

Wrestling with Ambivalence
Liberty, Freedom and the Organizational Self

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ABSTRACT

Our understanding of the cognitive ambiguities and moral ambivalences surrounding the rationalization of the organizational self has tended to be overly structured by long standing value-laden bi-polar models of organizational culture and associated tripartite schemas of actors and responses. Drawing on a case study analysis of how organizational actors addressed the ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions surrounding whether planned cultural change was an opportunity for or threat to human freedom, this paper argues for a more open and less-restrictive avenue of research. This alternative involves organizational studies researchers learning more about the intellectual and moral complexity of organizational practice by paying greater attention to the dilemmas facing organizational actors of all kinds seeking to make sense of such ambiguities and grapple with their ambivalence.

A BI-POLAR DISORDER?

While the origin of culture change initiatives is an important question, a central concern is also how managers and workers perceive and respond to them. As has been commented elsewhere (McLoughlin, Badham and Palmer 2005), too often managerial/employee intentions and rhetoric, or ossified and politicized academic positions, stand in for systematic empirical investigation of actor's actual experiences and practices. In an interesting twist on Giddens' 'double hermeneutic' (1976), this has been established and perpetuated by a degree of mutual-reinforcement between the discourses of organizational actors and analysts of organizational culture.

These positions take the form of academic and lay versions of what Dalton (1959) and Burns (1961) identified as the 'dual code' in organizational language and morality. The dual code in organizational studies of culture has traditionally been the contrast between what Martin (2001) has characterized as 'integrationist' and 'differentiationist' frames or paradigms. The former is unitarist, functionalist, consensual and managerialist, assuming and/or pursuing a common and benign organizational culture. The latter assumes an embedded inequality in organizations, domination by the most powerful, and conflicting

ideologies reflecting different interests. The rationalization of the self when viewed through these dual codes is either viewed as a set of strategies and processes aligning organizational requirements and actor's needs or a set of rhetoric and practices of the powerful accompanied by a more or less enduring opposition and resistance. This bipolar view has been documented in culture change studies as embedded in the interpreted experiences and practices of different categories of organizational actor. Thus, critics such as Casey (1995) and Collinson (2003) distinguish between 'colluded' or 'conformist' selves who adopt managerial culture rhetoric and 'defensive' or 'resistant' selves that reject it (Hochschild 1983; Kunda 1992 use similar dichotomies). This bipolar view of the interpretations and experiences of organizational actors is now a de-facto institutionalized socio-intellectual construction. A self-reinforcing double hermeneutic exists between these normative values and category assumptions of management and organizational studies scholars and the ideology and rhetoric of organizational actors operating in discursive arenas of 'private' and 'public', 'backstage' and 'frontstage', and rhetorics of 'administration' and 'realpolitik'. (Buchanan and Badham 2007). Academic interpreters and lay actors see their assumptions reflected in each other's discourse, there is a level of mutual reinforcement that, at least to a degree, maintains such views as a concrete social reality.

A THIRD WAY? AMBIGUITY AND AMBIVALENCE

In contrast to this polar orthodoxy there lies another interpretation of the rationalization of the organizational self. A 'fragmentationist' understanding of organizational culture (Martin 2001) sees such rationalization processes as far more ambiguous in source and character, such that 'cultures of ambiguity' are identifiable (McLoughlin, Badham and Palmer 2005). However, the argument for a more complex and nuanced view of organizational 'self'-rationalization is also argued for from *both* positions *within* the more traditional polar approaches – influenced by traditional interpretations of 'sociological ambivalence' Merton (1976) on the one hand and 'contradictory working class consciousness' on the other (Mann 1970; Abercrombie et al. 1980). Influenced by such perspectives, the focus on ambiguity and ambivalence in culture change empirical research has tended to take the form of the positing of a rise of a class of 'ironic' (Kunda 1992), 'capitulated' (Casey 1995), 'dramaturgical' (Collinson 1992), and 'bewildered' (Knights

and McCabe 2000) organizational actors. Insofar as such studies have questioned or overcome the simplicities of traditional bi-polar models, this has been an important development, providing closer analyses of actual practices and experiences. One of the dangers of such analyses is, however, that despite an apparent recognition of greater complexity, they can end up restricting analysis within a bipolar evaluative framework while encouraging a somewhat stereotyped tripartite classification of types of actor, with all the attendant dangers of schemas of this type (Goldthorpe et. al 1972) In contrast, this paper argues for the importance of extending and further exploring the ambiguities and ambivalences that have been identified. This is undertaken not simply as a ‘fragmentationist’ critique of the simplicities of bipolar models or tripartite schemes but in order to further explore what Kondo (1990: 225) characterizes as the ‘ludic space’ in which we craft our organizational selves i.e. not the space of ‘monolithic domination and utopian resistance but [...] the complicated web of contradictions and ironies which bind us and which we in turn fabricate as we live out our lives’. It is further understanding of the discursive practices and identity work undertaken by organizational actors in order to make sense of and grapple with such issues that, we argue, is the most fruitful area for further research.

STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Within this general research area, the particular theme taken up in this paper is how ambiguity and ambivalence is experienced or represented *within each* of the groups of actors characterized by tripartite classification schemas – an exploration that arguably throws doubt on the classification itself. We have initially characterized these ideal type categories as the more committed citizens, the more distanced critics, and the ambivalent players ‘caught in the middle’. In addressing this issue, the paper draws on data and insights obtained from a six-year study of an Australian cokemaking plant (Cokemaking Oz) undergoing an extensive normative cultural change program.

This theme is explored by focusing on the discourse of these actors around one of the key cultural values raised and debated in the course of such programs – that of liberty or freedom (terms that, for the purposes of this paper, are used interchangeably). This paper explores the themes, ambiguities and contradictions

involved with the help of the classic analysis of liberty by Berlin (2003). Berlin argues that Western culture has two intertwined and often-conflicting ‘positive’ (freedom to) and ‘negative’ (freedom from) ideas of liberty – and these respective views are clearly drawn upon by those more committed to and distanced from the change program. However, as Berlin also points out, there are ambiguities and tensions within these concepts, and the authoritarian use of the former and liberal use of the latter in the West are historical conditions rather than logical consequences. As we shall see, there was at Cokemaking Oz a widespread albeit selective recognition of many of these tensions, and varying degrees of attention given to grappling with the ambiguities and contradictions involved. The paper argues from these findings that what drives promoters or motivates critics is less a clear and distinct value set than ambiguous values, which are wrestled with, translated and made to work in context by all actors.

THE CASE: COKEMAKING OZ AND UTILITIES

In the late 90s, a new plant manager (Garry) was appointed to the Cokemaking site with a brief to bring about a change in culture. The overall rhetoric was that of a culture of enterprise. Garry’s discussions of the change ‘journey’ involved his own highly personalised spin on the now 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 and Palmer 2005). This rhetoric was cascaded through the organization, and managers from different sections of the plant were tasked with instigating the changes.

Within the Cokemaking plant, utilities is the section that maintains and repairs the doors and ovens of the ‘Batteries’. These are hundreds of tall narrow ovens, in which ground coal is cooked to produce coke, which is then used to make steel. The process is dirty, hot and dangerous, technically complex and ultimately unpredictable. Utilities has been subject to a series of change initiatives, which resulted in the subcontracting out of certain tasks, and a consequent reduction of the numbers and the skill diversity of directly employed staff. The manager, Albert, is largely responsible for these subcontractors, as well as a

staff of fourteen *Battery Specialists* and six *Battery Technicians*: new designations resulting from restructuring. Albert's approach was generally perceived as 'ahead of the game' in regards culture change, and has strong 'ideological' affinities with the plant manager.

The *Battery Specialists* work on the batteries: they are the 'guys who get their hands dirty'. Most of the *Technicians* worked previously on the batteries, and their new role reflects a perceived need from Albert for a cadre of self-motivated and enterprising individuals to perform planning rather than doing work. These changes have sought to undermine and overturn entrenched 'old' work cultures, which are negatively perceived by Albert and the plant manager, Garry. However, identification of many employees as 'wages' and 'workers', with management as 'staff', is still strong. Thus, the new terms describing jobs in Utilities are thus overlaid upon extant and arguably 'deeper' cultural identifications.

During the period of research, payment for overtime and being on call emerged as one of the salient issues reflecting both management's view of the proposed cultural change as well as the deeper cultural divides within Utilities. Payment for four hours overtime per week was factored into the total package in an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, in which the workforce agreed to management plant-wide having more discretion and flexibility. The continuous nature of cokemaking means that on occasion operational difficulties arise requiring employees to work weekends or night shifts. Some of these difficulties require Battery Specialist expertise relating to the doors, hence the need for Specialists to be available on a 'call out' basis. That is, if Production (the section of Cokemaking that loads, cooks and pushes the ovens) needed help they proceed to go through a list of names of Utilities personnel. Specialists are paid for providing this call out cover, regardless of whether they are actually called in.

