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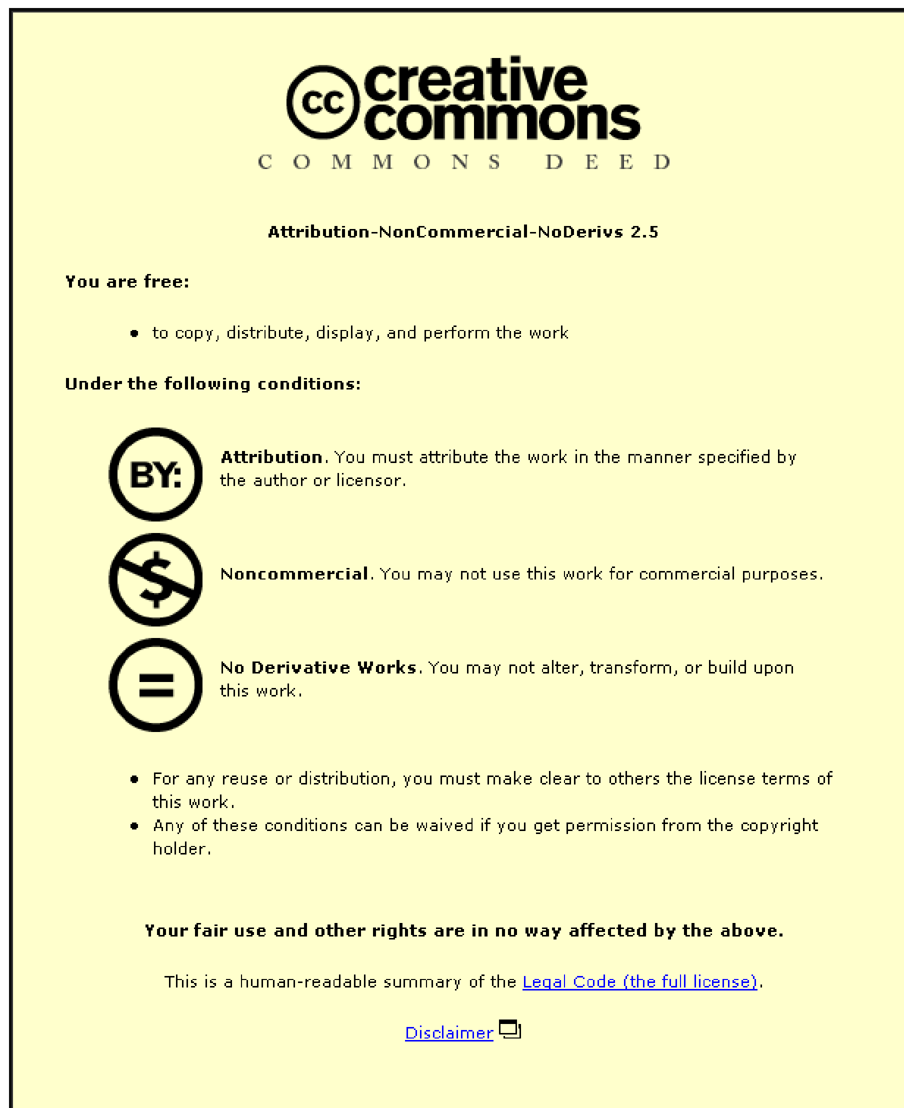

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‘Playing at work’:

Understanding Humour in Contemporary Corporate Culture

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by

Carolyn Hunter

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of
Doctoral Thesis of Loughborough University

30/10/2011

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Abstract

This thesis explores how employees use humour in their everyday experience of fun corporate cultures. Several problems with play as a management initiative have already been noted: management do not always support the initiatives (Redman and Matthews, 2002); employees can be quite cynical (Fleming, 2005); and feel belittled (Warren and Fineman, 2007). Considering these effects of corporate culture, this thesis examines the experiences of employees who engage with the corporate culture to explore how they use humour.

In order to do so, the thesis considers the nature of humour as a social phenomenon as a social, emotion and embodied mode of communication. This thesis is concerned with the creative industries in particular, as a context where play is linked to a self-managing workforce. It examines several themes which have emerged within the literature on fun identities, managing emotions and space and materiality in fun corporate cultures. The latter chapters explore the findings from three creative organisations to consider how humour is performative. In order to do so, it analyses how employees use humour as a tactic drawing on De Certeau's (1984) distinction between strategies and tactics within the everyday. De Certeau's work distinguishes how strategies form 'proper' spaces with dominant meanings and the tactics which the users of the space invoke in order to re-appropriate the space. This thesis argues that by seeing humour as a tactic, it is possible to divide the use of fun into four different discourses which work on employees' subjectivity.

This thesis makes three contributions to the study of humour in fun corporate cultures. First, it contributes empirically through forming a four-way typology linking discourses on fun to tactics of humour and the effect on employees' subjectivity. Second, it uses a novel method of studying humour through designing a humour log which encourages employees to be conscious and reflective of humour. Finally, it makes a theoretical contribution through applying De Certeau's work on strategies and tactics to the material and spatial features of the organisations (Lefebvre, 1991).

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Chapter One: Introducing fun into organisations

This thesis is about the use of humour in playful organisations. The aim is to investigate the everyday use of humour within corporate cultures designed around being fun. The adoption of these fun cultures has been driven by management literature which advocates that through adopting a playful mindset, employees will become more dedicated, engaged and ultimately more productive within their work. Authors such as Barsoux (1993) have been keen to suggest that humour in particular is essential to this process, and have positioned the use of humour as an overarching solution to organisational problems. The design of corporate cultures around the values of fun, play and pleasure have seen increased attention from critical scholars in the past decade (Redman and Matthews, 2002; Warren, 2002; Warren and Fineman, 2007; Costea et al, 2005; Fleming, 2005; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). These scholars take a less optimistic view about the introduction of managed fun within workplaces, noting employees' cynicism, ambivalence and reservations about working in this environment.

This thesis therefore is interested in how employees' use of humour might change within cultures that tightly define how and when employees ought to have fun during work. The study of humour in organisations has been discussed at length in critical management studies, including: the use of shop floor humour in Collinson's (1992) classic study of joking and masculine identity through resistance, conformity and control; Linstead's (1985) study of the subversive attributes of humour drawing on resistance and sabotage; and Taylor and Bain's (2003) study on the subversiveness of humour within highly controlled call centre work. All three of these examples draw on the dissident nature of humour, viewing it as a mechanism of resistance, and in Collinson's work in particular as a mechanism of group control.

Considering that humour has traditionally taken a position as anti-establishment, anti-management and anti-the status quo within these studies, the integration of humour into corporate culture can be viewed as an attempt by management to control and manage a potentially subversive force. No longer is humour simply something which needs to be either ignored or repressed in everyday life, instead it is suggested that along with play humour can be celebrated as an expression of the creative potential of employees. The review of the

literature will develop this tension in more detail, by examining studies of corporate cultures which claim that employees ought to have fun at work. Recognising the complexity of implementing such a strategy, the literature examines why employees may reject corporate culture as a method of control over employees. It also explores the nature of humour in organisations, drawing together the literature to suggest that humour is an emotional, embodied process of social interaction that is reliant on the context in which it operates.

This thesis suggests that the management of fun creates a change in the meaning of humour and of fun more generally, as a shift in discourse on what it means to be fun. The corporate cultures appear to provide a dominant frame of meaning which narrows down the scope of how employees *ought* to be fun. Using humour is encouraged under the assumption that it is being used towards organisational goals. This thesis therefore views corporate culture as a *strategy* (De Certeau, 1984) of everyday life.

However, this thesis also examines the other side of everyday life, by investigating how employees interpret and reinterpret the strategies they experience. Employers appear to use corporate culture as a strategy to define how employees ought to *behave*, how they ought to *feel* about their work and how they should *identify* as a fun employee. On the other hand, employees are not docile in their behaviour, feelings and identity construction. Indeed this thesis proposes that employees tactically engage with these strategies through the use of humour. Humour was used in the identity management of employees to present themselves as different forms of employees. This subjectivity drew on different concepts of what it meant to be fun in these organisations, which at times matched the desired behaviours of the organisation but at other times rejected them by re-appropriation of fun into different uses.

The adoption of play at work supports the claim that boundaries between work and pleasure, organisations and the self, and public and personal are increasingly becoming blurred, with organisations encouraging employees to bring selected elements from the private sphere into work (Baldry and Hallier, 2010; Fleming and Sturdy 2010). These ‘fun’ discourses encourage employees to behave as playful people by providing ‘fun’ spaces for employees. The aesthetic design of these spaces, both the physical space of the organisation and the embodied space of

the employees, represent the playful attitudes manifested in the philosophy of the company and supposedly in the attitudes of the employees.

These themes reflect wider debates within organisation studies concerning the changing character of contemporary workplaces. Humour has traditionally been observed within organisations as part of the informal organisational culture, in particular playing a role in providing resistance to organisational initiatives (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). In the case of new forms of work, this study focuses on how humour becomes formalised and incorporated into ‘good’ performance, as an expected behaviour of an ideal employee (Barsoux, 1993). Secondly, the research on which this thesis is based views organisations as a physical and material entity (Dale, 2005) especially in how this space can be organised and manipulated by those designing it (Lefebvre, 1991). This is related also to how employees are physical entities and through their embodiment relate to the spaces provided (Fleming, 2007). Thirdly there is a movement in the literature to recognise emotion in the everyday experience of organisations and a greater exploration of how employees emotionally relate to each other (Fineman, 2008). This relates to how people view emotion within a specific context in which rules regulate its expression and indeed management. Instead of presupposing organisations are an emotionless, bureaucratic, rational space, emotion instead becomes prevalent in the everyday experience of work. Like humour, these studies have seen a wider utilisation of explicit emotions by employers, where employees are expected to produce emotional labour during work, especially in dealing with customers and colleagues (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993).

