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Breakfast at Spiro's: Dramaturgy and Dominance

Michael Rosen
New York University

An approach is presented here for analyzing the relationship between cultural and social action in bureaucracy. Symbols and power are shown as the primary variables of sociocultural study, where symbolic forms and techniques are manipulated by asymmetrical groups in the articulation of basic interests. Through their interrelationship the organizational conditions of production are reproduced or transformed. Social drama is the processual unit through which power relations, symbolic action, and their interaction are played out, and through which social structure is made evident. This perspective is applied to data from an ethnographic study of an advertising agency.

The social drama around which this study is based, a business breakfast, involved the members of Spiro and Associates, an advertising agency located in "Center City" Philadelphia. For ten months in 1982 I did participant observation research in this agency, which at the time employed an average of 104 people.

Spiro and Associates billed approximately \$44.8 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1982. The agency's gross income was roughly 15% of this amount. Among Philadelphia agencies, Spiro and Associates was second in billings for the 1982 fiscal year, approximately \$15 million behind and \$10 million ahead of its immediate competitors.

The Annual Agency Breakfast

Two days after the Labor Day holiday, the first Monday in September, all employees of Spiro and Associates attend the annual "Agency Breakfast." Attendance is required. The organization's accountants and lawyer are also present.

The event is held in the "Main Ballroom" of one of Philadelphia's "luxury class" hotels. For the 1982 Breakfast, 12 large round tables with chairs were arranged throughout the room, with a speaker's podium at one end. A small table

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Address all correspondence to Michael Rosen, Department of Management, Graduate School of Business Administration, 600 Tisch Hall, New York University, New York, NY 10003.

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with two slide projectors had been placed directly in front of the podium. Immediately behind it was a large viewing screen.

Each table was set with fine china and flatware. Pastries were on each table, and at each setting a piece of carved melon stuffed with strawberries had been placed. As guests arrived and were seated they were served coffee or tea by the dining room staff. The event was scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m., but by 8:15 two thirds of the guests had arrived. People were dressed formally, the men in ties and business suits and the women in business suits or dresses.

Breakfast, one hundred or so eggs Benedict marched in by suited waiters in synchronization, was served almost exactly at 8:30. Nine down at a table, nine down at the next.

“Coffee or tea for you?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Are you finished, sir? Would you like more coffee?” Code for letting them take your near-empty plate.

Walter Spiro, chairman of the board, 59 years old, about five feet seven inches tall, with a balding head and a face soft and creased with years of evident well living, his slight German accent now producing the effect of that of a Bronx boy in fine clothes, walked to the podium at 9 o'clock. He began by speaking of the agency's “record year,” how well its people had all done. They should all be proud. The Breakfast carried on from there. Each department head gave a speech. Some were serious and some were funny. Some were both. Some people received awards, others were promoted. Many stood and were applauded. Music was played and slides were shown. When it was all done the employees of Spiro and Associates went to work for the day. Or at least to the office. As will be seen, they were already “at work” throughout the course of the Breakfast.

In the same way that the various members of Spiro and Associates exert a measure of influence on other people's behaviors through the manipulation of their ideas via advertising, the messages encoded in and enacted through the Breakfast—and in other instances of social drama concerning this agency explored elsewhere (Rosen, 1984a, 1985)—influence the practice of the members of Spiro and Associates themselves in a manner likely to recreate the relations of domination inherent to the bureaucratic form, if not essentially the form itself. Though the manifestations of contradiction—conflict through dissent and struggle—are not foreign to the bureaucratic terrain, recreation of the power order inherent to the form is nevertheless primary. Recreation is largely accomplished through manipulation of the symbolic order, reimpregnating the bureaucratic consciousness with meaning sufficient to largely recreate the lived order. In the economic realm this is one of asymmetrical social group control and domination.

The question of how the cultural and social realms interrelate in the reproduction of the relations of bureaucracy—if not its precise structure—is addressed here through the Breakfast analysis. The relationship between the social and the cultural is seen not as “a procrastinating homology but rather a continuing and unmerging opposition” (Bailey, 1983, p. 18), a “politico-symbolic dialectic” (Cohen, 1974, p. 35). Within this framework culture is seen as communicated through symbols, each standing ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings. It is

this ambiguity which enables a system of symbols to maintain the facade of order, the perception of rational process. The "use" of the ambiguity of symbols within the realm of bureaucracy, however, goes beyond the necessity of basic human communication (Giddens, 1979; Habermas, 1972). As will be seen, assumptions, beliefs, and values—the bases of culture—influence action and are ongoingly influenced by action. These aspects of culture are conveyed, or "envehicled" (Geertz, 1980, p. 135), through symbols, which, given their ambiguity, are manipulated by individuals and/or groups at different points and in different ways to communicate meaning. Hence, a particular ordering more likely to reproduce an arena favoring a particular set of interests is enacted than would occur given the communication of another meaning system.