In practice this arrangement caused a good deal of frustration. As illustrated in the events described below, there was a great deal of irritation from some Specialists who felt they were doing more than their fair share. Albert had to cope with the problems of morale and the operational knock on effects of this 'call out' controversy. He acknowledged the pivotal and symbolic significance of the issue when responding to

a more general question about the likely success of the cultural change program in changing the mindsets of the workers: Will it ever occur? A prime example [of the problem we face] is... We have an issue and always have, with overtime and call out. [...]. We deliver a service to the batteries and a service is this package that we agreed to. So when we said to the people 'Ok you guys come up with a system', they came up with a system of avoidance: 'lets just do the least, we'll stuff you'. [...] I knew it wasn't going to work for the simple fact that these people here aren't going to treat this seriously [...]. Their wives would answer the phone; 'Oh he's not home' and all this sort of stuff. So we're paying people four hours a week in overtime money to basically keep them on call [...] they don't like this because it inconveniences them. [...] When we started this change of management it was to get a balance of work and play [...] it's not all play.

THE COMMITTED CORPORATE CITIZENS

The manner in which a number of managers and employees in the Utilities section had interpreted and implemented change towards a more enterprising culture had all the hallmarks of what Berlin characterised as a 'positive' view of freedom. As Berlin put it, the basis of the positive view of freedom is a central concern with 'self-mastery', a mastery that meant not only an absence of slavery to other people but also to ones 'lower self' i.e. our 'poor, ignorant, desire ridden, passionate, empirical selves' (2003: 219). The 'higher self' is perceived as something wider than the individual, the exalted freedom of a social whole – in this case the enterprising member of an expressive enterprising work community. Coercion is, then, justifiable because it is coercing 'men in the name of some goal [...] which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue, but do not, because they are blind or ignorant or corrupt' (2003: 204).

In Utilities, this was clearly exemplified in the rhetoric of the manager. Albert applied a deliberate policy of hiring new employees from greenfield sites with higher skills, education levels and more enterprising attitudes. In the cultural change in Utilities, the division of the workforce into Technicians and Specialists had been taken by Albert as an opportunity to put 'five or six best performing people' into the 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." This 'immaturity' was often seen as a matter of selfishness and personal disappointment, and requiring either the use of threatening behaviour or responsible parenting of 'immature' children. At other times, this 'positive' attitude took the form of a more symbolic parenting response. Following an incident involving a lost key to a shared toolbox, requiring 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, and 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.' [field notes]

It was, however, in the paternalistic rhetoric around 'caring' for such employees that the problems and tensions in the 'positive' view of freedom were most explicitly raised by promoters of the change. – and where people can most clearly be seen as wrestling with the ambiguities thrown up by the lived experience of change (Badham and Garrety 2003). 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 the appropriate time to reveal that there is no option'. 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 one's 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"'.

On the other hand 'caring' was understood and used quite differently in different contexts. 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]. 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'.

On the one hand, in accordance with the ethic of positive freedom, managers and employees were often given narrow choices – for some, to accept job loss and as their jobs became redundant, for others, to 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 in being disciplined, 'thank you for caring for me'.

On the other hand, changes were often 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 was entered into during the change, 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 the 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’. 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 constraints put in place to not ‘force people to be free’, that a degree of confusion and angst was observed amongst many of the more committed promoters of the change.

THE DISTANCED CRITICS

In sharp contrast to the ‘positive’ discourse of enterprise exhibited in Utilities, there co-existed a more ‘negative’ defence of established ‘private’ liberties against the intrusiveness of the change program. The essence of defences of negative liberty is, as Berlin argues, not the validity or worth of the ideals and practices of any intrusive authority but, rather, the threat that any such diminution in autonomy presents to the inherent value of liberty (Berlin 2003: 199/120). Particular defences of negative liberty will always have some a priori notion of the minimal conditions of autonomy and independence with which authorities are not legitimately allowed to interfere. In the case of Utilities, this occurred in three areas where employees sought to defend themselves from intrusion.

The first area concerns the effects of the call out system. While having agreed to overtime being included in normal pay, many Specialists strongly resented the intrusion into their home lives. 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?’”

The second defence concerned a perceived intrusion in a private ‘inner world’ of work. An example of this attitude can be seen in what Zoran said, “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.” This desire to work, not manage, was a common attitude among Specialists.