This links emotion to the identity work that employees are expected to undertake, to not only appear as fun people when dealing with customers, but to internalise the ‘play ethic’ (Kane, 2005). The ‘play ethic’ refers to the integration of the non-serious, playful mindset into the serious world of work, opening up opportunities for alternative methods of working. Finally, the presence of sexuality in organisations has until recently been perceived as either non-existent or as deviant by employers and managers, as well as in academic studies (Pollert, 1981; Burrell, 1984; Burrell, 1992b). Increasingly, sexuality has been discussed by critical management scholars and feminist theorists as consistently a prevalent feature of organisations, and certainly in ‘fun’ organisations there appears to be a larger tolerance or

even incorporation of sexuality into the workplace (Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Fleming 2007). This needs to be framed with reference to the growing tensions between work and play, in particular when employees appear to utilise sexuality as part of the aesthetic and embodied labour undertaken.

This thesis develops a typology of 'fun' and humour. The problem is of course that in the current literature, fun, play and games are used to mean different things and often used interchangeably. 'Fun' generally I see as an emotive state which either those who are taking part try to achieve or that people attempt to invoke in another; play on the other hand is more of an ontological perspective of forming temporary 'reality' where alternative social rules are guiding behaviour (based on Huizinga); and 'games' as the organised activities where these rules are played out. In regard to 'being a fun person', this thesis discusses identity from the perspective of performativity, the shaping of subjectivity through multiple reiterations of behaviours which occur in society and are projected onto how we see ourselves. Alternatively I position this in relation to 'being a fun employee', which is more instrumental in displaying the characteristics desired by the play cultures. In this case it is possible to see different forms of 'fun' being played in out in organisations, divided roughly into those which are instrumental towards the organisation's aims and others which are instrumental towards the individual/groups aims. Thus I argue that the consequence for play is that it is used instrumentally to achieve particular ends rather than for its own sake. However as a result of the complexity of this empirical phenomenon, this typological distinction is not separate, but overlaps, shifts between and allows humour to operate in multiple spaces at the same time. This ambiguity of humour to move presents it as a complex phenomenon, which this thesis argues enables it to take on different ontological positions outlined above.

In order to investigate this problem, I selected three organisations within the creative industries where employees were encouraged to have fun at work. The creative industries represent an understudied area from a critical perspective. Much of the current literature focuses on the creative product itself, ignoring the labour process that occurs to make it happen. When the focus has been on the creative employee, there tends to be an assumption of a self-managing employee whose work is self-fulfilling. This perspective tends to ignore the

methods of control which are implemented on creative workers (Bilton, 2007), especially within an organisational context.

Contribution to organisational analysis

This thesis contributes empirically, methodologically and theoretically to the study of humour in fun organisations.

1) In regard to the empirical contribution of this thesis, it examines the different ways in which humour is used within three creative organisations that claim employees have fun at work. As such it creates a four way typology to examine different discourses on fun used by the employees: compelled fun, sanctioned fun, bounded fun and subversive fun. The typology links each of these to a different tactic of humour and subjectivity.
2) Methodologically, this thesis explores the effect of corporate cultures on the everyday. In order to do so, it asks participants to reflect on the humour they use through a humour log (Appendix One, p.323). This choice of method encouraged employees to be reflective on a process that is largely taken for granted within the everyday. The use of a humour log is a new approach to analysing the use of humour and how participants experience these events.
3) Finally, as a theoretical contribution this work links the work of Lefebvre (1991) on space and De Certeau (1984) on the everyday to view how the tactics of humour are used to re-appropriate dominated, conceived space in organisations.

Typology of fun

The empirical contribution of this thesis adds to the current work on play in organisations. Following on from the work which takes a critical stance on the play literature, this thesis scrutinises the effect of the discourses of fun corporate cultures on the everyday experience of working lives. Several studies such as Warren and Fineman (2007) and Fleming (2005) have noted that there are a variety of perspectives on the fun organisations which result from the tensions of having fun and being productive. This thesis adds to these by investigating humour

in four different forms. Warren and Fineman (2007) note that many of the employees within their research felt ambiguously towards management's playful initiatives. While, on the one hand, they appreciated that management attempted to make work interesting and pleasurable, many employees also felt belittled by the childish characteristics of managed play. As a result they used several of the playful objects such as scooters and giant Russian dolls in a subversive manner. Similarly, in Fleming's (2005) study several employees used humour to express cynicism towards the playful, party culture of the call centre. This thesis builds on their work by investigating the range of reactions to the fun-at-work culture, by noting how employees tactically use humour in response. To do so, it observes the spectrum of responses, which range from accepting the culture, pragmatically reacting to it and rejecting it. As such it proposes that fun was discussed in four different ways within the research: through compelled fun, sanctioned fun, bounded fun and subversive fun.

To inform the empirical contribution, the framework uses De Certeau's concept of strategies and tactics to explore how the meaning of fun was spatially and discursively dominated by the organisations. It views the corporate culture as a strategy: "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'" (De Certeau, 1984: xix). Strategies dominate meaning by using 'proper' space, or the space which has been conceived by the institution controlling it. In the examples discussed in this thesis, the corporate cultures defined fun through the space of the organisation and expressed it in the materiality of the organisation and the embodiment of fun employees. Tactics, for De Certeau, represent the temporary space of the user, who manoeuvres within it and can momentarily usurp the space. This study analyses how humour is one such tactic which can be used to question the dominant meaning of fun through re-appropriation by interpreting and utilising it in the employees' own interests.

This builds on Warren and Fineman's (2007) and Fleming's (2005) studies by exploring the range of tactical use of humour, linking four different conceptualisations of fun to four different tactical uses of humour and four different subjectivities which are drawn upon. The first of these, *compelled fun*, conceptualises fun in the manner proposed by the organisation, that is that fun should be positive and productive towards the organisational goals. The user

positions him or herself as a *fun employee*, and uses humour to *get on* in the organisation. The second of these is *sanctioned fun*, which focuses on the fun, informal, everyday interactions between employees. While this is not directly managed in the same way as compelled fun, employees felt that the fun cultures gave them permission to use humour as part of *getting by* in their everyday work. It drew upon a subjective position that having fun was natural for humans, and as such established a subjectivity of being a *fun person*. While these two forms of fun accepted and pragmatically used the strategy of fun corporate culture, the final two tactically used humour in a manner which questioned the dominant discourse that fun should be used towards the organisation's profit. *Bounded fun* describes the manner in which employees limited the extent to which they integrated the organisationally defined concept of fun into their subjectivity, recognising the tensions between fun and work. It re-appropriated the concept of fun through using the concept of fun towards the employee's own ends, forming a subjectivity of *the wig*. For De Certeau, the wig was described as a person who used the resources of the institution towards their own work, in particular the organisation's time and machinery, although the work remains disguised as the organisations' work. The final form of fun consists of *subversive fun*, or fun which undermines the organisations' dominant discourse. In these three corporate cultures, some employees resisted through *refusing to be fun* while at work. Taking on the subjectivity of the *saboteur,* these employees maintained a distinction of work being serious rather than playful and rejected the versions of fun which were based in the organisations' interests.

Humour log

In addition to contributing a typology of fun to the literature on play in corporate cultures, this study adopted an original methodology of collecting humour logs from the participants. While many studies interview employees about their use of humour and/or use observation of the workplace, these studies are highly reliant on the observer being immersed into the culture to 'get' the jokes they are presented with. Warren's (2002) study of fun cultures attempted to overcome this through asking employees to capture the materiality of the organisation with photography. While this was not presented as any particular 'truth', recognising the socially constructed nature of images, it did lead to insights about how the employees experienced their organisations' materiality. This study asked interviewees to record at least one use of humour or joking every day for a week during the research, after which they were interviewed.

The humour log then became a tool to be used in interviews to discuss humorous events which the employee felt to be important and in particular exploring the significance of humour.

This research design was particularly useful in this study because of the nature of humour within everyday life. Many humorous events pass by quickly, without the participant giving them much attention. Humour is fleeting, unreflective and context specific. The humour log encouraged the employee to reflect on the humour they used, becoming more aware of it when it happened and provided an opportunity to comment on it. It also provided insights into a lot of the humour that was observed, but as a result of my outsider status in the organisation I failed to understand. Humour is reliant on past knowledge and the context within which it operates. The context knowledge of the joke was important to not only understanding it's content but also its relevance. Finally, it allowed employees to bring up humorous events which they felt important, rather than simply privileging my own view as a researcher. It informed me of events where I could not be present as well as the intimate interactions which occurred out of sight in the organisation. As a result, the humour log allows insights which would not have been possible with either straightforward interviews or observation.

Space and the everyday

Finally, the theoretical contribution of this thesis is an exploration of the everyday in fun organisations by drawing on the work of De Certeau (1984) and Lefebvre (1991). These theorists were chosen in order to theoretically draw together space, materiality, embodiment, subjectivity and discourses of fun. The work by De Certeau (1984) on strategies and tactics provides an opportunity to consider the everyday in organisations within spatial practices. As will be discussed in the literature review, humour is a process in three ways: through utilising it as a resource; forming an emotional reaction; and constructing a social act of being humorous. It is embedded in the everyday, communicating understanding of what is occurring in organisations both in regard to work and to social interactions. As such, this thesis uses De Certeau's concept of tactics: the everyday opportunities which are 'seized' by employees to interpret the place they are working in.