The Annual Breakfast is an arena in which this manipulation of symbols is particularly evident. A set of symbols is communicated in such a way as to influence ideas, thus influencing action, thus shaping experience, consequently shaping ideas. Some components of this set have been alluded to above. The style of dress affected, the particular hotel and room chosen for the event, the time of day it is held, the technique of commensality, the type of food eaten, the manner in which the food is presented and served, the general technique of rhetoric and the specific messages verbally communicated: all combine to communicate a particular message, to objectify and reify a particular social structure with ramifications for the maintenance of a particular power order. Put differently, social drama enacts the "reality" of a particular set of social relations through its public display (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977) under a set of conditions allowing a state of *communitas* to emerge (Turner, 1974), thus influencing consciousness in a manner likely to elicit consent. The task of this analysis is consequently to explicate the dimensions and processes involved in the recreation of the bureaucratic form as a mechanism of control—though in a manner limited by space considerations to the Breakfast—which is a sociocultural explication of the recreation of the bureaucratic culture and its relationship to practice.

Some Symbolic Techniques

The Breakfast is similar to ceremonials held in other organizations, and may in fact appear almost banal, given our familiarity with these. The Breakfast's significance, however, derives not from its uniqueness, but from the affirmations, reaffirmations, and transformations which occur in and through this drama. It is important and efficacious precisely because it is accepted by those involved with its performance as part of the natural order of things.

An encompassing technique of the Breakfast is commensality. That the members of Spiro and Associates all sit and eat together in one room as one body transforms formally unifunctional, contractual relationships to one another and to the agency into an arena for multifunctional relations of communion and amity. At the same time, group identity and exclusiveness is signified by the body "breaking bread together." Those inside the ballroom are Spiro and Associates. Those outside are not.

The type of food eaten by the group signifies its image of itself in a particular role, or at least the elite's image of itself and the organization. In this instance the food fundamentally signifies "American gourmet," or *haute cuisine*—those eating this food are at a special event and are themselves high (Goody, 1982). The opulent surroundings of the hotel, the main ballroom, the fine china, and so on, intend the same message.

The techniques of using the opulent hotel, ballroom, china, food, and so on also serve an additional function. On the basis of their salaries the majority of members cannot normally afford such aspects of high culture, the attaining of which is a goal dictated by capitalist logic. The fine surroundings reinvest this goal with meaning, saying that at least by association members can now afford part of "the good life." If the members continue participation more will be theirs in the future.

Dress may be used either to camouflage or define identity, or to accomplish both. Such was the dual function of dress at the Breakfast. The primary bifurcation in a "typical" advertising agency, both socially and culturally, is between the creative and business roles. In general, the dress norms governing each of these roles are different. This is also the case at Spiro and Associates, where there is an explicit dress code for those performing business functions, but none for those performing creative functions. The dress code, in fact addressed only to business males, states that suits (of appropriate color, tailoring, and fabric—not polyester, for example) must be worn at work, and so on. Female business clothing norms have yet to be formally codified. Though expected to dress in a fashion paralleling the requirements for men, more leeway exists for women for variations on the theme of formality, such as wearing dresses.

The difference in dress norms between roles in the agency corresponds to its power hierarchy. The clerical workers and, by and large, the creative people, are not in the main contest for wealth, influence, and power, and are hence not as socially constricted in their behavior. By contrast, the behavior of those vying for the larger rewards of power, the business people, is highly circumscribed. Clothing, hair styles, expressed values and goals, friendships, verbal patterns, social club memberships, and other presumed ideational expressions are more closely restricted. Through these closures the borders of the powerful are in part maintained.

In congruence with the meaning of the Breakfast, everyone came in business dress, except for one creative person who had earned the reputation of being particularly incorrigible. (He left shortly after my study.) The Breakfast is here equated with business. People did not come attired in black-tie wear, for example, nor in leisure clothing. In this instance dress is used to camouflage distinct intra-organizational role identity, and hence power and status differences, in order to create a communion among disparate groups. At the same time, the dress standard is that of the powerful, legitimating their terrain and defining group identity on their ground.

The form of commensality at the Breakfast is as critical for accomplishing the symbolic function as is the specific types of food eaten. Unlike the buffet conditions of other formal agency ceremonials, food at the Breakfast is served. Being

served creates a stratification between servers, who are standing, mobile, and providing, and consumers, who are sitting, immobile, and consuming; a leisure class is objectified in an arena of heightened elegance (Goody, 1982). The high culture pursued in the Breakfast necessitates this level of formality: a dominant class image of a group-limited communion is sought.

An understanding of the "lavishness" message communicated by this and other Spiro and Associates social dramas that include commensality is enhanced through comparison to its opposite, fasting and abstinence. Pursuing a life of strict personal restraint against overindulgence, including abstinence from sex, frequent fasting combined with a highly restricted diet, avoidance of luxurious and/or stylish clothing, jewelry, perfumes, frequent bathing, and so on, is understood in many systems as a means to grace and holiness (Goody, 1982). The social relations of business in general, and Spiro and Associates in particular, provides the opposite message. This is fundamentally the realm of the mundane. Interest in personal appearance, including hair, hygiene, jewelry, and clothing, and indulgence in food, alcohol, and sex, are considered compatible and perhaps synonymous with the material logic of bureaucratic relations.

The Speeches

The technique of rhetoric is conspicuous during the Breakfast drama, as a number of speeches are given by prominent managers, who discuss many different aspects of the agency's operations. A major segment of this phase will be recounted to provide an insight into agency process.

When Walter Spiro walked to the podium at 9:00 a.m., he began his talk by reminding those present of the "tradition" behind the Breakfast, saying that it is an annual event which everyone is expected to attend. He stated that it is held directly after Labor Day because this time period is the end of summer, and people at the agency "should be rested."

