

From theatrics to metatheatre: The Enron Drama

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David Boje
New Mexico State University

Hans Hansen
Texas Tech University

Grace Ann Rosile
New Mexico State University

Abstract

In this article, we explore the relation between theatrics and metatheatre and attempt to demonstrate how metatheatre might act to resolve theatrics. We look at the case of Enron theatrics and the multiple conflicting stories that came to confrontation on the Enron stage. We synthesize several perspectives on metatheatre and suggest two ways that metatheatre mediates theatrics.

Introduction

That life is theatrical is a given for most readers of this special issue. When this theatrical life is well-organized and well rehearsed, it approaches a production in full, with explicit roles, scripts and stages. Drama and theatrics as a lense for understanding was imported into organizational studies through Burke (1945, 1969) and Goffman (1959) and continued by Pine and Gilmour (1999) and Oswick, Keenoy, and Grant (2001), and Clark and Mangham (2004) among many others. Given those dramaturgical assumptions about organizations, we explore the often explicit theatrics of the now infamous Enron. Rather than drama as a metaphor, Enron literally employed staged theatrics to influence the world in which they operated. So rather than all the world being a stage, inside Enron, all the stages made up their world.

We review briefly dramatism and theatrics and attempt to synthesize several views of metatheatre to suggest that metatheatre has the potential to govern theatrics. We posit metatheatre can influence theatrics by *dis*-integrating dominant theatrics to reveal differences, and provide those competing theatrics a stage for enactment. On the other hand, metatheatre may provide a means for competing theatrics to achieve dialectic resolution through antenarrative synthesis. We think metatheatre serves both dialectic purposes, sometimes by engendering a dialectic of disintegration as well as resolving competing theatrics when metatheatre offers an antenarrative that either synthesizes theatrical dialectics or enables them to co-exist on the same stage. These two metatheatrical governed events occur simultaneously and continuously, continuing

without closure in rhizomatic fashion. The only criteria metatheatrics must meet is that it allows theatrics to continue to find a way to move (forward, backward, sideways, up, down, etc.), so that players, in our case, people in organizations, can continue to coordinate ongoing action.

Aligning ourselves with dramatism and the narrative paradigm in general, we begin by reviewing theatrics and metatheatre. We then explore Enron's context and the related theatrics. We demonstrate how metatheatre mediates all these theatrics and then discuss how metatheatre operates and the implications of metatheatre for future research on the topic of organizational theatre. We hope to offer a view of metatheatre that can be applied widely in the analysis of social life.

Dramaturgy, Theatrics, and Antenarrative

The two main influences of dramaturgy in organizational studies are Kenneth Burke and Erving Goffman. Both of them encourage us to look at social interaction through a theatrical lens, seeing how people dramatize and mystify everything they do in everyday life. Focusing this lens on organizational life allows us to analyze organizations as context made up of actors playing roles on a particular stage. Dramaturgy assumes a close relationship between language and action (Burke, 1966, 1969). Dramas are literary compositions that tell a story, often of human conflict, by means of dialogue and action, and are performed by actors' in front of an audience (Turner, 1986).

In organizational studies, drama is used as an umbrella metaphor (Czarniawska, 1997) encompassing a wide range of events where meaning emerges from social

interaction: story-as-performed, enacted stories, scripts, cultural performance, plays, etc. Mangham and Overington (1987) present a dramaturgical model for understanding organizational interactions and the staging of organizational reality, looking at the various ways organizational members project appearances in various organizational settings. Continuing that work, Clark and Mangham (2004) look at dramatic events that are explicitly scripted and produced. They examine the power corporate theatre has in suggesting new values and challenging everyday assumptions as the authors, audience and actors collude in turning scripts into an imaginative life made present. The difference with the examination we present is that the audience was an unwitting one. Clark and Mangham (2004) review a piece of corporate theatre where the audience was invited to what they knew was a corporate show, a Hollywood-style production. In the performance we analyze here, the audience was an unwitting one. They were not aware they were watching scripted theatrics. And while the producers knew the show was make-believe, the audience thought they were witnessing everyday life, and not a special show created in a liminal space set aside for the scripted performance. Our example provides a backstage peek at some Goffmanesque trickery and mystification.