In addition De Certeau (1984: xiii) refers to the concept of *bricolage:* how users "make innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt to their own interests and their own rules." The users do not accept the texts presented by dominant institutions passively, but interpret them and use them towards their own benefit. Linstead and Grafton-Small (1992) have discussed De Certeau's use of *bricolage,* or 'making do' as a tactical negotiation within corporate culture, a process of creativity for those operating in a disciplinary culture. To develop the work on organisational bricolage, this study argues more specifically that strategies and tactics are based on the organisational space. In order to do so, it draws on the work of Lefebvre (1991) to note firstly the social construction of space and the manner in which space creates social interaction, and secondly the formation of abstract space through the influence of capitalism. He theorised that space could be analysed at three levels, by looking at the historical understanding of space in *perceived space*; at the level of designed space through symbolism in *conceived space*; and finally through the embodied understanding of space on the everyday level in *lived space.* Dale (2005) and Dale and Burrell (2008) have drawn on Lefebvre in order to discuss how organisations, as institutions, design space to convey particular messages to users (employees and outsiders). Dale and Burrell (2008) use Lefebvre to describe the embodiment of lived space, through noting how it involves a process of enchantment (linking the physical and the symbolic creating power effects), emplacement (space designed for particular uses) and enactment within space (how movement allows enchantment and emplacement to be experienced in lived space). As such, they note that the embodied movement through space is embedded within power relations. This thesis builds on their observations to discuss how this process is rationalised by employees into *performative fun*, utilising humour when responding to the corporate cultures. In particular these fun corporate cultures work on employees' subjectivity, and as such it conceptualises four ways in which employees performatively frame their subjectivity. These four subjectivities relate to the four discourses of fun: compelled fun encourages users to think of themselves as *fun employees*, sanctioned fun relates to a concept of being a *fun person,* bounded fun relates to the concept of bricolage and a subjectivity of 'the wig' as using company resources for their own gain; and finally subversive fun enacts a subjectivity of the saboteur of those who refuse to be fun.

Thesis overview

Section one: Literature review

Chapter Two discusses the current literature on play and culture management in organisations. Considering organisations that have promoted play at work, it analyses the management literature that has encouraged play as the solution to organisational problems of stress, engagement and commitment from staff. However, this presents humour as a catch-all solution, ignoring the complexity of the use of humour and presenting it as a mechanism which is easily controlled and manipulated. Drawing on critical studies of culture management, the chapter notes the move from a normative control which was established by Casey (1996) within culture management to that of a neo-normative control within fun cultures (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). In order to develop these theories on culture management and control, the review then turns to the literature on play itself. Using a sociological perspective on play, it reviews authors such as Huizinga (1949) who described it as a rule bound activity based in an alternative, temporary 'reality'. Drawing on the theory of play, it then discusses the infantilisating nature of play within fun-at-work culture management which has been discussed. Finally, Chapter Two investigates the relationship of play and culture management to work within the creative industries. Analysing the transition from the culture industries as a critical analysis of mass culture to the creative industries where the focus is on productivity and profit, the chapter suggests that the creative industries have been understudied in regard to the experience of employment. The chapter concludes with suggesting that studying fun corporate cultures within the creative industries provides a context where workers are assumed to be self-managing creatives in 'good' work. By analysing corporate culture as a strategy, this thesis discusses how the creative industries implement control over employees through asking them to identify with the fun practices.

In Chapter Three, the review turns to themes which have emerged within the current literature on play in organisations. The first theme explores humour in particular, noting the manner in which humour is treated within management literature as a positive and straightforward solution to improving organisational performance. Discussing humour from a critical perspective, the review instead views humour as a complex social process, embedded

in context, which works on the emotions of others. It suggests that humour is inherently ambiguous by its nature, playing on multiple understandings and questioning the dominant interpretations of events. The chapter then examines the identity work which corporate cultures encourage employees to undertake, suggesting that organisations adopting fun corporate cultures encourage their employees to view themselves through fun identities, to manage their emotions, integrate sexuality in the workplace and finally is embedded within the spatial and material aspects of the organisation.

The chapter concludes with discussing several areas which are explored in this thesis to expand on the current literature. Firstly, it discusses how employees experience 'fun' corporate cultures and the possible contradictions produced between the idea of 'having fun' and the 'realities of work'. Secondly, it analyses the nature of control within the creative industries where employees' identities are bound up in their creative work. In order to do so, it considers whether 'play' is a method of self-disciplining a relatively autonomous workforce. Finally, conceptualising play as a strategy of control, it considers what role does space play in materialising this strategy, and what space is available for alternative meanings of play?

Section two: Methodology

The second section of the thesis then turns to the methods and the methodology of researching fun. Three organisations were selected which presented themselves as 'fun' through both the materiality of the organisation and the behaviours, attitudes and values they encouraged employees to undertake. Each of these organisations are located within the creative industries and proposed that fun at work was important as it allowed employees to be more productive within their work. The research was conducted from the perspective of a critical methodology, following the tradition of positioning corporate culture within the power relations in organisations (Linstead, 1997; Putnam et al, 1993; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Casey, 1996). This involved using observation within the three organisations; the humour logs which encouraged a reflectivity about humour (as detailed in the previous section); interviews with employees about their humour log, the corporate culture and their general experience of working in these firms; and finally photographs to capture the materiality which employees discussed as being important in their culture.

The research was framed within a social constructivist perspective: exploring how the interactions between employees helped to shape their subjectivity and their views about the organisations. It considered humour to be part of the social fabric of everyday life in organisations, and as a conversational mechanism which employees use to convey meaning. However the meaning is constructed through the interaction, requiring others to 'get' the joke, to join in, to demonstrate the correct emotional reaction and to respond in an embodied manner (smiling, laughing, smirking etc.). It draws on the work of Shultz (1970) on phenomenology and the stream of consciousness and Berger and Luckmann (1966) on social constructivism to discuss how humans form their own social reality through their interactions. Importantly, this also relates to subjectivity, the construction of identity and in particular work identities which are shaped by corporate culture (Warren, 2002; Collinson, 1988, Willmott, 1993). As such, the data is analysed through a phenomenological approach which focuses on the holistic meaning and emergent themes within the interviews and observations.

Section three: Findings

Section three consists of two chapters which set out the data findings through the theoretical framework of strategies and tactics within corporate culture. In Chapter Five, the findings discuss how fun is used as a discourse informing cultural texts within these organisations and how employees used humour within their work. The chapter studies three organisations: Smiley which is an IT training and development company, Marketing Inc. which was a marketing research company and finally Magazine Inc. which was a pre-teen girls' magazine and part of a large media corporation. The chapter focuses on the corporate cultures as strategies: that is corporate texts formed by the management to express to employees how they ought to have fun while at work.

Through positioning the corporate culture as a strategy, it examines how fun was used as a method of control and in particular how fun was conceptualised as 'natural' and 'human' behaviours for employees. It examines how positive emotions were embedded within the culture, with negative emotions positioned as a 'serious offense' which employees should guard against. In addition it discusses the youthful characteristics of the play, where employees discussed playing just like kids. Finally it noted that despite the organisational

initiatives that work was fun, there remained specific times for being seen to have fun (such as meetings and time outs) and other times where being seen to have fun was considered a distraction or that employees would be criticized for not working. The tension between work and fun was still prevalent despite the corporate cultures encouraging employees to have fun while they worked.

The second section of the chapter examines the use of humour: in particular noting a performative element to the humour when employees discussed it. In other words, humour, was used as a social mechanism to form their sense of self as being fun. Employees were primarily concerned with being seen to be funny, with building ties with other employees and forming groups through in-joking and excluding others through joking. There was also a strong spatial element to these cultures and the way humour was enacted within them. Management designed the spaces to communicate a message that the organisation was fun to both the employees and to outsiders who entered the space. Examining Lefebvre's (1991) three forms of space, the ending of the chapter notes how the space was *perceived, conceived and lived*. Especially in Marketing Inc. and Smiley, management encouraged employees to design the space, taking an active role in interpreting how the fun culture could be materialised. Finally, it discusses how employees also used unmanaged space within their use of humour and how virtual space in particular was important in the communication of humour.

Chapter Six then turns to the tactic of humour which employees used within the fun corporate cultures. It examines some of the tensions which emerged within the data: the struggle within identity and embodiment of maintaining a separate sense of self; the emotional rules which employees engaged with; and the tactic of sexual banter which featured within employees' use of humour. In each of these areas, the corporate culture attempted to shape employees as being fun in a manner which was positive, pleasurable and infantile in their behaviour. Employees however responded to these initiatives in a pragmatic manner through 'bounded fun', a temporary interlude from the reality of work demands, but which requires employees to negotiate the boundaries of play to protect a sense self. Other identities such as behaving as a professional were enacted to counter the pressure to have fun at work. This chapter concludes with suggesting that while many of the interviewees were positive about working in a fun organisation, they also recognised many of the tensions which emerged between the

discourse of having fun and the realities of work: including workplace stress and emotions, long hour cultures and an intensive customer focus.

Section four: Discussion, typology and conclusion

The final section within this thesis discusses how the data can be conceptualised into a framework that captures the strategies and tactics played out in corporate cultures. It organises the data into a four-way typology that links the different ways in which fun was discussed to the form humour took as a tactic. It considers how fun was performative in the organisations: both in reference to being used in an efficiency-focused manner (Lyotard, 1984) and by operating as a discourse working on employees' subjectivity (Butler, 1990). Employees would present different views of the fun corporate culture at different times, with employees often presenting several of these perspectives throughout their interviews and in the observations of the organisations. It concludes with analysing how humour was tactically used to get by, get on, get away and resist having fun within these organisations. In this case, it discusses how employees were tactically using humour in a manner which can be described as instrumentally performative: focusing on the ends of *appearing* to be fun for others in the organisation and the management. The thesis concludes with advocating that employees are instrumental in their use of humour and tactically engage with the corporate culture in a form of bricolage, or making do, which benefits their own ends. Humour acts as a tactical negotiation of the meaning of a fun corporate culture, playing with the dominant meaning of play and fun, allowing participants to get on, get by, get away and resist fun discourses in their everyday practices.