Walter said that "immediately after the Breakfast" the agency is "releasing to the press" a note that "Spiro and Associates had a record billing in the past [1982] fiscal year of \$44.8 million, an 18% increase over last year. We are clearly the number two agency in town." His remark, meant positively, was met by a small amount of polite applause, and Walter continued. He observed that the current economic environment is harsh. "Hot jobs [rush advertisements] are up because the economy is bad. This often results in internal conflict in the agency, with people working long hours under difficult circumstances. But we're all a part of this. It's called Spiro and Associates, and you're the Associates. Normally only I speak at the Breakfast, but today the associate directors [agency officers and department heads] will also speak. Before that, however, I'd like to give an overview of the agency's progress this year.

"I would say that the Creative Department is in very good shape, and is under very good leadership. The Production Department, which was under little leadership for a while, is now under superb leadership,

and is doing well.... Hotels and Travel is doing well. The Industrial Accounts area is doing well.... So much for improved departments.

“Public Relations and Traffic have had problems this year... Public Relations, which used to be a leader in this agency, has had some problems with people and attitudes. We’ve made some changes in personnel there, and expect things to get better.

“We got some important new accounts last year. ‘X’ is a new account. We like them. We especially like the color of their money.” People in the audience laughed, as did Walter.

Walter then started to list the major new accounts and projects acquired during the past year, and toward the end of this recounting he stated: “One of our new accounts is French, and one is Japanese. In addition, we received Deer Valley Ski Area in Utah, the most spectacular ski area in America,” an exaggeration, to say the least, for Deer Valley is a relatively small and obscure place in the skiing world.

“The coup in the Hotel Division was the Omni Hotel Group. We’ve been given four of their hotels [to advertise for], and they have four more being built. We look forward to getting their new business as well.” During the speeches I was sitting at a table with Marty Kramer, the “contact” person and supervisor for the Omni account, and Corbin Riemer, one of the two account executives working on this project. When Walter spoke of acquiring the four new hotels, they mentioned to one another that neither knew of any formal intent nor of any steps to concretize it.

Walter continued, “We lost business too, and in each case I’ll tell you why. We lost the Playboy Hotel and Casino. You all know that, and I don’t have to go into it anymore. It was basic incompatibility, and we look forward to finding a more compatible situation.

“We lost Hershey Park [an outdoor amusement center], and that was incompatibility too. The person who fired us was let go a week later, but we didn’t get the account back. We’re looking for a replacement there also.

“Four outside agencies came into Philadelphia this past year. They will get clients, but if it were up to me they wouldn’t. When we leave here we have to be more aggressive, more caring. And we will reward it.”

Of note in Walter’s evaluation of the various departments is his statement that people’s “attitudes” in Public Relations have presented problems this past year. A deviation in attitude is a potential threat to hegemony, for control is efficacious to the degree that it controls the totality of attitudes, belief, and behavior (Edwards, 1979). During the past year a significant ideational deviation was understood to have occurred in the public relations department. It could not be tolerated by top management, and steps were taken to negate the perceived cause.

Walter’s discourse on the clients that have been lost, and particularly on those that have been gained, is a clear case of posturing, where the agency is shown to handle important and prestigious accounts, including international businesses, magnificent ski areas, and luxury hotels. By association, as these clients are important so are the agency and its employees. It does not matter that Walter is ex-

aggregating and the members are to a degree aware of it, as long as the basic parameters are accepted.

The next phase of the drama concerned gift giving. Spiro and Associates has a tradition of presenting members with "gifts" each time they complete a five-year period of employment, up until their 25th year.

At the Breakfast two members had just completed their 10th year of employment, and as Walter was starting to present their gifts he said, "I'd like to introduce some new people here, Jack Bithrow and Jose Hill." Jack Bithrow, an art director, was called to the podium first, and presented with a gift-wrapped box. Jose Hill, the agency's "odd jobs" person, was called up next, accompanied by overwhelming applause. In response Walter announced, "Jose is the most popular person in the agency," further increasing the applause.

After the gifts were presented Walter read the names of those employed from 5 to 10 years. He asked each individual to stand as their name was called, and asked the audience to hold its applause till he finished. About 15 people were met with polite applause. Walter then announced those employed from 10 to 20 years. Six people were named, and each was applauded individually as she or he rose. The same process was repeated for two people employed for more than 20 but less than 25 years, and again for one person, Harry Egbert, who had been with the agency for 37 years. Walter noted that Harry Egbert "keeps coming back to haunt us. He thinks he's 18 and acts like he's 12." People laughed, and Harry, the agency's "patriarch," rose to a loud applause. At this point over 25% of the employees were standing. Walter asked everyone to applaud themselves, and people responded loudly.

Gift-giving is related to the long-run orientation of bureaucratic control. As noted, the efficacy of control is bound up in a socialization to the rules, values, and assumptions constituting this form. The "loyal" employee is likely to be more valuable to the employer than is the new, nonsocialized employee. The conditioned worker has internalized the rules of the form—control appearing as freedom—and through practice has probably increased skills, client relationships, and so on. As the employee becomes skilled and loyal, she or he can be given tasks of greater value, with increasing return to the organization. Within this arena, therefore, it is functional to reward seniority. While only a small part of this reward is constituted by public gift-giving, these ritualized offerings are not insignificant. They conspicuously signify gratitude from the realm of moral bonding, applying to each member socialized within the agency. The publicness of this exchange, whereby a "loyal" member is recognized, accepts a gift, is applauded, and so on, signifies and recreates.