Dramaturgy's bent on social construction is that social reality is co-constructed through a community of players and witnesses to the play (Barry, 1997). Dramaturgists assert that human behavior is constituted by rhetoric; individuals use discourse to persuade and influence the behavior of others (Brissett & Edgley, 1990).

“The synthetic nature of stories goes beyond saying what *did* happen, to imply what *should* happen or what *can* happen. In this way, they not only influence thought, feeling, and will, but the construction of social reality itself” (Feldman, 1990, italics in original).

In addition to discourse, dramaturgy recognizes that part of the meaning of peoples' social interaction is to be found *in the manner* which they express themselves during interaction (Brissett & Edgley, 1990). Thus, how people express themselves to, and in conjunction with, others to create meaning is the central focus of dramaturgy (Gardner & Avolio, 1998).

Organizational theatrics remind us that a drama is never really complete until it is performed; acted on some kind of a stage before an audience.

‘Even the most trivial forms of day-to-day talk involve immense skill and presume a great deal of learning. Talk can become art in the sense that particular forms of convention or contrivance may be employed to secure certain expressive and communicative ends. Storytelling, displays of wit, rhetoric and drama exist in all types of society. The ‘success’ of these verbal forms, however, is directly involved with their performance...’ (Giddens, 1987).

Those particular theatrics, their production and for whom and what purpose, by what means, become organizational episodes, along with their scripts, that we can explore using narrative and ethnographic methods. For the organization itself, organizational theatre provides a model, in one concentrated image, of the ways in which members can give meaning and direction to their work lives. While organizational narratives furnish an ideal, theatrics enact particular stories, specifying roles suited for particular actors and contexts. By engaging in theatrics in various settings for particular audiences, actors attempt to shape their definition of the situation Goffman (1959).

But this shaping can be met with resistance. People have their own projects and there are represented by competing discourses and expressed by people performing those

discourses in competing theatrics (Boje, 2002a; Boje and Rosile, 2003b). They are enacting new and alternative narratives and fighting for stage time.

This competition often begins with antenarrative. Antenarrative theory (Boje, 2001) is closely tied to Kristeva (1980: 36) and Bakhtin (1981), who suggest that each text has an intertextual “trajectory” that is historical and social (Boje, 2001, O’Connor, 2002). Used as an adverb, "ante" combined with "narrative" or "antenarrative" means earlier than narrative. Antenarrative shifts the focus of narrative analysis from “what’s the story here” to questions of “why and how did this particular story emerge to dominate the stage?” Used as a noun, ‘ante’ indicates a bet, a pre-narrative speculation that offers new possibility. As opposed to an existing or dominant narrative, antenarrative is nothing more than a wager. Antenarrative signifies discourse that is fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, yet unplotted. The bet is that such a pre-story can be told and theatrically performed to thereby enroll stakeholders in intertextual ways that transform the world of action into theatrics. A narrative of dominant discourse usually tries to retain its elite status by silencing alternative discourse or swashing antenarrative newcomers. People in power re-double their efforts at theatrics that enact the narratives that serve their own purposes and projects. They do not want to share stage time with competing theatrics or antenarrative rookies, much less rebels.

Antenarrative is threatening to narrative because its theatrics are potentially liberating. Clark and Mangham(2004) explains how in theatrics, imaginative events take on for a moment the presentness of physical events; in theatre, ‘physical events take on for a moment the perfection of imaginative form’ (Cole, 1975, cited in Clark and Mangham). These moments involve a power to reveal the seen but unnoticed by

juxtaposing the lived and experienced world with the presentation of the narrative ideal (to contrast the profane with the sacred), and the role that theatrics play depends on the manifestation of imaginative life as physical presence (Clark and Mangham, 2004).