The thesis begins with considering the nature of play in organisations, through reviewing the literature on corporate culture, fun workplaces and the creative industries. It aims to achieve a debate on why play is important as a form of control in organisations and how employees experience and respond to the pressures to have fun. After all, why wouldn't employees want to have fun?

Chapter Two: Fun corporate cultures: background and perspectives

Chapter Two explores the introduction of 'fun' into organisations, noting a distinctive change in the management of corporate culture. This change has suggested that play is not the opposite of work, but instead can be integrated into work in order to increase productivity. It will discuss how management theory encourages employees to 'play' as part of their everyday work. Corporate culture therefore becomes a strategy which utilises employees' humour. In order to do so this chapter will explore the relationship between fun, play and humour within corporate culture. It positions this in a discussion of the creative industries, as sites of employment where these fun cultures may be used. The link between creativity and play in the management literature has been pervasive, with play inevitably positioned as an opportunity for employees to release their creativity in a productive capacity. This would suggest a positive relationship between creativity and play, although as Chapter Three will explore in more depth, this creativity is not always be used towards the organisation's productive capacity.

However, critical management scholars have also proposed that these 'playful' and 'pleasurable' discourses of 'fun' corporate identities create an infantilised space within organisations, through the playschool atmosphere, toys and promotion of youthful behaviour (Costea et al, 2005; Fleming, 2005; Dale and Burrell, 2008; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). The infantilisation of work thesis explored here proposes that corporate cultures create docile employees, demonstrated through humorous activities in an uncritical, one-dimensional emotional engagement with work. The studies which have theorised play at work usually draw upon employees' use of humour, and in particular sexualised humour, in order to relate or resist the corporate discourses (Fleming, 2005; Fleming, 2006; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009), their emotional responses to working in these corporate cultures (Redman and Mathews, 2002; Warren and Fineman, 2007) and the space and materiality of the cultures reflecting children's play grounds (Warren and Fineman, 2007; Dale and Burrell, 2008).

These areas relate to a key component of fun organisations, the encouragement of employees to 'be themselves' (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009) through employees creating authentic displays

of identity, positive emotions, the casual ‘look’ and aesthetic of the body and expressions of sexuality. This chapter begins by exploring culture management and fun corporate cultures. It argues that in order to understand the experiences of employees within these environments, the nature of control has to be linked to the character of play in ‘fun’ corporate cultures. In particular the link between play and the creative industries will be explored as sites where fun and creativity are essential to not only the work undertaken but the identity projects pursued by creative workers. In Chapter Three, I will discuss the relationship between those areas outlined above and the formation of fun corporate cultures. The aim is to demonstrate that further research is needed into the effects of infantilisation of the creative workforce. Linking the influence of infantile play in these organisations to employees’ experience is in particular important, as it allows for a critique of how play is a form of control in itself. This aspect, how play in itself is such an effective form of cultural control, remains unexplored in the current literature, but could provide insight into the way organisations use play to close space for worker discretion, while simultaneously appearing to open it up. The conclusion will consider these points and how this study will make a contribution to the current literature on play, fun and corporate cultures, outlining a series of important questions and under researched themes emerging from the literature on fun corporate cultures that has developed thus far.

Culture management, fun, play and an infantilisation of work

Culture management and fun cultures

There has been a well-documented intensification of managing culture within organisations towards the end of the last century (Willmott, 1993; Kunda, 1995; Casey, 1996), and more recently more attention has been given to the growth of ‘fun’ corporate cultures (Redman and Mathews, 2002; Kane, 2005; Fleming, 2005; Costea et al, 2005; Warren and Fineman, 2007; Cederström and Grassman, 2008; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009; Hunter et al, 2010). Contemporary management authors have continued to emphasise a theme central to post-Taylorist styles of management, namely that workplaces should be made ‘meaningful’ through employees finding enjoyment at work (e.g. Barsoux, 1993). These authors prescribe that organisations should aim to not only gain compliance but to encourage employees to feel positive emotions about their work and the company.

As Cooper et al (2001: xi-xii) have noted "the last half-century has seen an enormous change in the nature of society and of the workplace in particular", where despite improvements in economic markets "there were the first signs of strain, as 'stress' and 'burnout' became concepts in the everyday vocabulary of many working people." The nature of employment appeared to be changing, becoming more tenuous, flexible and temporary. As a result occupational identities appear to reflect this change, with employees increasingly expecting their career to be fragmented and insecure rather than a fixed occupation and identity (Sennett, 1998). The effect has been that employers can no longer take for granted that once employees are hired they will remain loyal and dedicated to a firm. As a result, employers increasingly search for ways to engage employees, not simply obtaining their compliance but rather a deeper identification with the organisational goals and objectives (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

The most common solution to the need for employee commitment and engagement is to build a 'strong' culture within an organisation. Organisational culture programmes became popular within the US and Europe during the 1980's and 1990's, promoting the idea that culture was the key component to creating high performance employees who are dedicated to the organisational goals. According to Parker (2000), Pettigrew's (1979) article on organisations as cultures, and the resulting practitioner interest from management gurus, created a shift where anthropology and the study of culture moved from academic interest into popular management texts. As a response to the increased Japanese competition, these texts highlighting that the best companies within the USA achieved employee dedication due to their cultures (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Deal and Kennedy (1982) mirror this position by proposing that organisations should have 'strong' cultures, with such characteristics as vision, shared values, enlightened leadership, employee loyalty, open door management policies and organisational flexibility. As such, Parker (2000) argues that these texts were essentially marketing a product of managed culture, but with weak evidence and a focus on heroic leadership and self-help material. Despite the popularity of these books, culture in organisations is not a new phenomenon nor has management been removed from shaping it, for example in the paternalistic Quaker culture in the Bourneville factory in the late nineteenth century (Dellheim, 1987; Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993). Additionally, scientific management as

developed by Taylor (1998/1911) was a direct attempt to harmonise the working relationship between managers and workers, forming a single mind set which rejected counter-cultures (Parker, 2000). As such, claims that human relations theory was a significant shift in how employees were considered can instead be set in context of the historical attempts of management to present culture through a single, unitarist perspective. Despite this, the way in which culture in organisations has been discussed in academic work in particular has changed to encourage a more nuanced, complex and fragmented view of culture. Linstead and Grafton-Small (1992) highlight this argument through suggesting academics should use the term corporate culture as opposed to organisational culture to express the engineering and implementation by management compared to organic growth of culture. I plan to follow this distinction, referring to corporate cultures as strategies used by organisations to manipulate the values, behaviours and traditions of the workforce.

Within the development of 'Work Hard/Play Hard Cultures' (Deal and Kennedy, 1982) has been the rise in 'fun' elements within corporate cultures through the encouragement of 'play' at work (Costea et al, 2005). The term fun refers to the creation of an environment in which employees are encouraged to play, and is concerned with employees' experience of work in particular. 'Fun' cultures focus on the experiences of the employees and as such are those which "are not necessarily fun in and of themselves but aim to establish a context in which fun experiences are more likely to occur" (Fleming, 2005: 287). Fun corporate cultures can be analysed as a set of practices, both discursively and materially expressed, concerning the way work can be conceptualised around *instrumental* 'fun' practices such as humour, games and traditional extra-organisational leisure activities such as drinking (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009).

The use of culture management has met significant criticism however. Willmott's (1993: 517 emphasis added) influential article noted a totalitarian nature to culture management:

> Its central argument is that, in the name of expanded practical autonomy, it aspires to extend management control by colonizing the affective domain. It does this by promoting employee commitment to a monolithic structure of feeling and thought, *a development that is seen to be incipiently totalitarian.*

This *totalitarian* aspect arises from the ability of culture management to engage the employee in self-discipline. Rather than a direct form of control, culture management aims to instil values within the workforce in order that they will willingly engage in productive activity. From a Marxist critique, Willmott points out that it functions both in the way employees *think* and *feel* about the organisation, requiring their 'hearts and minds' to align with organisational goals. If culture management was successful it would therefore reduce the capacity to question the employment relationship (Willmott, 1993). Employing a Foucauldian analysis, Willmott draws attention to the element of control within these programmes which evolve from the 'politics of truth', the normalisation of control to appear inevitable. One of the key factors within culture management is that employees engage in disciplining themselves, judging their own performance against organisational goals and feeling guilt and shame if they have fallen short. Foucault (1977) stated that through this discourse of 'truth', management would not have to rely on direct control, but the workforce would internalise the values and self-discipline themselves. This is referred to by Willmott (1993) as a normative framework of control. These modernist programmes are, from a critical standpoint, designed in order to create a placid, docile workforce, rather than being driven by paternalistic or humanist concerns (Willmott, 1998). However there are doubts about the effectiveness of these programmes, as space for resistance continues to prevail within normative control. This aligns with the point made by Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 621) that while culture management does affect employees' values and beliefs, they "reject any suggestion that management is omnipotent in its definition of employee identity." Of course, there is room to manoeuvre and resist organisational forms of control, even normative forms. Some of the problems with normative control are discussed below, drawing in particular on the context of fun corporate cultures.

Control

Warren and Fineman (2007: 92) note "fun programmes at work add a particular dimension of control and morality to the kinds of fun or mirth that employees *ought* to experience." This element of control in fun organisations uses play as an enticement for employees to engage with organisational goals and values. Authors such as Wray-Bliss and Parker (1998), drawing on

Marx, have noted the exploitative nature of these programmes within capitalism, where 'in return' for a caring employer, employees appear to be expected to love work to such an extent that personal 'time' is allocated for work (Hunter et al, 2010).