As noted, when Walter had finished calling the names of those employed at least five years, over 25% of all members were standing, a physical symbol of valued seniority. When Walter asked everyone to applaud themselves, all were subject to the technique of clapping, the loud noise signifying, "We have all achieved," "we are good," "I am good," "the agency is good," "I belong," and so on.

Those standing sat, and Walter started talking about the “things the agency does for all of us.” He mentioned that expenses rose by “18% during the past year, but the pension fund is fully funded. It’s very expensive, but all of you have worked for it. Bill Walker [the one agency retiree present at the Breakfast] and Mort Koshlin [the other retiree, not present] know it’s helpful.”

Walter next read a list of those involved with “public service” work during the year, and the organizations in which they served. He then began to describe the “importance of public service,” saying that here such service was not strictly within the government’s domain, and “it is [therefore] necessary to give.” Walter then read a list of service organizations he was involved with. He was making the list public only so that members would know what he was involved in, and why he was seen with numerous outsiders at work. Walter then said his involvement was “the best advertising an advertising agency can have, better than a page in *Focus Magazine* [the local business journal].

“We’re building from within. It’s the Spiro way. We only go outside [the agency to hire] when it’s absolutely necessary. I’m therefore happy to announce the following promotions Herb Smith has been promoted to senior vice president [from vice president], and Ed Shields has been promoted to vice president [he was not previously an officer]. Congratulations to each of you. I’m happy to announce that Gerry Oakes has been promoted to executive vice president [from senior vice president]. Congratulations, Gerry!” At the announcement of Gerry Oakes’ promotion there was a loud round of applause.

Walter’s remarks concerning the pension plan are revealing, for the agency is postured as a benevolent and somewhat suffering provider. Pension fund money is connoted to be not all realized by members’ labor, thus not belonging to them. Instead, the agency provides even though it has to bear perhaps inequitable financial pain. The agency is magnanimous: “It’s [the pension fund] very expensive.” Here the notion of “gift” is evoked, couched in parental terms. Workers are “good,” so top management will reward them, providing more than they objectively deserve. The objective circumstances of capitalist appropriation are inverted in presentation. The theme of altruism is extended by connoting the retirees’ pensions as gifts not fully earned.

Title promotions are rewarded on the combined basis of tenure, performance, and projected worth, and are valued by the involved individuals because they increase one’s organizational and personal status. However, they do not normally result in increases in remuneration, nor change one’s task function. Title promotions signify recognition, but do not directly result in an increase in authority or responsibility. The major exception here was the promotion of Gerry Oakes to executive vice president, which represented formal recognition of his membership in the top circles of management.

Repeating the long-run theme of bureaucracy, Walter Spiro notes that the agency rewards tenure, loyalty, and dedication through promotions. Little could more readily undermine this theme than to consistently hire, and admit the hiring of, top-level managers at the expense of promoting from within.

Finished announcing promotions, Walter began to explain why Spiro and Associates has two Creative Department directors. The members sharing this responsibility are "two different people, as different as can be. One is from Creative and the other is from Copy." During this time the two directors had walked to the podium. They were similarly dressed in light blue seersucker suits, light yellow oxford shirts, dark blue ties, similar shoes, and metal-rimmed glasses. Standing on either side of Walter, one said, "Hi, I'm Isaac," and the other said "Hi, I'm Bob." They began to speak about advertising awards the agency had received during the year. They then showed a series of slides of each individual from the Creative Department. Each photograph was humorously posed, with members standing on their desks making faces, and so on. Then, to the accompaniment of the theme song from the movie "Star Wars," Bob and Isaac displayed slides of each award-winning advertisement. After the show ended and the lights were turned back on, Bob noted that the agency had won 40% of the competitions they had entered, and then Isaac read the name of each member of the Creative Department, including Bob and himself. He asked people to stand as their names were called, and when all were standing he said, "Give these people a hand. They deserve it." The Creative Department members were applauded, and then they returned to their seats.

In the departmental speeches, each head communicated something about what she or he considered important. In addition, as Walter said earlier, the very inclusion of "Associates" signifies that the agency is a place for personal belonging and growth, holding the potential for realizing an individual's advancement.

The play encountered in the presentation coordinated by the managers of the Creative Department draws attention to the norms governing business behavior. The two creative directors, dressed in light-blue-and-white-striped seersucker suits with similar accessories, and standing on either side of Walter, dressed in a dark conservative suit, French-style cuffed shirt, sizable gold cuff links, and so on, are playing their role of agency jester, where the jester is funny by testing and mocking norms. The same taunting occurs in Bob and Isaac's comic introduction.