But theatrics are tenuous, and liberation and change is far from guaranteed. While organizations themselves are becoming more fragmented, polyphonic (many voiced) and collectively produced, and we would like to think that as modernist organizations make way for postmodern organizations, dominant narratives must make way for multiple stories. The issues of power and politics, along with the marginalization and silence of alternative discourses and antenarrative is ever present.

The focus of our analysis are these currently-under-construction and fragmented theatrics, the discourses just beginning to compete through enactment. These organizational theatrics are the theatrics of the antenarrative versus the theatrics of narrative. Looming over this staged battle is metatheatre.

Metatheatre

In this paper, we synthesize two metatheatre perspectives. Victor Turner (1985: 181) uses the term to indicate all the communication regarding a particular communication process, the metacommentary that spectators and actors engage in as they reflect upon their own roles and actions on various stages. We all engage in this metacommentary, reflecting and talking about what we have said and done or even what we are saying and doing. “Thus, if daily living is a kind of theater, social drama is a kind of meta-theater, that is, a dramaturgical language about the language of ordinary role-playing and status-maintenance which constitutes communication in the quotidian social

process” (Turner, 1985:181). This metatheatre involves reflexivity by everyday actors about their performances where they reveal to spectators what they are doing.

For Boje and Rosile (2003a), the term metatheatre highlights the simultaneity of multiple theatres. For them, metatheatre indicates the multiple and contending theatres that constitute organizations. Boje (1995) uses the metaphor of a multi-play performance called Tamara, where the audience follows different threads of stories, following actors from room to room. Doing so, the audience only ever sees portions of the larger script. They get peaks and pieces depending on the theatrics they witness. The metatheatre here is represented by the grand written script, the meta-script, by Tamara playwright John Krizanc (1981, 1989). For actors and audience alike, there is no ‘larger’ script. The only thing the audience can experience in chasing actors from room to room are fragmented, emerging, incomplete theatrics. As with a grand narrative (Lyotard, 1979/1984), no one is ever in the position to witness metatheatre, but only local narratives and theatrics. The same is true for all of us, whether it be the metatheatrics of ‘capitalism’ or our organizations. We never see all the theatre performed; it is occurring simultaneously on different stages; some you see and perform, but other acts you hear about from colleagues, vendors, and customers (Boje & Rosile, 2002b). We know them, and change them, only through the theatrics that involve us.

The relation between theatrics and metatheatre might be compared to Giddens’ (1987) deep and surface structure which entails a duality of some construct simultaneously influencing and being influenced by, social interaction. The metatheatre provides an abstract frame for our theatrical actions, and those actions in turn influence the frame. Our actions also change our conception of metatheatre. We see similar

dualities in organizational studies, as with the perspective of a culture that resides ‘above’ individual behavior or the simultaneous and recursive emergence between structure and strategy.

We synthesize these two metatheatre approaches so we can reflect on theatrics and their purposes and agenda, as well as attend to Tamara-esque fragmentation, liminality and indeterminacy of processual aspects of theatrics. Both perspectives take postmodern turns in dramaturgy, with Turner’s focusing on reflexivity and metacommentary while Boje and Rosile’s focus on fragmentation and multiple theatrics. As we will see, both of these processual theatrical qualities are endemic to Enron (Boje, 2002b), and can be reveal through Enron actors reflecting on their actions and theatrics. At Enron, each integrating attempt by presidents, corporate leaders and boards of directors to evoke spectacular theatre, to control the center stage, and to enroll a cast of characters that will influence spectators, soon disintegrates as the pull of multiple scripts, plots, and characters spin out of control.

On one hand, metatheatre reveals a dialectic of disintegration that opposes integrative attempts by executive players. On the other hand, metatheatre might also offer a resolution by offering an antenarrative that allows multiple theatrics to co-exist on the same stage (that will become a Tamaraland), or perhaps the new antenarrative will turn out to be a good bet, bringing together or silencing the previous narratives, carving out enough space and stage to become the new dominant theatrics by subsuming or displacing competing theatrics. And eventually, these evolutions and revolutions in dialectic cycles of theatric-integration and disintegration, the networking of simultaneous

stage-crafted performances seeking to instruct and control spectators and actors, also erupt into more fragmentation (Boje, 2002b: 10).