However it is suggested by authors such as Fleming and Sturdy (2009) that control within these fun organisations is undergoing a shift, taking a 'neo-normative' form. This suggests a development of the normative form of control, rather than a break away from traditional methods of management. Neo-normative control recognises one of the biggest problems with normative forms of control, in that the latter requires employees to shape their sense of self around a shared set of goals. As a result it often ignores important differences and diversity within the workforce. Neo-normative control instead is a purported celebration of the individual, through encouraging employees 'to be themselves'. This often entails bringing in aspects of the self that have traditionally been seen as 'outside' the organisation such as pleasure, emotions, sexuality and humour, suggesting a breakdown of the traditional boundaries between a work identity and an outside 'authentic' self (Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Fleming and Sturdy (2009) developed their theory of neo-normative control through studying a self-espoused 'fun' company, where corporate discourses promote the expression of an 'authentic' self, such as 'the expressive, playful, inner child', partying and drinking, sexuality, dress codes and health and happiness.

In their case study they noted how employees were encouraged to "Just Be Yourself" within the workplace through the expression of their supposed 'real' and 'authentic' selves. As a form of 'neo-normative' control employees' identities were aligned with the organisation through the promotion of a supposed 'authentic' identity for the employee, expressing their uniqueness such as unusual hair colouring, dress and tattoos. Identity management was also designed to encourage employees to bring aspects of their private lives into work:

> Here, consumption, lifestyle factors, sexuality and humour, for example, are not externalized in favour of a collective normative alignment nor barred from the organization in the bureaucratic tradition, but 'celebrated' as a useful organizational resource (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009: 203).

The authors raise serious questions about the use of employees' personal lives towards the company's profit. They also discuss the degree to which employees were really encouraged to be 'themselves' or if they were encouraged to reproduce a company ideal of originality. As they note "there was no room for the non-fun, non-'different' person in the organized events" (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009: 212). There remained a degree of scepticism from employees towards fun practices, especially when they integrate concepts of self into working practices (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). Some employees within their study appeared to reject what they viewed as their 'authentic' self being utilised for corporate gain and instead noted how only certain versions of authenticity and choice which matched the corporate philosophy were favoured by the organisation. In this case 'fun' practices and looking 'authentic' became the objects of ridicule.

The role of humour can be further explored as both an expression of a fun identity *and* as resistance in a form of scepticism. Resistance to fun cultures was documented in Fleming and Sturdy's (2009) study where they found that some employees rejected the organisational discourses. It was perceived by employees that the fun discourses actually produced uniformity through pressure to look unique, with the result that employees resisted 'being themselves'. In later work, Costas and Fleming (2009) discuss this process in relation to a different case study as dis-identification, the distancing of themselves from what is perceived as 'fake' workplace identities. In particular a level of cynicism was used to point out that empowerment was only used as management chose and to reinforce the importance of the collective over individuality. As one of their interviewees noted:

> Well, to "succeed" at Sunray you are basically gay, have to be really "alternative" and Sunray likes people who have different coloured hair and who are into [in a sarcastic tone] "being themselves". Now I'm not too sure which one we fit into, but basically we are all plebs. Just plebs (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009: 579).

The corporate culture was undermined by these individuals who resisted altering their sense of self, even if this resulted in them not being as successful within the company. Through analysing neo-normative forms of control, it becomes apparent that play is not simply a

workplace device, but an aspect of everyday life which people engage with for multiple social reasons, influencing how and when play occurs. When employees felt that play was being controlled in the organisation, some employees undertook forms of resistance to prevent aligning too much of themselves with the organisation, through the use of cynicism and in particular humour. However, as Costas and Fleming's (2009: 360) study examines, this leads to a position where "they simultaneously notice that 'who they really are' is an alien corporate self". In other words, those who reject the designed corporate self recognise through a reflexive process the constructed self in 'narrated imaginary of authenticity', that the concept of being an individual is also constructed. This leads to what the authors describe as a self-alienation: the recognition that the narrative of authenticity slips away underneath the pressures to form a particular subjectivity demanded in the workplace.

The study of the neo-normative control is not confined to Fleming and Sturdy's (2009) and Costas and Fleming's (2009) case studies. Cederström and Grassman (2008: 43) have drawn on the concept of neo-normative control within Google, which they note is based "on a model that takes a more 'genuine' interest in the employee as idiosyncratic and individual" and achieve this through appealing to the employee's sense of 'authenticity' and through the blurring of the working self and 'authentic-self':

> Its blend of work and recreation – an intermixture of fun and seriousness – disintegrates *Homo faber* (the working man) to allow for *Homo ludens* (the playing man). The formula of the neo-normative perspective is that work should not be considered as a necessary evil that one is forced into, but as a hobby that one pursues and which expresses the radical 'edge' of oneself (Cederström and Grassman, 2008: 46).

Like Sunray from Fleming and Sturdy's study, Google make a concerted effort to reduce the difference between the authentic sense of self and the working sense of self. They compared this form of organisation with a low involvement, market-based corporate culture they describe as 'masochistic-reflexive' for the open cynicism towards the organisation. They argue that neo-normative forms of control discard the difference between the working self and

existential inwardness, thus denying the 'symptom' of exploitation. From this perspective, resistance to the neo-normative culture begins to become more clear, because it breaks the illusion that work can be play. The neo-normative form of control thus is illusionary in nature, and while appealing to many employees, it remains possible to resist.

The contribution of neo-normative control in fun organisations is a useful starting point, as it introduces the idea that the fun organisation is both an illusion and a contradiction. However, Costea et al (2005)'s review of fun corporate cultures and play raises many relevant questions about identity and control which appear to be unanswered. While neo-normative forms of control focus on the issue of authenticity in the workplace, a question remains of why play in particular is evoked within neo-normative control. Costea et al (2005:140) begin to address this by noting how play can alter the current balance between exploitation and authenticity, and the related class consciousness and false consciousness, "because it mobilises cultural, social and psychological resources, and triggers processes, beyond simple economic or political rationalities". As a result it is a particularly effective means of control, but raises two important questions:

> Why is it possible for play to be a means of instructional order? Why can 'control' take the form of play and be culturally legitimate? (Costea et al, 2005: 140).

This quote raises many pertinent questions about the nature of control in relation to play. While Fleming and Sturdy's study does note that many of the employees appeared to accept the fun corporate culture, the study focuses on four employees who in particular appear to resent and resist the culture. While not to deter from their contribution, it does leave a question remaining of why most of the employees in the organisation they studied at least appear to accept and perhaps enjoy the fun corporate culture. Play appears to support corporate culture as normative and neo-normative control, but there is little exploration of why this may be the case. In order to consider this, the nature of play itself needs to be explored. In particular the intrinsic, unassuming way in which we use it socially to relate to others may be the key to why it is becoming so prevalent in organisations. In the work on fun organisations to date it is assumed that play is perhaps side-lined in favour of other aspects of culture

management, such as the openness of the culture to diversity. A more direct focus on the management of fun and play in the next section begins to set up a case for studying how employees experience play.

Management of 'fun' in organisations

'Fun' within work has attracted increased attention within academic texts and management practice. Companies such as Google have seen significant attention from the media for their workplace culture and the supposed creative benefits this may provide (Baldry and Hallier, 2010). This could signify simply another form of culture management, but it could also represent a change in the way work is perceived. Fun, play and enjoyment may seem at odds with how traditional, serious workplaces are conceived. As a result fun may be a contested concept, especially within the bureaucratic organisation envisioned by Weber (1958). Certainly within a bureaucratic structure, ideal work was envisioned as emotionless, rational decision making (see Fineman (1999) for a more complete discussion of the complex relationship between rationality and emotion). In this perspective the presence of non-serious activities, such as play and sexuality remain conceptually firmly outside of the organisation (Burrell, 1984). This reflects perhaps a wider trend of a breaking down of identities relating to the 'private' and 'public', the 'outside' of the organisation or the 'inside' of the home (Baldry and Hallier, 2010). There appears to be a breakdown of the spatial and temporal boundaries of work which were established within modernity (Costea et al, 2005). At the same time there is a breakdown of the serious bureaucratic workforce and the 'informal' elements of the private – such as emotion, sexuality, the authentic self, and 'having fun'. This position argues that meaning is becoming more fluid, fragmented and ambiguous for employees in contemporary organisations (Sennett, 1988; Kondo, 1990; Collinson, 2003).

Within this context, management texts propose employers should encourage 'having fun' at work. This includes an expression of corporate philosophy in the form of mission statements, core beliefs and assessments, and into everyday practices such as management encouraging dress up days, humour in meetings and in the office, using playfulness to encourage creativity and more generally an open approach by management to 'allow' employees to be themselves. It is ironic then that many of the informal 'have fun' practices such as humour have already

been documented as part of organisational life often without management's explicit consent or involvement (Roy, 1959; Pollert, 1981; Linstead, 1985; Collinson, 1988). The combination of the corporate objectives with management advocating that employees should have fun can be seen as an extension from humour being tolerated to being controlled and linked to employees' performance. It certainly suggests the incorporation of many elements (humour, outlandish dress, sexuality) which have been noted in the past as forms of resistance to management. Moreover Warren and Fineman (2007) have suggested that fun programmes can be used to neutralise the impulse for dissent by employees, although only to a varying degree of success. This trend inverts the common assumption that work must be serious and humour's role is simply a form of distraction (from boredom) or resistance (from resentment). The way that play is organised therefore may have a significant impact on how employees respond to the corporate culture.