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. [field notes]”

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’. 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 appears as a form of positive freedom that is imposed on a workforce with a combination of dogmatism, paternalism and more or less hidden threat. The workforce

defending traditional privileges also draw on long standing liberal values against the imposition of arbitrary authority, in particular drawing on 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.

As Berlin recognises, support for ‘negative’ liberty – in this case freedom from intrusion by the new enterprising culture – can, however, embody its own positive and/or authoritarian conceptions of freedom. Implicit in the defence of home life, mental freedom at work, and dignified manual labour are alternative conceptions of ‘positive’ freedom: to preserve forms of work characteristic of the previous indulgent bureaucratic regime. 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. Although, at various times, 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. The inherent dilemmas of ‘negative’ freedom strategies, and the ambiguities that surround it as a coherent view of freedom, appear to be more widely commented upon by critical analysts than by distanced and critical practitioners (Collinson 2003: 504; Collinson 1992: 39). In the plant more broadly, and even amongst some of the Specialists themselves, there was *some* recognition given to these problems – particularly from ‘craft’ workers critical of the self-interested defence of their privileges by ‘operators’. And, isolated instances were found of distanced critics alternating patterns of enthusiasm, guarded optimism and radical scepticism as they reflected on the value of using the change program to improve their ‘subordinate’ status. However, like Collinson and others, we did not explore the nature and distribution of such reflective critical stances in any more detail, nor create or attend other more ‘intimate’ research settings in order to collect such data.

THE AMBIVALENT PLAYERS

In contrast to traditional analyses of the committed citizen and distanced critics, recent 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. A different ‘spin’ on such actors is provided in recent 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.

What was apparent amongst a number in Utilities, especially amongst the Technicians, was a sustained grappling with the contradictory nature of their situation, recognising the value yet limitations of the change ethic, the desirable yet restrictive nature of the ‘old order’ that the exponents of negative liberty sought to defend, and, hence, the overall ambiguity of (and their ambivalence towards) the cultural change. One Technician 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: *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]

Day-to-day ambivalence about 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, 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."

The ambivalences, tension and contradictions involved in becoming a more responsible employee were most clearly evident in interviews with Michael. 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 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."

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."

CONCLUSION

What is revealed by the studies at Cokemaking Oz are a broad range of people pragmatically grappling with the values espoused by the culture change program rather than clearly delineated sets of actors who have either internalised, adopted a distanced stance towards or who are ironically ambivalent about such values. This empirical observation is the contribution we are making to current debates. But there is a broader theoretical salience as well. The initial imagery in organizations and organizational studies towards corporate rationalization was fundamentally bi-polar, in the words of Michael at Cokemaking Oz, as either the forces for 'light' or 'dark'. Subsequent attempts to move beyond traditional schemas proved to be difficult, with critical writers often fluctuating between explaining or evaluating ambiguity and ambivalence in traditional bi-polar terms or offering an under-theorized or stereotypically classified view of the 'ambivalent'. What we have attempted to do in this paper is to take people grappling with ambiguity and ambivalence seriously as both a self-project and a research project. This involves more than revealing that there is a greater degree of 'variability' and complexity in response to change than simple polarised 'positive' and 'negative' reactions (Ogbonna and Harris 2002: 700). It means giving full recognition to the fact that many committed corporate citizens, distanced critics and ambivalent players have varying levels of understanding of the cognitive ambiguity surrounding the freedoms they seek, and a moral ambivalence towards partial and stereotyped views of the nature of these freedoms and their inherent value – *and focusing our research investigations on the nature and implications of this lived experience.*

Our argument is that organisational researchers should be more open to understanding how the experienced ambiguities, ambivalences and paradoxes are played out, listen more carefully to organizational actors on how they craft out their selves in recognition of such issues and dilemmas, allow for the existence of both pro and anti-management stances towards managerial initiatives and the existence of uncertain costs and benefits for both, and adopt a narrative of our 'academic' or 'research'

selves, as well as others, that recognises more of the ambiguity and ambivalence of practice than is normally the case. In short, our argument is that organizational researchers should be open to further exploring and learning from the *manner* in which actors in organizational settings such as Cokemaking Oz grapple with, address or run away from the ambiguities and ambivalences surrounding the rationalization of the organizational self. We should not relapse into simply ‘explaining’ (or ‘explaining away’) actors’ discursive practices and/or evaluating them – particularly in the restricted terms of a bipolar model (or tripartite categorisation interpreted in bipolar terms). Such approaches threaten to analytically and morally perpetuate an overly rationalistic darkness rather than bathe us in the discomfoting light of acknowledged ambivalence (Smelser 1997).

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