Our synthesis also allows us to make reflexive hermeneutic shifts. We make shifts between the metatheatric perspectives, between actor commentary about their theatrics and the theatrics that emerge from those reflections, as well as shift between the multiple competing theatrics. By making these shifts, we are able to explore and reveal fragmented, emerging theatrics that might plant a seed for change through dialectic confrontation or synthesis, as well as the actor and spectator reflections on their own performances and participation in theatrics.

Theatrics at Enron: Tall Texas Tales

We examined the theatrics and metatheatrics at Enron via various texts and scripts. Chosen for analysis in this study were journal and news articles, congressional transcripts, and key Enron memos and reports. The texts collected were for a larger project that accumulated excerpts from 1985 to July 2002 in a wide range of international and national news sources. The corpus of text consisted of over 9,684 news articles that were published between December 2001 and March 2002. They included searching directories such as Lexus Nexus, ProQuest, congressional transcripts, as well as web reports such as SEEN (2002), and the Powers (2002) report. In addition to second source metacommentary about what occurred during Enron's theatrics, we collected semi-structured interviews from a key informant, who worked on Enron's trading floor.

Taking the stage is infamous Enron, the world's largest energy trader at the time of its collapse. Enron's storied success was based in part on elaborate theatrical productions and performances touting their profitability and capabilities. Investors swooned. Stock soared. Competing stories emerged. Crash.

These theatrics took place from 1998 to 2000. Stock price has been pretty steady around \$20 in the few years before 1998, but began quite a climb. Enron stock was \$20 in the beginning of 1998, \$30 at the close of 1999, then \$40 by 2000, peaking around \$90 that year before the show was canceled. Back in 1998, employees were asked to stage a corporate performance to convince an audience of visiting analysts that a business trading unit was fully functional (Leopold, 2002). It wasn't. It was make-believe, and investors were made-to-believe these dominant theatrics that employees were directed to perform.

Enron had hired choreographers and dramatists (Banerjee, 2002) to coach executives in character roles in elaborate corporate extravaganzas in the past. But now, Enron was ready for an off-Wall Street performance where they set out to deceive using façade and illusion. The theatrics took place at Enron headquarters in Houston, Texas.

The producers at Enron oversaw the construction of an elaborate theatre stage on Enron's empty and barren 6th floor to simulate a *real* trading floor. On the big day, various employees, including secretaries and whatever cast members could be assembled, played their rehearsed character roles, pretending to be 'Energy Services' traders, doing

mega deals, while Jeffrey Skilling and Kenneth Lay played their starring roles in the Enron as on stage narrators to an audience of Wall Street analysts, who didn't know they were only on a set.

As the curtain rises, we see analysts being led on a tour of Enron company headquarters in Houston, Texas. Enron executives rushed dozens of employees to an empty trading floor and told them to act as if they were trying to sell energy contracts. "We went down to the sixth floor, I remember we had to take the stairs so the analysts wouldn't see us" (cited in Leopold, 2002).

'We brought some of our personal stuff, like pictures, to make it look like the area was lived in. There were a bunch of trading desks on the sixth floor, but the desks were totally empty. Some of the computers didn't even work, so we worked off of our laptops. When the analysts arrived, we had to make believe we were on the phone buying and selling electricity and natural gas' (Leopold, 2002).

Former employee Carol Elkin explains it was all an act, and that no trades were actually made there. The people on the phones were talking to each other. According to employees, they knew the sixth floor of the company's downtown headquarters was a set, designed to trick analysts into believing business was booming.

'They actually brought in computers and phones and they told us to act like we were typing or talking on the phone when the analysts were walking through. They told us it was very important for us to make a good impression and if the analysts saw that the operation was disorganized, they wouldn't give the company a good rating' (Leopold, 2002).