One key way in which the culture is managed is through the utilisation of joking within 'serious' playfulness: play which promotes productivity and creativity for profit by the organisation. This involves recognising play can have serious impact, including increasing productivity, while simultaneously claiming to reduce the seriousness of adult play into 'free' childlike play. In other words, adult play is too serious, while child's play can be more free and unconsciously in touch with the 'inner child' (Costea et al, 2005). Indeed there is an attempt by management to channel the emotional amusement of humour into work processes, to free up the approach to work to be more light-hearted (Barsoux, 1993). This could be perceived either as a humanistic movement to make work more enjoyable or from a critical perspective as an attempt by managers to extract more work from employees to increase their productive output. Studies of such workplaces have found an element of both of these perspectives. Hatch (1997) proposes humour allows employees to construct organisations linguistically as a contradiction through the use of ironic humour. By using irony, the speaker can introduce a redefinition of an event by proposing the opposite and as a result question the status quo. This allows the speaker to simultaneously represent their response as a contradiction, especially when presented with the complexity of contradictions organisations represent. The contradiction of 'managing fun' is one such inconsistency: on the one hand fun is encouraged but on the other boundaries around appropriate behaviour continue to exist.

Contradiction in managing fun

The contradiction of playfulness and seriousness lies at the very heart of fun corporate practices. These discourses and expectations are simultaneously coexisting: employees should be both serious and playful, work should be productive and fun and employees are expected to display an authentic self in the sense of being funny and outgoing, but also knowing where the boundary of acceptable fun lies. Warren and Fineman's (2007) study demonstrates how contradiction was important in organisationally sanctioned fun. While employees seemed to appreciate efforts made by management, overall they remained sceptical about the management initiated fun. Warren and Fineman raise questions about the nature of the management of fun, whether it is oppressive towards employees and whether employees experience the fun as positive or negative. They make two important observations. First, all fun is managed, as even spontaneous humour in organisations is organised by employees around "social and cultural conventions that shape what is felt, what is expressed and what is shared" (Warren and Fineman, 2007: 106). What differs in these 'fun' organisations is the authorship of the fun: whereas certain types of play were encouraged by management, others which were considered counterproductive were repressed. They provide an example of human-sized Russian Dolls, created by management, which the employees used in subversively humorous ways such as putting them in the toilets and punching their faces when management were not watching. This led to sanctions by management for using the dolls in 'inappropriately' fun ways.

Related to this, their second point is that the unmanageable nature of the fun becomes immediately evident, when the fun sanctioned by management is not perceived as fun and instead takes the form of alternative, subversive forms of fun. In the case of the Russian dolls, each doll represented an equal opportunity business 'family' within the organisation, or as one employee described them "a stupid fucking politically correct family" (Warren and Fineman, 2007: 100). The organisation attempted to use fun to portray a politically correct representation with a mix of genders, race and age. It is probable that the contradiction between this representation and the employees' experiences was expressed in the humour enacted on the dolls (for instance the 'adult male' doll appearing in the women's toilets contradicted the politically correct message the organisation intended). In this sense play is

being used within this company as a tactic to open up space for alternative 'meanings', in particular the playful items whose purpose is supposedly controlled by management.

Additionally Warren and Fineman note that much of the structured fun in the organisation was designed by men and was male-oriented, for instance war games played out with Nerf guns (toys which shoot out a foam ball). The authors suggest that as a result the experience of the fun at work was likely to be more uncomfortable for women, who would feel obliged to play along so as not to be stigmatised. While it did not appear to be stopping women from participating in the subversive fun, they do suggest that 'harmless fun' can often translate into serious implications for the butt of the joke, resulting in possible harassment. Here humour could be used as a tactic to resist organisational discourses on diversity and openness, to create space for other discourses about the nature of men and women. This theme of tactical behaviour will be returned to in later sections, demonstrating that fun in these organisations is used in a tactical, instrumental fashion rather than employees buying wholeheartedly into the culture.

It has already been suggested that ambiguity and contradiction are important elements of the nature of play. The study above by Warren and Fineman demonstrates that play can, in many ways, break expectations of managerially sanctioned behaviour, allowing space for a different view of reality from that of 'normality'. If play is not controllable in the manner that management texts suggest, this raises questions about what the actual nature of play is and why it is difficult to manage. Below I will set out an ontology of play, considering how play provides an alternative space and set of rules, an alternative temporary reality for the player. In this sense, it will be argued that play is a tactic used to create space, which leads to a discussion about the degree to which play is manageable.

Towards an ontology of play

> Play always connects value spheres and mediates important boundaries in social activities and personal existence in all human societies; it is the occasion of collective and individual eruptions of passion, of exuberance and anger, of resistance and agitation, of effervescence and candour (Costea et al, 2005: 140).

Play, while often appearing as a simplistic concept in management texts, is a complex phenomenon which involves public and private spheres, pertaining to an individual's sense of self and to their relations with others. Fun-at-work thus is more than simply an approach to work, but can be an aim to view life through a *play ethic* (Kane, 2005) where play informs our interactions and mindset within work, creating an integration of the non-serious arena of play into the seriousness of work. These discourses may appeal morally as emancipating and empowering for employees by allowing employees to express their 'real' selves in a creative, enjoyable and playful manner. Kane (2005) provides a theory of a 'play ethic' which he discusses in relation to providing creativity to many aspects of life, including art, culture, politics and work. His discussion of the application of the play ethic to work remains ambiguous, however, for while he supports applying it from an ideological perspective, he describes current efforts of integrating it into work as falling short, as more lip service rather than a true change.

Much of Kane's thesis draws on Huizinga's (1949) early work introducing 'play theory' in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture*, where Huizinga discusses the false separation of 'seriousness' and play. Instead Huizinga demonstrates how play is integral to human activity, referring to man as the *Homo Luden,* or 'Man the Player' (Huizinga, 1949). He attempted to 'understand play as a cultural factor in life'; to see it as a social construction where actions play out a certain 'imagination' of reality (Huizinga, 1949: 4). It has important implications in how we relate to others, drawing upon shared culture to create understanding. He stated that play was "a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life" and "proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner" (Huizinga, 1949: 13). In this sense, play is not arbitrary or irrelevant, but organised around its own rules which exist if only temporarily. It is an organised activity, which provides meaning to the players who engage in it. Play is thus primarily a social activity, rather than an individual activity.

Huizinga argued that play was central to understanding culture, and thus society more generally. Play contained several key elements: first, it had to be freely undertaken; second, play was not ‘ordinary’ or ‘real’ life, but a temporary interlude from normality; and thirdly as such, it exists within specific boundaries of time and space. While he viewed play as a necessarily irrational, playful activity, according to him it still contained order: mutually accepted and tacitly recognised temporary rules which guided the actions of play.

However Huizinga’s concept of play is guided by his categorisation of playful activities. Huizinga viewed play as predominantly a competitive interaction through theorising about games such as sport. The work of Caillois (1958) expanded his theory to view games with different sets of characteristics, in particular as Agôn (competitive), Alea (chance), Mimicry (imitation) and Ilinx (disorder). Thus Caillois theorised play along a spectrum from the luden, the rule bound formal games, to paidia, the anarchic, spontaneous play. Caillois’s typology conceived play in relation to the organisation of society, and considered how play is expressed within different contexts and for different purposes. Caillois (1958: 6) rightly points out that games such as “bets and games of chance – for example gambling houses, casinos, racetracks, and lotteries” occupy an important section of the economy and disputes Huizinga’s proposition that play cannot contain material interest.

A recent article by Sørensen and Spoelstra (2011) has taken the work of Huizinga and Caillois to develop an ontology of play in relation to work. For these authors, play is autotelic: its purpose is simply to play. In discussing semi-fictitious company football reports in Ryland Inc., they theorise that play can be a continuation by performing functions for work although remaining independent from it. Alternatively play can be an intervention to work through its ability to ‘double’ organisations, or in other words create an alternative reality to organisational life and allow cynicism and critique. They do not however see this as resistance in the manner described by Fleming and Spicer (2008) or Rodrigues and Collinson (1995), instead arguing: “Play necessarily goes its own way: it remains ‘at play’ and is by its sheer ambiguity at times able to put the organization into a crisis” (Sørensen and Spoelstra, 2011: 11). As a result of its ontological position of creating an alternative reality, it is not a tool of

resistance utilised but instead opens up the possibility through its ambiguous nature. Finally they discuss play as usurpation, where play is essentially taking over the organisation of the company without consent. In this case, play functions in a way which compensates for the organisation's limitations. They conclude with noting that while work cannot take over play, play can usurp work, forming an asymmetrical relationship. While an interesting argument, there are some fundamental problems with it. In this first case the authors strongly advocate that play is ontologically separate from reality, functioning simply for the sake of play. Yet simultaneously it is then positioned within the three functions, in the retrospective style that they themselves scorn the use of interviews on play and the resistance literature. Yet who then decides the 'rules' of the game of play which they discuss? It allows the authors to position themselves as the authority on the purpose of play through their research, a position which counters the assumptions claimed in their methods. Also, is the 'double' of the organisation not also a comment on that organisation? The authors appear to idealise play, without reconciling how power dynamics exist within the rules of play. If they were to do this, it may be possible to see play as a purposeful activity instead of the relativist position into which they seem to fall.

Play may be able to offer an opportunity to break the normality of work; providing a separate time and space within which 'play' rules apply and thus implicitly compensating for the oppressive limitations of a disciplined body and mind in a work situation. However as seen in Sørensen and Spoelstra's study it would be dangerous to see play as too romanticised, or it may end up in a position where any interpretation is invalid: "Strictly speaking, there is no interpretive study on organizational play from the perspective of play, because play does not tolerate interpretation" (2011: 15). However, relating back to Kane's thesis of the play ethic, if play becomes work itself, is a separation between the two truly possible? Is the body also disciplined within play, for example through competitive sport the body is worked on, manipulated and moved through space in relation to the rules of play. Simultaneously in organisations, when the boundaries of work and play are dissolved into managed play, how are the body and mind disciplined into play behaviours which are ultimately performance oriented, if not instrumental? If play is performance driven, employees are willing to go along with the play ethos as it makes the time pass faster and the work more enjoyable, but may keep some distance from exposing their true self. Alternatively employees may be using it

instrumentally, towards an outcome such as getting a good review or a promotion. Are employees simply playing at being playful?