In the pictures of Creative Department members, employees are shown asleep at their desks, wearing outlandish clothing, making silly faces, standing on their desks, and so on. That the pictures were considered funny rather than offensive indicates an understood burlesque of norms, bringing all members together in sharing a slightly "naughty" experience. Further, the very nature of a slide show, a performance occurring in a dark room with all occupied in the same task, contributes to the shared experience, as do the accompanying slides of the "award-winning" advertisements. The "Star Wars" score was met with laughter and applause, in appreciation of the Creative Department's deviant courage. Creative's performance was truly enjoyed by many, where the work of advertising, their work, was made fun of by portraying it in an inverted form. Imagine the Creative Department directors dressing alike in foppish clothing and appearing to "pitch" a new account by introducing themselves by "Hi, I'm Bob" and "Hi, I'm

Isaac.’’ Further, although potential clients are often shown a ‘‘best of Spiro and Associates’’ advertisement portfolio, this would not normally be done to the accompaniment of such overly dramatic music as the ‘‘Star Wars’’ score. Further, it is beyond the norms of standard business behavior for members to stand on their desks wearing outlandish clothing. In each of these instances members have mocked normative conduct by ‘‘distancing’’ their portrayals from acceptable role behavior (Goffman, 1961, p. 85). Further, the inversion that occurs by not going ‘‘too far’’ makes known the deep rules of satisfactory action.

Harry Egbert, head of Research, then went to the podium. He began by saying that Spiro and Associates should really be called ‘‘Spiro and Associates International,’’ because the Research Department, together with others, does significant work for foreign clients. He then showed a series of slides of members’ names. The first displayed ‘‘Ed Shields,’’ with ‘‘M.V.P. Award,’’ for ‘‘most valued player,’’ below it. Harry Egbert said that this year Ed Shields, an account executive, channeled more work to the Research Department than any other member, and therefore deserved to be distinguished. The final slide displayed the names of the three Research Department members aside from Harry Egbert, each a woman. One of these, the assistant department manager, is considered an agency success story. Harry Egbert recounted her agency career, describing how she started as a secretary, was for a short time a receptionist on the floor where Research is located, and eventually ‘‘worked her way up’’ to her present position under him. Next year she is expecting to complete a master’s degree in business administration, which she has been doing part-time in the evenings for a number of years. Harry Egbert said that she is the ‘‘horatio Alger story of the agency.’’ He asked her to stand, and as he read the names of the other two women he asked them to stand as well. These three were given a round of applause, and they sat down as Harry Egbert also returned to his seat.

Before he mentioned the individuals working in the Research Department, Harry Egbert honored some people providing it with work. These individuals provide a resource comparatively more scarce and necessary than that provided by the actual department members as their tasks are defined. The latter, relative to others in the agency, are ‘‘unskilled’’ clerical workers. When he introduced the department members, Egbert emphasized the achievements of one woman in particular, evoking the American ‘‘rags to riches,’’ ‘‘Horatio Alger’’ reality and the myth of that reality: people can enter the agency from any socioeconomic position and climb the corporate ladder. Some may even enter as secretaries and eventually become account executives or administrators in the Research Department. This possibility, the Myth of Advancement crucial to maintaining consent, is tempered by sociological constraints, with the consequence that very few rise as such. Those in the agency that do have never advanced beyond a middle-level position. This Myth is nevertheless consistently evoked in various instances—literature, drama, and so on—to promote the image of equal opportunity to attain ‘‘success.’’

Walter then walked to the podium, announcing as he arrived that, "naturally, Public Relations is a most important area in this agency. Nelson Fellman [department head] will tell us what happened here."

Nelson talked about the role of public relations work at Spiro and Associates. He mentioned that "the role of public relations is to crystallize public opinion," to "increase awareness," and to "increase public relations for our clients." He described the accounts they currently have, showing a slide for each. At the conclusion of this series Nelson Fellman said that they have a psychiatric unit as a client, and if successful in "pitching" a new account "across the river [at Campbell Soup company, where they are trying to attract business] we can say that we have clients 'from soup to nuts.'" This pun was received with loud laughter.

Walter came back to the podium. "Thanks Nels, that was a very good presentation."

At last year's Breakfast Nelson Fellman had been promoted to executive vice president, taking the position filled by Norman Tissian until he was raised to president during the same ceremony. Nelson's promotion was a surprise to many, as his advancement left Gerry Oakes, who was thought to be a powerful favorite, in an inferior position. After his promotion Nelson's duties as Public Relations Department director were not changed, but he was expected to become more involved with the agency's strategic decision-making process. This did not seem to occur, disappointing Walter and others. Compounding the situation, several major public relations clients were lost and the resulting gap left unfilled. Nelson fell from grace, unable, in Walter's opinion, to satisfactorily account for the poor performance of his department.

This phase of the Breakfast was an arena for redressive action between Walter and Nelson. Walter established the seriousness of the circumstances by admitting earlier that the area had done poorly, and now by saying that whatever happened must be publicly addressed. In response Nelson did not refer to the "problems" of his work, but instead made the type of "hype pitch" that would be made to a prospective client. He was, in effect, "selling" his direction of public relations.

One may question why Nelson felt it necessary to explain the functions of his department in pedestrian terms to this audience quite familiar with the topic: his "pitch" did not appear to fit either the crowd or the occasion. He is in fact making a presentation which affirms, in the most basic manner, the norms expected to govern behavior both in public relations in particular and Spiro and Associates in general. On the surface he is affirming acceptance of the belief that public relations is necessary to "crystallize public opinion," and so on. His performance is comparable to the individual judged by church elders to have erred, to have breached the norms governing behavior. Rather than leave the church, the member seeks repentance, redress, in a public display of faith in the community and goals of the church. The person may stand before "the body of the church" and confess his or her sins, or the individual may present a sermon which speaks of the importance of the church in everyone's life, thereby symbolizing his or her acceptance of the church and its significant function in society. Nelson has taken the latter approach. His speech is a confessional sermon.