A convincing performance is wise advice, Enron wanted to make sure the analysts did not generate any alternative plot lines. They wanted them to suspend all

disbelief and adopt the theatrical performance as reality. Ken Lay, Enron's chairman and CEO, was narrating the tour personally, but this 'harried performer' (Goffman, 1959) found the time to sneak back and tell the cast their performance was a success.

'I think a bunch of us asked him why we were doing this, and he said the analysts need to see a bunch of warm bodies working so Enron could get a good credit rating. He said the trading part of Enron was the company's bread and butter' (Leopold, 2002).

What the analysts needed was buttered popcorn. They were watching the most expensive matinee in corporate history. "The illusion must be supported, whatever the cost" (Czarniawska, 1997), and Enron had to foresee and address any counter-claims. Witnessing these theatrics allowed analysts to kick off their own performance as investors. But this time, the money wasn't a prop and these theatrics had a very real effect on Enron's stock.

From theatrics to metatheatre

A good example of Metatheatre is Lay's October 17, 2001 performance. Already by now Enron's narratives were unraveling on stage, and institutions were no longer willing to suspend disbelief for their theatrics (Goldberg, 2001b). Other theatrics began to emerge. On Wednesday October 17 of 2001, the SEC requested by fax more information concerning Andy Fastow and the LJM partnerships. At that time, Lay traveled to "Boston ... To try to mollify about 40 investment-fund managers and securities analysts" (Witt & Behr, 2002: A01):

Enron treated them to an elegant lunch at the Four Seasons Hotel. Cued by a PowerPoint presentation, Lay led the analysts through predictions of ever-rising revenue.

What the analysts wanted to know about was the \$ 1.2 billion error highlighted in that morning's paper. Instead, the Enron chairman attacked the critical press coverage, calling it an irresponsible wild goose chase.

Lay vigorously defended Fastow and assured the audience there were no more losses coming from other private partnerships.

Gregory Phelps, who manages \$ 1 billion in energy and utility stocks at John Hancock Advisers Inc., noticed that Lay was looking right at him.

"This is a one-time thing," Lay said, according to Phelps. "There is nothing else out there."

Lay took one or two more questions, then suddenly looked at his watch and stopped. Lay's aides said, " 'We have to go' and just hustled out of there," Phelps said later.

The next day (Thursday October 18, 2001), the SEC phoned Enron for details about Fastow and two of the LJM investment partnerships (Goldberg, 2001b). The next day (Friday), Enron shares closed at \$26.05. By Monday (October 22) news about the SEC had leaked in the financial wire services. Shares in Enron fell over 20 percent. On that same morning, Ken Lay was in the middle of performing theatrics with 200 of Enron's top-tier managers, in the Dogwood room on the 3rd floor of Houston's downtown Hyatt (Witt & Behr, 2002: A01):

Most hadn't yet heard about the SEC investigation yet, and Lay didn't mention it. Instead, he told those assembled that Enron's board and senior management were united behind Fastow. Lay wanted his executives to unite behind Fastow, too.

As Lay talked, some in the audience checked handheld BlackBerry messaging devices. News of the SEC investigation flashed. Enron's stock price flashed, too, the shares starting their one-day 20 percent plunge.

Sharp, testy questions erupted about the company's vulnerable position and Fastow and his private partnerships.

Lay tried to reassure the managers.

"Well, we don't think we did anything wrong, but knowing what we do now, we would never do it again," Lay said, according to Robert J. Hermann, then Enron's general tax counsel.

Hermann had everything invested in Enron: his professional pride, his network of golfing buddies and his retirement savings, worth more than \$ 10 million before Enron stock began to tumble.

Hermann raised his hand and said: "Ken, there is a big disconnect. How can you say we didn't do anything wrong, but would never do it again? Is 'what we know now' is that we got caught?"

Lay glared at Hermann. "It was like I'd put my head on the tracks," Hermann later recalled.