Play as theorised within Huizinga's and Caillois' work can be enlightening, allowing the players to be freed of social constraints. Play also can be oppressive, however, especially when it takes the form of competitiveness. In their theories, play has a darker side, recognising the power dynamics that often underpin who makes the rules of play. Focusing on these power dynamics, it is possible that play may not always have positive results for those who are playing. Huizinga proposed that play had to be freely undertaken by those involved, but how free is play in organisations when it becomes an integral part of work? Or do employees, such as in the Warren and Fineman case from the last section, choose their own ways to play? The following section will explore the character of play in 'fun' organisations more critically, as some authors propose that the way play is used in corporate cultures may not be as liberating as Kane hopes, but instead may have quite detrimental effects on employees. In particular many critical accounts have suggested that play can be belittling to employees' sense of self through a process of infantilisation.

Infantilisation of work

Critical management scholars view many of the contemporary trends in organisations as superficial changes which do little to enhance the quality of working life. Linstead (2002) develops this theme through his deployment of the term organisational kitsch, an ontology of *being kitsch* which relies on superficiality and ease:

> Kitsch involves the easy satisfaction of expectations, the harmonic fusion of the image with reality itself and the elision of tensions without placing demands on its audience (Linstead, 2002: 660).

A particular attribute of kitsch is the lack of reflexivity that differentiates it from irony. In irony the users know the superficiality and purposely use it. Kitsch remains unaware of the lack of

substance, but the superficiality constructs a simplified form of reality which brushes over human construction and the contradictions produced. Linstead argues that corporate culture management is kitsch through producing simplistic, sweeping solutions which mask the complexity of reality underneath.

In the context of corporate cultures, it is possible that there is a matching process of infantilisation in the production of childish discourses with kitsch undertones. This process relates in particular to the way play appears in the organisation, the types of play which are encouraged and how employees experience 'fun' organisations. Certainly those studies which have explored the management of fun in organisations have reflected upon the spirit of these fun discourses as being 'child's play' (Costea et al, 2005). This may not be just a new aspect of organisations, for example Bryman (1999) noted how the management within Disney attempted to organise work to look like play, as if employees were not really working after all. He described this trend as a 'Disneyization' of the work experience. Bryman's thesis however refers to the appearance of work, while infantilisation seems to be deeper, an attempt through culture management to alter the employees' frame of mind. In Disneyization the work is made to appear as play for those outside of the organisation, with the primary focus on the client and customers who 'experience' the culture in the parks. Employees' behaviour was tightly monitored to ensure that they complied with this especially within the 'front-stage' locations. In the case of fun-at-work policies it assumes that employees themselves desire play at work, although this does not remove the possibility that customers may also be important.

Culture management programmes which draw on play often seem to use child metaphors in describing their corporate cultures. Play, it seems, often refers to child play, rather than adult play. Fleming (2005) noted this trend in his study of Sunray, where employers utilised a 'school' theme through student-teacher relationships, activities mirroring primary school or kindergarten puzzle books and away days to 'party' destinations. Also he noted how this school theme is expressed in the physicality of the organisation, through the colour schemes chosen for the walls designed to "create a mood of verve and fun" and large cut outs of jungle trees, multi-coloured building blocks of letters and children's television characters providing a "juvenile ambience" (Fleming, 2005: 294). These related to other themes such as family, through team organisation, training documents referring to the Sunray Family and the owner

of the company acting as Santa handing out gifts. Another theme was partying, where the image of a party atmosphere was literally evoked in training sessions, and drinking and sexual behaviours were encouraged creating a nightclub ambience. Additionally dress code was relaxed and fashionable to reflect the 'fun' identities of the employees. Dress-up days were also organised, with various themes such as superheroes or pyjamas. These elements combined provided a paternalistic, youthful 'school' atmosphere. As Fleming's study suggests, there is a distinct material element to the infantilisation of work. The management specifically chose objects to decorate the building, the dress of the employees, and the use of party tools all of which reflected the child play ambience and had the result of the building resembling a play pen.

In addition to the objects selected, the ambience of fun organisations are influenced by the spatial design, the way employees are encouraged to move through the space and interact with it. Dale and Burrell's (2008) review of space and organisations notes one office building in Melbourne where the playful corporate culture was spatially expressed. In this case management decided to organise employees' movement through the space by placing drawings of cartoons to remind staff to put back chairs and depicting them fighting over the furniture, as if they were moral statements to children about sharing. The authors note the cartoons "were, to our mind, condescending and close to suggesting infantilism amongst staff, but their stated intentions were to be a fun way of communicating spatial rules" (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 128). Even if the organisation had a good intention when placing the cartoons, in all likelihood having a laugh at the rules, the cartoons still organised employees within the spaces through placing employees in the role of children.

Indeed they note the power relations within these designs, in how "play – the ludic – has become co-opted into workplace redesign with very definite organizational goals in mind" (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 129). The cartoons and general use of space within these organisations appeared to recreate the power differences that already exist between workers and the company, where management get to organise the space to construct particular ideas about who uses it and how. Work begins to appear as if it is play, while in reality it remained work. As a result the authors stated the use of tapping into creativeness towards organisational goals is more 'productive play', or play used in order to be more industrious, rather than as an

emancipation from power relations. It reflects the distinction between performance of play and instrumental play, or how employees view play as being productive in both their work output and in other's perception of themselves. Reinforcing the current power relations, employees ultimately performed playful behaviours which align their own goals to those of management. This thesis adopts the position of 'productive play', considering how employees purposely use play to achieve instrumental ends. However it also expands on this developing how employees interpret these infantilising undertones into different forms of productive play which can be understood in relation to the pressure to use play to be more industrious.

This point about the organisation of materiality and space as infantilising can also be seen in Warren and Fineman's study, where the company aims to celebrate 'the childishness in us all' (2007: 92). They note "the *infantile turn* we see in many of these initiatives sits oddly with the image of grown-ups at work" (2007: 95 emphasis added) which resulted in some participants rejecting the fun elements. The employees were asked to 'play' with Lego in the play area, which resembled a children's nursery, while being filmed for a local TV programme. A selection of those interviewed felt that these practices in particular belittled the status of employees as professional people, especially in combination with the public promotion of the corporate culture as fun play. Part of the tension arose from the discrepancy between discourses of professionals and the discourses of child's play, so that while employees appreciated the company and managers making an effort to introduce a more entertaining workplace, this raised significant problems for their sense of worth as professionals.

The experience of work for these employees as infantile appeared to be problematic for their sense of self as educated, skilled and knowledgeable persons. The 'infantile turn' to which Warren and Fineman refer (2009: 5) or infantilisation as an organisational process, concerns the introduction of overly simplistic, easy and often sweeping perspectives, rather than encouraging a nuanced, critical and complex view of the world including the world of work. It refers to the way we consume discourses and identities, and how we choose to view work and wider society (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). Barber (2007) discusses the theme of infantilisation in relation to wider societal trends, and in particular to our relation to the market as consumers. He proposes that contemporary organisations encourage adults to create identities which are adolescent, while at the same time targeting children for increasing levels of consumption.

“Infantilization aims at inducing puerility in adults and preserving what is childish in children trying to grow up, even as children are ‘empowered’ to consume” (Barber, 2007: 82). This occurs through a preference for what is easy over hard, what is simple over complex and what is achieved quickly over slowly.

As a result Barber firstly notes tendencies for privileging impulse over deliberation, as gut instinct is favoured over intensive reflection. Secondly, and related to this, there is a preference for feeling over reason, to allow for emotions within the moment to influence consumption. Thirdly, play is privileged over work, with the tendency to enjoy playing over hard graft. As stated above, this means that work should appear more like play. Fourthly, Barber notes that there is a preference for immediate pleasure over long term happiness. This relates to privileging a ‘timeless present over temporality’ where, consumers are encouraged to live for the moment rather than experiencing time as passing. In the same sense of living for the moment, physical sexuality begins to dominate over erotic love, as we endeavour to please our impulse. Finally, he notes a pressure to view ourselves as individuals rather than consider ourselves to be part of a community, resulting in an introverted view of our actions (Barber, 2007). In this sense, Barber draws on Adorno’s critique of the culture industry which of a standardised and formulaic mass product. This theme of the culture industries, and the move to the term of the ‘creative industries’ which focuses on the profitability of creativity, will be returned to in later sections. However, Barber’s critique of the creative industries focuses on the infantilisation of consumers through movies, television, books and other media.

While Barber speaks about infantilisation in relation to markets, his thesis is intended to explain the wider behaviours of society in how we consume products and lifestyles. This includes a range of products from the focus of education moving to the achievement of good marks, or mass media such as music and television based on approachability and speed of production rather than substance, such as the fad for reality television or the electronic production of pop music. From a marketing perspective, there is an intensification of products which reflect lifestyles and the consumer’s sense of self, where footwear or music can define a person’s identity. As such, it leads to consumption in a manner which relies on instant gratification over deferred gratification, short term pleasure over long term happiness. This theme is developed through the sociologist Colin Campbell’s (1989) account of what he

describes as the ‘Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (drawing on Weber). Analysing Weber’s work, he notes that the driving force of capitalism *is* consumption, rather than the capacity of production. Campbell demonstrates that a romantic spirit was fundamental to the rise of consumerism, marking a change in the industrial revolution which accounted for the sharp rise in demand. This romantic ethic is based on a hedonistic model, where pleasure over satisfaction is the key factor. This pleasure is based on an illusion however, as the consumer attempts to create a pleasurable emotional environment through their consumption (Campbell, 1989). Considering recent developments in ‘fun’ organisations, parallels can be drawn between the wider cultural norms of consuming through infantilisation and the consumption at work of identities, friendships, personalities and corporate cultures. Employees are not passive when facing cultural texts, but consume them, through what De Certeau (1984) calls the secondary production of meaning where those consuming the products reinterpret their meaning. As workers are increasingly encouraged to experience work through a youthful attitude, this creates a mode of consumption of corporate culture which reinforces infantilised discourses, focusing on pleasure of the immediate over a longer term, critical and potentially resistant approaches. In other words, the experience of work for employees becomes increasingly vacuous in pursuit of satisfying their immediate wants.