Walter went to the podium and said “*We now come to a subject of great importance to our community. We have good jobs, a good company, and good clients, but there are those less fortunate than us. I am speaking, of course, of the United Way. We are a ‘pace setting’ agency, giving early in the campaign, before others, to set an example. This year Ken Bofinger is the chairman of our agency’s United Way drive*” (italics added).

Ken Bofinger, head of the Production Department, made a short speech, stating that a corporate goal had been set at 23% above the previous year’s goal. He then identified those working to canvas their departments, and asked for everyone’s cooperation in the drive.

“I want to underscore the importance of this,” said Walter. “I hope you won’t brush aside the responsibility. It’s an important thing in this country and this city to support the United Way. I’ll certainly do my part, and I’m sure you’ll do yours.”

The role of public service work, extensively discussed elsewhere as a mechanism obfuscating managerial hegemony (Rosen, 1984a), is evoked here. Throughout this phase the agency is referred to in terms denoting unity and harmony and that the interests of all are realized in a situation of mutual benefit.

Designating the agency as a “pace setter,” with a corporate goal 23% above the previous year’s, is an elite act of power. During a time when the agency is delaying salary increases, as will be seen below, and the overall economy is depressed, requesting members to make economic sacrifices significant on an individual level is an act which, in a zero-sum situation, primarily benefits corporate interests through the recreation of bureaucracy.

This form of centralized forced giving is an act of power for an additional reason. The average member has limited means. By giving to the United Way, an institutionalized corporate charity, his or her economic means to contribute to other charities is subsequently reduced. As she or he meets the corporate goal she or he might be contributing to causes not personally desired, and forcibly ignoring those consciously wanted (see Rosen, 1984a). He or she will likely donate through the agency’s United Way drive, however. Since giving has directive overtones beyond that of a request, the goal will probably be met or exceeded, as it has been in past years.

Walter then introduced the topic of profit sharing and bonuses. He said that other Philadelphia agencies purport to have these, but that they are really “delayed pension and Christmas funds. Here at Spiro and Associates we share profits after retained earnings, the money coming from the past fiscal year. But management decisions have to be tempered by considerations of today’s economy. Other companies may put away money for retained earnings for a rainy day. However, we’ve decided to give our money in the most generous possible way. It’s been a difficult year, with expenses up. Almost everyone will receive as much of a bonus, if not more, than they did last year.” Walter then described the employee bonus system, and said that each employee would meet with his or her department head by the end of that week and receive a copy of his or her performance evaluation. These are decided

upon by Walter, Norman, Gerry Oakes, and each employee's department head.

"Up to this year," Walter continued, "we did something we knew was a mistake. All of you received your profit sharing and bonuses at the same time you received your salary adjustments. But profit sharing and bonuses look backward to your and our performance over the past year. Salary adjustments look forward, and looking forward by September 15, with only July's accounting figures [from the new fiscal year, the Accounting Department can compile only July's figures by the time management decides on salary increases] is difficult, and July's figures were not good. Therefore, on January 1 we'll announce the new salary adjustments. This decision isn't a salary freeze. From now on bonuses will be given after Labor Day [no longer at the Breakfast] and salary adjustments [cost of living increases and pay raises] will be given on January 1. Everyone, from me to the lowest person here, will not receive a salary adjustment till January.

"We have a policy at Spiro and Associates of not laying off people. With the account losses we've sustained other agencies would lay off people, but we won't here. You can go back to sleep, because the next speaker is Norman Tissian." People laughed.

After the fiscal year ends the agency pays "bonuses" to members, which must be distributed no later than two-and-a-half months after the last day of the fiscal year. The agency also has a pension program. The money contributed to both programs is a tax-deductible business expense.

According to Gerry Oakes, the agency's financial officer and an executive vice president, Walter Spiro has exaggerated the munificence of management. While Spiro and Associates pays a bonus "rewarding" workers' yearly performances, some other Philadelphia advertising agencies distribute "Christmas bonuses" instead, considered seasonal gifts. These are smaller than a salary bonus. Walter Spiro highlights the difference between these schemes in order to cast his remunerative practices in a favorable light. However, Gerry Oakes reports that other comparable Philadelphia agencies pay higher base salaries than Spiro and Associates, the agency performance bonus merely making their remuneration more competitive. Walter is thus overstating the agency's munificence.

Walter's comment concerning the relationship between retained earnings and the bonus plan is worth examination for its illustration of social structure. According to Gerry Oakes, under Walter's direction the amount of funds credited to retained earnings is disproportionately large for a firm of this size and nature. By diverting funds to "profit" and consequently to retained earnings, Gerry noted, top management is primarily depriving general members of income realizable here through bonuses. Gerry termed this practice "a selfish one," and Walter's discourse over bonuses a "Walterism." It is "selfish," Gerry noted, because the buy-out price management will eventually receive is increased by this distribution of funds otherwise likely dispersed to general members as income. Thus, at least according to the agency's top financial officer, Walter's statement that while "other companies may put away money for retained earnings for a rainy day ... we've [management] decided to give our money in the most generous possible

way,” is not reflective of Spiro and Associates practice: the opposite occurs. Where munificence is declared, appropriation exists, clouded against a background of familial caring for the “we-ness” that is proposed as Spiro and Associates.