Vince Kaminski, the respected and normally reserved head of research, raised his hand and told Lay, "I'm in the terrible position of having to disagree with you."

"It's okay, anybody can," Lay said, according to one account. He invited Kaminski, a Polish-born mathematics whiz and expert in risk management, to speak.

Kaminski strode to the podium and accepted the microphone.

Enron should never have gotten involved in secret, high-risk deals with Fastow's private partnerships, he said. He had warned against that course back in June 1999.

"What Andy Fastow did was not only improper, it was terminally stupid," Kaminski said. "The only fighting chance we have is to come clean."

Lay looked "sort of blank," Hermann recalled. "It was like somebody getting pummeled, and he just stood there and took it."

Finally, Enron's new president, Greg Whalley, who had taken over when Jeffrey K. Skilling resigned in August, stepped in. "That's enough, Vince," he said.

Evident now should be the multiple theatrics within Enron metatheatre. These emerging theatrics are multiple, competing *Tamara*-esque antenarratives, fragmented stories-a-making. These new theatrics are refusing closure, carving out space within the metatheatre. Within this metatheatre is a multiplicity of stages and scenes, both words here have two meaning, both temporal and physical meanings. "Stage" means a physical *space* (often shaped by a proscenium arch) and it also means a *time*, as in "what stage (of a process) is one at?" Scene is a special location, as "scene of the crime," and it also is a time "a time for a set of related interactions among characters in a play."

We also see the metatheatre components of reflexivity and metacommentary as actors begin to critique their own performances. On October 26th (Friday), Ben Glisan

(Enron's treasurer and Fastow's trusted aide), assembled his team of accountants and lawyers inside in-house attorney Kristina Mordant's office at the 14000 Smith Street headquarters tower in Houston, Texas (Witt & Behr, 2002: A01): "Somebody tell me we didn't do this" he pleaded. Yet it was he who had helped Fastow design the LJM partnerships, and had dreamed up the clever Star Wars and Jurassic names like Raptor, Jedi, and Ob-1. With Fastow's departure and the WSJ articles, the media began to get anonymous tips to look in to the Chewco deal (named after Chewbacca). They sat around reviewing the Chewco Investments L.P. file, getting ready for the next media firestorm; the group found serious accounting errors. Chewco was a confidential partnership Fastow's team had concocted to keep more than \$600 million in debt off Enron's books, keeping it hidden from analysts, average investors, and pesky regulators. Chewco was a precursor to the LJM1 and LJM3 private partnerships run by Fastow. Instead of seeking independent investors in Chewco, Fastow assigned his top deputy Michael J. Kopper to own and manage it and Kopper's domestic partner William Dodson (a Continental Airlines employee). Kopper and Dodson put in \$125,000 of their cash, borrowed \$11 million more from Barclays Bank. Enron guaranteed those loans, further undermining Chewco's independence from the company. Enron closed down the partnership in early 2001, and paid Kopper and Dodson \$10.5 million. "Earlier, McMahon, then Enron's treasurer, had clashed with Fastow over the size of Kopper and Dodson's windfall, arguing that it should be no more than \$1 million. Fastow prevailed" (Witt & Behr, 2002: A01). The tragic flaw noticed by Glisan's team was that according to the accounting rules, 3 percent of Chewco funding had to come from outside investors in order for the partnership to meet the definition of independent. "Through an apparent

oversight back in 1997, Kopper and Dodson's stake in Chewco had fallen just short of the 3 percent outside equity stake required to make the deal conform to accounting rules” (Witt & Behr, 2002: A01).

