English Success: In defeating the Spanish Armada, the Elizabethan fleet established Britain's dominance of the oceans and ensured that the country did not have to fight in any European wars should it not be politically expedient to do so. In the late-Elizabethan and Jacobean age, Britain enjoyed the longest period of peace in its modern history,{Peck, 2005 #997: 7}, accompanied by rising prosperity and colonial endeavors, which provided the building blocks for its imperial future.

Despite the rising concerns with political intrigue against the king in Shakespeare's work, the prosperity of the country and, perhaps, the malleability of James I, produced a then unparalleled period of peace and prosperity, albeit one that resulted in the country being in deficit at the end of James's reign {Gregg, 1981 #852: 40}. Yet, within a mere twenty-five years of his death, the English Revolution had unseated and executed a king and Parliament had declared that "the people are, under God, the original of all just power; that the Commons of England, being chosen by and representing the people, have the supreme power in this nation." James's successor, Charles I, believed in the divine right of kings and was determined that Parliamentary opposition could and would not stop him from following his foreign ambitions in Europe. Influenced by Buckingham{, #998}², Charles embroiled England into a costly and calamitous war with Spain, which he funded by collecting taxes without Parliamentary consent or support, reinstating obsolete feudal taxes and revoking all historical gifts of land by the crown or church, forcing owners to pay rent {Kishlansky, 1996 #851}. There were also religious conflicts around Charles's attempts to limit the Reformation and return England to a more traditional and sacramental direction {Gregg, 1981 #852}. Charles managed to suspend Parliament through a period referred to as the Eleven Years Tyranny {Carlton, 1995 #853: 154}. The subsequent Civil War between monarchists and the Parliamentarians resulted in the more democratic forces reducing the power of the aristocratic elite.

Cultural Transmission of Values: This was accompanied by the rise of English drama, which followed two forms, Tudor morality plays, which validate the virtues of a Godly life by prompting the hero to choose such a life over an evil alternative, and more academic variants in the Aristotelian tradition, which prompted ideas of unity and decorum through long soliloquies {Greenblatt, 2004 #843}. The theatrical Renaissance of Elizabethan England was established by the University Wits, a group of diverse playwrights, including luminaries such as Marlowe and Nashe, who wrote tragic plays focusing on heroic themes and great historical figures {Albert, 1979 #844}. These themes gradually became more complex and ambiguous, blending the morality plays with the rhetorical complexity of the academic plays {Bevington, 1968 #846}. These themes emerged most completely in Shakespeare's work, which shifted from the classical tragic form of his earlier plays {Ribner, 1965 #847}, into the darker Jacobean tragedies, satires and tragicomedies, in which heroic personalities were enmeshed in pervasive corruption {Foakes, 1971 #848;Campbell, 1938 #849}. Just as Greek theatre had captured and shaped the imagination of the populace, Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre was the ideal means to capture and convey the interests of the time. Danby's {Danby, 1949 #850} evaluation of Shakespeare's plays is invaluable in seeing them

as historical counterpoints to Greek society. Danby illustrates how Shakespeare attacks the Machiavellianism of Elizabethan England (ibid: 72-74) portraying Machiavels as an historical inevitability that must be resisted in order to maintain the humane traditional societies that precede their rise.

By the Restoration, the nature of the plays had changed {Harwood, 1982 #1293;McMillin, 1997 #1294;Richetti, 2005 #1295;Loftis, 1966 #1297}. As with Greek theatre, historic tragedies were succeeded by fantastical comedies populated by caricatures. The plays increasingly became about "men and women who live in London, care for sex and money, and make fools of one another if not of themselves" {McMillin, 1997 #1294: ix}. Witty anti-heroes (wits, rakes and gallants) used trickery and masquerade to cuckold and rob vainglorious fops and fools (ref). Of the new fashion, the English poet Sir Phillip Sidney writes that the business of plays is

to expose the Singularities of Pride and Fancy, to make Folly and Falsehood contemptible, and to bring every Thing that is Ill Under Infamy, and Neglect {quoted in \Harwood, 1982 #1293: 2}

The most admired quality of the hero is not virtue, but his witty ability to obtain his goals. Knights {, 1966 #1298: 11} observes that the fools are distinguishable from the heroes only "by the discrepancy between their ambitions and achievement, not because their ambitions are puerile" and Kaul {, 1970 #1299: 94} maintains that "however much the manner might differ superficially, the purposes and the pursuits [of hero and fool] are identical." Of the witty protagonist, Birdsall {, 1970 #1300: 20} writes