At 9:00 that morning Walter announced that the agency experienced record billings, 18% above the previous year’s. One hour later, however, a message of austerity mixed with benevolence is communicated. All salaries are to be frozen for at least 25% of the coming year, but this freeze “isn’t a salary freeze.” Considering inflation, real wages have been cut. However, from Walter “to the lowest person here,” all will suffer, implying that a normatively equitable condition is achieved. Management’s increased equity value and dividend return is not included in this equation, as this is presumably an immaculate marginal return on capital divorced from salary considerations.

It is not uncommon for agencies to experience seasonal fluctuations in advertising expenditures as well as general fluctuations, as old clients leave and new ones are found. While Spiro and Associates did lose some major accounts during the past year, it also acquired a few, according to some managers, thus at least striking a balance. Because most members are unaware of the specific financial repercussions of any particular loss or gain, due to the financial complexities and intangibles involved, claiming account losses is an inherently vague argument appropriately appearing concretely grounded.

Considering the fluctuations mentioned above and management’s long-run revenue projections, it is unlikely that they would base salaries even primarily on one month’s accounting figures. Further, Walter’s argument is misleading, for at any point raises are decided upon the future, which remains unknowable. If raises are now to be given at the end of January, they will cover the last half of the current fiscal year and the first half of the next; not previous performance, as Walter implies. Management may use any number of previous months’ financial figures to project performance. However, if the giving of raises is kept to the Breakfast, management may use any number of previous months’ financial figures to project future performance, which is still unknowable absolutely, but with a level of probability in the general condition equal to the proposed January decision date.

Walter’s discussion obscures the securing of profit by capital in an additional dimension. By proposing stock dividends, credits to retained earnings, bonuses, and pay raises as different in kind from one another, capital proposes the various allocations of funds as independent, when each is a related distribution of income. For example, in Walter’s communication of reality, the reported lack of funding necessitating the pay freeze is unrelated to the funding allocated to dividends and to retained earnings, the practice Gerry Oakes described as “selfish.” Of relevance, although many members expressed a discomfort concerning the freeze, no one with whom I talked proposed any relation between it and these extra-wage returns to capital. This reality is reified to the extent that the assumptions upon which it is based are reified. In that instance a perception of the environment is used as an instrument of coercion, which is the case when man-

agement states that the agency wants to be benevolent, "but management decisions have to be tempered by considerations of today's economy."

Norman Tissian walked to the podium. "Last year at this time I was on a high. I was made president, and had just received many other new titles as well: single man [recently divorced], single parent, and man about town—but I'm competing with Walter on that one. The best title is thin man [he lost a significant amount of weight during the year], and I shaved for the first time in eight years.

"You are in the advertising business because it's the only way for you to express yourself. You are in this agency because Spiro and Associates is the best shop in town, where you are pushed harder and can go farther. I can only speak for myself, but this year I will work longer hours. I will travel more. I will try harder to make my work, and this agency, into the best it can be. We deserve better clients than Playboy and Hershey," recently lost. The audience spontaneously applauded. "And we are going to get them. I want everyone here to stand, and to applaud ourselves for the great work we have done, and for what we have accomplished."

After the applause ended and people sat down, Walter Spiro asked for the lights to be turned off and showed a slide of the words "Tell/Listen" in large letters. He said, "If everyone in this agency told and listened, we'd have 15% more revenue. It sounds stupid, but it's true. If people told others what they need to know, and if people listened when they are being given information, there would be much less wasted effort here, much less duplication of work, and we would all be much better off."

He then projected another slide of the image "Me/We," and said, "'Me/We,' they belong together. Me, I want more money. Me, I want more success. Me, I want more recognition. If we can get all of the ambitions of the Me under the We, Spiro and Associates could add another 15 to 20% to our revenues. If we would think of all of us as a team, we would all be much better off."

The third and final slide Walter Spiro showed was of the words "Drive/Win," and he continued, "Winning is the objective. To give the best marketing plan. To make the best presentation. To have the most creative idea. To make the best advertisement. To write the best copy. To write the best public relations story.

"Laid-back people have no place in this agency. Other agencies have laid-back people, but ask them if they have profit plans, ask them if they have bonuses, ask them if they have a fully funded pension plan, ask them if they have the profit record and growth record that we have.

"Drive is what it takes to win. Have drive or get out of the kitchen. Or get it.

"I want driven people back at the agency. I want people who want to win, who want to listen, who want to tell, who want to think of this agency. Thank you, and let's get back to work."

Norman Tissian's speech, like Walter Spiro's, is at one level a pep talk. Here it is designed to reinforce the motivation to work hard by rather explicitly manip-

ulating symbolic techniques familiar to all, and further, to reinforce relations of unity of purpose among members. In a manner at least as forceful as any previous phase of this drama, these two performances create and project an ontology of hard work, success, and *communitas*.