Lay still hoped to turn the drama around and head off the SEC investigation. In metatheatre terms, new cast members (new stars) can be added, and a tamer spectacle theatre enacted, one that finds a different scapegoat, to appease the spectators, media, and regulators. The scapegoat was, of course, Andrew Fastow; all Enron’s sins would be heaped onto his back. On October 28th (Sunday), Lay added Williams C. Powers Jr., dean of the University of Texas School of Law, to Enron's board. Powers was to head an inquiry aided by more new cast members, as Lay also hired former SEC enforcement chief William R. McLucas and his partners at the law firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering to conduct this spectacle. The outside squad of inquisitors (lawyers & accountants) began to do their interviews, asking tough questions about Fastow and LJM. Kristina Mordaunt (Enron’s in-house attorney), in whose office the Ben Glisan gang had met to review the Chewco and LJM fallout, got nervous and disclosed to general counsel Derrick that she was one of the investors in an LJM partnership. “I didn't want Lay to be blindsided,” she said. Derrick advised her to talk to the attorneys assembled by Powers and McLukas, who had taken over most of Enron’s fourth floor.

Lays’ theatrics were a flop and began to further unwind (Fusaro & Miller, 2002). Enron narratives dissolved into mere antenarratives and had to share the metatheatre stage with competing antenarratives (Boje and Rosile, 2002a), some of which were gaining coherence and an audience with their theatrics.

Conclusion

In ‘antenarrative’ (Boje, 2001) terms, Lay’s initial idea is no more than a bet, a weakling pre-story that Latour (1996: 119) calls a “whirlwind” since it “moves only if it interests one group or another” in nonlinear processes of antenarrative-translation and reconstitution, according to the interests of political groups. Whirlwind is for Latour (1996) an alternative to more linear-diffusion models of narrative. Only in retrospect and revisionism, is Lay’s founding strategy a linear, journey tale. The LJM partnerships let events gain control; the whirlwind exposed partners that preferred to remain off stage. As long as Enron stock prices were up, the risk of exposure was small, but as stock prices fall, the scheme had to be underwritten with more and more secret partnerships, until it imploded. The theatrical performances by Lay, Skilling, and a supporting cast of thousands (including regulators, analysts, journalists, & auditors), delayed the collapse.

As we know, recent metatheatre has put some of these theatrics to rest. Still others continue, and new ones are still emerging. Latour’s (1996: 119) term “whirlwind” suggests the more non-linear models of narrative that we use to describe the fragmented, rhizomatic (go anywhere), and emerging aspects of theatrics. Metatheatre tries to resolve this whirlwind of theatrics. It does so by reflexivity and metacommentary as well as fragmentation. It might integrate or disintegrate. We saw iterative versions of metatheatre in our case analysis.

In this case, metatheatre resolved Enron theatrics by silencing them, and for many of the theatrics, they have disintegrated. In emerging theatrics serving to integrate, the

courts have handed down guilty verdicts for Ken Lay and Andy Fastow. Just over a month later, but before the sentence was determined (most likely life in jail), Key Lay passed away (at the time we were writing this paper). His death will no doubt be the subject of further theatrics, most likely multiple and competing, that play out on metatheatrical stages.

You might be wondering does any good ever come from theatrics? Certainly. The opportunities for positive change through theatrics are more frequent than may seem. People everywhere transform their lives and their experience into stories with practiced ease (Mangham & Overington, 1987). Every theatrical event may be a moment where “the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance” (Turner, 1982: 44). Fantasies can become everyday reality. The result is a much more diverse, representative, and pluralistic organizational reality. If we are accomplished performers, we might even enact our way into more diverse and brighter futures. This is possible because theatrics help narratives to become illocutionary, such that saying it so makes it so. The story leaps from the story-as-performed to the story as lived. The fate of any organization depends on the capacity to navigate within the multiple and ever-changing sea of realities (Gergen, 1999), to restory itself. And more broadly, we share Turner’s (1986: 122) idea that any society “which hopes to be imperishable must whittle out for itself a piece of space and a while of time, in which it can honestly look at itself.”

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Contact info:

David M. Boje, Ph. D.
Room 204 Business Complex
University at Solano
Department of Management
Postal code MSC 3DJ
Po.O. Box 30001
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003-8001
Phone: 505-646-2391 (work)
505-532-1693 (home).
505-646-1372 (fax).
Email: dboje@nmsu.edu
Web site: <http://cbae.nmsu.edu/~dboje/>