The Restoration comic hero does not turn the world of inherited rules upside down merely for the smutty or destructive fun of it. If he is self-consciously wicked, it is because the prevailing system has proved repressive of his *élan* vital and hence prompts him to demand more flexible and expressive forms. For him the only true morality is living well and fully. (P. 20)

³ The most auspicious of these were the annual competitions of dithyrambic choruses, which were civic events attended by the majority of Athenian citizenry {Munn, 2000 #1285;Monoson, 2000 #1286}. Although the exact origins of these performances are questionable, scholars tend to assume they began as religious events and transformed into a celebration of democratic values {Scodel, 2010 #1287: 33}. Certainly, early in the theatrical transmission of values mythical tragedies were highly valued, whereas non-mythical, realistic tragedies caused great upset {Scodel, 2010 #1287: 39}. However, plays began to increasingly reflect the achievements of real rather than mythical Greeks {Munn, 2000 #1285: 29-31} and reflect the dissatisfaction with political figures {Scodel, 2010 #1287: 60}. As democracy became increasingly established, Athenian citizenry were united under a belief that victories and their city's success were God-given, driven forward by god-favored leaders who, in deferring their victories to the god and mythical heroes of the past, bowed to and accepted the political equality and democratic sentiment of the city {Munn, 2000 #1285: 27}. Monoson {, 2000 #1286: 88-89} draws on a wealth of Greek scholarship in claiming that attending these events was "a vigorous civic practice closely identified with the exercise of democratic citizenship" and "an official perception of the excellence of their democratic polis."

⁴ For example, in Aristophanes' *The Birds*,

the gods are caricatures: the clumsy and foreign Triballus is utterly useless and does not even speak Greek, Heracles oscillates between violence and hunger, Poseidon is as pompous as a senior ambassador can get. They are no match for the clever Athenian who is helped by a Prometheus who is at his most conniving and sleazy {Graf, 2007 #1577: 80}.

5 Originating in the 2004 film, *The One Percent*, a phrase used to designate the elite in contemporary American politics. Typically referred to as 'wealth creators' by conservative news media.

6 Source: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2002/12/19/among-wealthy-nations/>

7 Source: Federal Judge James Leon Holmes 2002 address to the Society of Catholic Social Scientists

⁸ "Oil Good; Democrats bad", Townhall, 12 October 2000

⁹ Source: <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2009/03/09/36660/beck-eugenics/?mobile=nc>

¹⁰ Source: The O'Reilly Factor (Fox News), 12 March 2007

¹¹ Rush Limbaugh, responding to criticism that he is sexist and defending his selection as one of the judges at the 2010 Miss America Pageant, "Fox News' Fox & Friends," February 3, 2010

¹² In a more extreme and heavily anti-Semitic rant, the blogger Joe Cortina states:

This foul mouth rat faced jew [sic] is one of the reasons our children have turned into pure filth. They love this demon and, sadly now think that his over the top screeds of filth are "COOL"!

¹³ If Stewart plays the elegant jester, then his one-time faux correspondent and now host of his own show, Stephen Colbert, plays a buffoonish fool in his portrayal of the faux conservative critic/host of *The Colbert Report*. Colbert parodies the hard-nosed, right-wing, Christian conservatism of personality-driven political pundit programs, particularly Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*. Colbert's poetic persona is 'well-intentioned, poorly informed, high-status idiot', who is 'appealing because he tells people how to think.'¹³

When Colbert (*in persona*) criticizes something like the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal, it's not the policy he dislikes - it's the missed opportunity. "It's time to bring torture back to this side of the pond and put Americans back to work," he says.¹³

Colbert's poetic character employs a concept of 'truthiness', which is, according to Miriam Webster, "truth that comes from the gut, not books" (Stephen Colbert, Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report," October 2005) and "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true" (American Dialect Society, January 2006). In over-exaggerating and extending the statements of his right-wing targets to extremes, Colbert transforms them into pompous alazons, sharing that perspective with his 'knowing' audience. There are some subtle differences between Stewart's serious fool and Colbert's foolish seriousness. Colbert reflects on Stewart's sense of ease when performing as the Daily Show 'anchor man,'

... Jon is Jon, and Jon can name the moment in ways that I eventually will, but this character isn't so much in my bones that I can do it automatically now {Rabin, 2006 #1574}.

Likewise, Stewart the man is not as detached from Stewart the 'anchor' as Colbert is from his poetic creation, leading to a greater level of personal responsibility.

It's also a freeing sense. Jon couldn't say on camera that he thinks Rosa Parks was overrated, because that's a hateful thing to say. But this character can get away with it, because the audience on some level knows [he doesn't] mean it {Rabin, 2006 #1574}.