More fundamentally, however, these performances reinforce the institutionalization of bureaucratic knowing and being, backgrounding that which is a contested terrain. In this instance, as in the previous episodes, it is not necessary nor especially likely that individuals will accept the surface exhortations, and will rather see these as “pep rallies.” Instead, behind each speaker’s particular phrases there exists an implicitly stated model of social structure. To the degree either speaker reinforces the acceptance of these models, capitalist relations in and of production are recreated. This is the dynamic of the politico-symbolic dialectic, where the force of the symbolic order on social relations denotes the control realizable through institutionalized ideational models. For example, for managerial control to be realized it is not necessary that members accept Walter’s and Norman’s precise pleas for hard, dedicated work. It is necessary, however, that the historically embedded ideational model of bureaucratically arranged work tasks is accepted, where the hierarchically stratified nature of offices, prestige, responsibilities, and remunerations are projected as neutral and naturally requisite. Each of these notions is embedded in the rhetoric episodes. Further, they are communicated as part of a long sequence of actions and ideas presenting the ontology and epistemology of bureaucracy as without alternative. This is embedded within a social drama, the structure of which contains the structural possibility for the experience of what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) terms “flow,” a temporary egoless merging of action and consciousness which is total involvement, an enjoyment similar to the notion of *communitas*, further influencing understanding. In this way it is not necessary that individuals precisely believe Walter Spiro’s statements concerning a 15% increase in agency revenue if members cooperate, and so on. However, underlying these proposals are the ideas of capitalist-defined profitability as a paramount goal, and bureaucratic remuneration practices, the specialization and stratification of offices and tasks, and managerial domination as neutral, not class-based, requisites for and by production. As bureaucratic control and its reproduction are founded on the acceptance of the ideational map underlying the form, managerial domination is in practice maintained not by an excited audience rushing back to the agency to work energetically, but by a workforce accepting the capitalist-defined terrain. Here the ideational premises underlying the messages are fundamental, rather than the explicit statements. This is also the case in other agency social dramas. Culture, creating and being the terrain for consciousness, is a mechanism for control.

Conclusion: On Dialectics and Doctrinal Efficacy

This analysis is based on the supposition that the study of power and bureaucratic control is usefully viewed as the outcome of a dialectical relationship between the social and cultural realms, sociohistorically contextualized at this point in the development of monopoly capitalism. Toward this point a brief conceptual

framework was introduced, and within it a particular social drama explored. The ensuing explanation of the reproduction of hegemony, however, is not in denial of the bureaucratic terrain as one of contest, where the objective workplace interests of asymmetrical social groups conflict in a manner which has, in various historical periods, led to organizational change or reproduction (Edwards, 1979; Rosen, 1984b). Given their interests, it is efficacious for management to behave as seen in this episode. However, the objective interests of labor are realizable in steps leading to the negation of bureaucracy through democratized forms. One form of outcome that counters the alienation of bureaucracy is the worker-owned and -operated cooperative (Rosen, 1984b). In such organizational forms one would expect to find rituals designed and/or intended to secure and sustain these social structures.

The primary implication for organizational members of the form of sociocultural analysis observed here is essentially one of elucidation, with the possibility, although not the certainty, of change. If members—managerial and nonmanagerial personnel alike—become aware of the political outcomes of what were until then banal, nonstructurally analyzed social dramas, power structures are laid bare. Depending upon one's workplace interests, an awareness of the underlying social structure of bureaucracy may lead toward action for the structure's recreation or transcendence. In either case, an unimpassioned participation in organizational process stemming from an increased awareness of sociocultural process is not a likely long-term occurrence. Humans are drawn into a worldview of the symbols they process, reifying a particular social reality without which any individual would be outside a culture system.

As Moore and Myerhoff (1977, p. 24) indicate, the success of the Breakfast or any other drama in the reification of social structure is a question of "operational efficacy," the extent to which it operationally succeeds in each instance, and not one of the structure's process. The relationship between ritual and the unquestionable is at the base of the form's "doctrinal efficacy," the extent to which ritual asserts that which is culturally created as undoubtable reality. Each ceremony at Spiro and Associates thus shows the existence of a particular form of social relations, that of hegemony, and by acting in terms of it aids in making it fact. The social relationships, concepts, assumptions, and values of social process, normally opaque, are through ritual made visible: they are objectified and reified (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Ritual "displays symbols of their existence and by implicit reference postulates and enacts their 'reality'" (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 14).

Precisely because ritualized social drama serves to postulate social convention as unquestionable, it is frequently used to objectify that which is most in doubt (Gluckman, 1965; Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 24). Whereas in bureaucratic life the conflict of objective interests among labor segments, exploitation, alienation, and ultimately role and class conflict are the objective existents holding the possibility for dialectical transformation, bureaucratic ritual is likely to consistently convey the "opposite message in form and content" (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 17), transmitting the notions of harmony and unity. Consequently, culture is

understood as built on the edge of chaos. Social drama is the instrument through which the social order is reinforced, and through it political control.

Every ceremony is par excellence a dramatic statement against indeterminacy in some field of human affairs.... A ceremony can allude to such propositions and demonstrate them at the same time. In other words, a dialectical relationship exists between the formed and the indeterminate. Ritual is a declaration of form *against* indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in the background (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 17).

The rituals of Spiro and Associates, and in general the rituals of bureaucracy, are promises of order and continuity. They promise the order of belonging, status, material sustenance, and the avoidance of the anxiety of chaos. They promise the continuity of employment and ego definition in capitalist society. This "ritual veils the ultimate disorder, the nonorder, which is the unconceptualized, unformed chaos underlying culture" (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 17). It is ultimately through the analysis of this processual unit, in the framework proposed, that the social contracts upon which order and continuity are based, and upon which change swivels, are revealed.

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