With the exception of those studies mentioned above, little has been published on the infantilisation thesis within the context of work, perhaps quite rightly because accusing employees of being infantilised would seem to reject any notion of agency in their own decision to adopt fun cultures. An alternative resource is secondary research from debates which occur through the medium of the internet between employees, non-employees, academics and practitioners. One source which does talk about it is an article in the Times Higher Education Supplement (Tester, 2007) which links Barber’s thesis on consumption to those made by Bauman (2007) on consumer culture leaving wants and desires unsatisfied. Bauman’s thesis suggests that desires and wants are left unfulfilled, despite consumption’s promise to satisfy them through the latest product, service or concept. The two authors reach a similar conclusion about the nature of consumption within contemporary society, but have very different perspectives about the solution. While Barber turns to those parts of society which are supposedly untainted by consumerism, such as religion and democratic sovereignty, Bauman remains more cynical about the possibility of escaping the preference within

contemporary consumerism for the fast, easy and simple and sees the system as self perpetuating.

Blogs can be another medium where these debates can occur within an open forum. In 2003, Aaron Swartz wrote one such blog called 'The Goog Life: how Google keeps employees by treating them like kids' (Swartz, 2003). In this, he proposed that Google purposely infantilised their employees so that inexperienced university graduates could maintain an infantilized lifestyle, and as a result would be tied to Google as they would not be able to survive in a 'normal' organisation. Within this he describes the replicas of SpaceShipOne and Dinosaur skeletons outside the campus, laundry facilities, free food, and bouncy brightly-coloured balls to sit on at work. Placed in a relatively well read blog, a strong reaction was created by the entry. 171 responses were made over a two year period, of which 88 strongly rejected his view, while 60 found it insightful or agreed with his position (and 22 made comments largely unrelated to the debate). Many of those who responded claimed to either work for or said they had worked for the company or similar companies in the past and had an interest in programming as an occupation. The responses were often emotional and contained strongly worded insults to either the author or the other respondents. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of those who claimed to work at Google were offended by the author calling them infantilised. As one response stated:

> A hint: telling someone that everyone you know at their company "either acts childish, enthusiastically adolescent, or else is deeply cynical", and that "the infantilizing tactics have worked: they're afraid they wouldn't be able to survive anywhere else." cannot be taken as anything but an attack on the other people there (Scott Ellsworth, December 16, 2006).

Some claimed that as Google was the best in what it produced and attracted the top talent, the employees deserved such profuse benefits. These responses often reframed the argument as Google being supportive of its employees, as a form of paternalistic organisation. For example one blogger wrote:

> But that's exactly why I think what Google is doing is terribly important. ***More*** companies need to be that way. They need to be families who treat their employees like children - they take care of them. They reward them for their hard work (Anon, December 14, 2006).

Other people, whether Google employees or not, rejected the infantilisation thesis as they did not see the activities as childish. They often rejected the claim that employees were cynical, arguing instead that the fun was genuine and that employees found the environment to be stimulating and constructive:

> [free food] sounds like a pretty sensible, adult benefit to me... Basically, Aaron, all the things you've denigrated as infantile — the bright colors, appreciated perks, etc. — strike me as being good for employees, good for business, just, well, good for people (Adam, December 14, 2006).

In the same sense, the following quote addresses the point about infantilising practices as being positive, by proposing this as creating a positive state of mind for employees to take. It proposes that children are freer to be creative, linking the rhetoric of play with creative thinking.

> Your observation about the dinosaur and SpaceShipOne are interesting. Even the use of the word "infantilization" is interesting too. I can't help but think that when we were kids we dreamed big. Those dreams weren't mature or polished, but the sky was the limit. Perhaps that's not such a bad thing to have (peter c, December 16, 2006).

The responses from employees often perceived such claims as threatening to their identities as competent, highly skilled employees with an elevated status. However, others who had a negative experience of working at the company, or those who had chosen not to consider a job there, tended to agree more with the critique of Google. One interesting point came from an employee who worked for five years in a support role at Google, who found the attempt to have fun ridiculous because of the work demands:

> Yes, there are foosball tables in the support buildings, but who has time to play them? Giant overhead projectors alerting them to the current turnaround time for their emails is Big Brother enough to ensure that they don't even THINK about playing foosball when they should be answering support emails. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are not nice alternatives - they are NECESSARY to ensure that all of the support peons remain dutiful and consistent with their email turnaround times (unnamed, January 4, 2007).

Many non-Google employees stated they found the arguments to be enlightening and the idea of working in the company as unattractive because of the company culture. These persons also certainly displayed less identification with Google's corporate philosophy. As one employee stated, he left after his internship because he did not enjoy the people, the work and the environment, stating that one of the "issues is that you need a certain mindset to fit into their 'culture'" (Mirrio, January 15, 2007). Another potential employee who rejected the company stated:

> I agree. I interviewed at Google and the overwhelming feeling was of a crèche with computers. The products are great and they are fantastic productivity gains when used to but tow rok [sic- to work] for Google you have to either buy into the Google religion or you don't work there (billy, December 21, 2006).

It is not surprising that from these posts it appears that some employees enjoyed the culture, while others did not. The debate about working in an infantilised corporate culture was often

related to the broader context of work, speaking about how employers should treat their employees. Most seem to agree that respect for employees was important but differed on whether a culture such as Google's was respectful of employees.

There have been elements of Barber's thesis outlined above which have been either traditionally or more recently considered in organisation studies: in particular the increased management of humour, emotions and sexuality. These three themes and the relationship to 'fun' corporate cultures will be considered in Chapter Three. Humour, emotion and sexuality are three aspects of informal work practices which traditionally have been associated with resistance in organisations (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). However each of these areas has seen a growth in management initiatives which attempt to manipulate and control these aspects towards organisational goals.

Before discussing each of these in turn, the context of the creative industries will be discussed. The creative industries are interesting both for the creative product and the unique contribution from employees in this production process. In other words, employees in the creative industries and the products which they produce are so closely tied together that they require employees to identify with their products and the organisations. As seen in the Google example above, the way employees felt about their work impacted on the type of highly skilled work they do and shaped their sense of self as creative workers. It is perhaps not surprising then that many of the companies who claim to have fun are based in the creative industries (Mainemelis and Ronson, 2006). The next section discusses the nature of employment within the creative industries, considering how play might be a response to the perceived need to control a fairly autonomous and skilled workforce.

Creative industries

In 2007, the creative industries accounted for an estimated 6.2% of the UK's gross value added, and 4.5% of the UK's exports of goods and services. As such, they represent a growing market within the UK, with a 5% growth from 1997 to 2007, compared to the average growth

of 3% (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010). Drawing on Hardt and Negri (2000) this can be seen as part of accomplishment of an informational economy (based on knowledge, information, affect and communication). For Hardt and Negri this represented a tertiary phase in the industrial process, where all forms of work become focused on the production of service and network structures. The definition of the creative industries is contested, but according to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport includes the following sectors: advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and television and radio in close inter-relationship with tourism, hospitality, museums and galleries and the heritage sector (Jeffcutt, 2000). This categorisation does have some shared characteristics, in that these industries have a shared focus as being sites designed for the explicit production and consumption of aesthetic goods:

> Distinguished by their contemporary influence, value and hybrid organisational forms, such sites are explicitly engaged with matters of intellectual property, aesthetics, improvisation, creativity and commodification in a developing economy of "signs and space" (Jeffcut, 2000: 124).

The creative industries are sites that are therefore concerned with the production and materialisation of ‘signs’ into products and sites where management need to control this creativity towards organisational goals (Jeffcut, 2000). They are also characterised, as part of the move to an informationalized society, as striving towards a continuous flow of information from the consumer to the producer, ensuring market responsiveness. It is immaterial labour: “a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication” as symbolic-analytical services which focus on creative symbolic manipulation (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 290). The creative industries refers to those industries involved in producing products which combine the individual talent of the creative arts with the mass scale of the culture industries, and incorporate new media technology to produce a knowledge economy (Hartley, 2005).

Hardt and Negri (2000) distinguish between those working at a high level creative level and those in routine symbolic manipulation. They also note that it requires affective labour where

the feelings of the customer are worked upon. In both cases, the labour pulls together an instrumental action with a communicative action which builds networks around productive ends. It is worth noting that authors such as Thompson (2005) remain highly critical of the novelty of Hardt and Negri's argument, especially for being reliant on relatively conventional Marxism despite also drawing on Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. As a result Thompson remains critical of the use of the term *biopower*, used to refer to the increased domination of the production of life, without a real consideration of the corporeal features of the subjectivity. He is also critical of the concept of immaterial labour, suggesting it is actually reproducing the argument for knowledge work. Instead he acknowledges that it is the way in which the concept of immaterial labour is located within the context of the wider economy as a potentially novel idea. However, the concept of labour being *immaterial*, as argued by Thompson and supported by this thesis, is absurd as all products, even a service, retain some materiality and are increasingly rationalised. In addition he critiques immaterial labour for failing to recognise the commodification of knowledge, which requires the knowledge to be separated from the employee. Finally Thompson discusses how Hardt and Negri's view of affective labour fails to note the intensification of labour as discussed by the emotional labour literature. Hardt and Negri's argument draws on Marxism yet seems to ignore the power differences which underpin much of the later debates on subjectivity. In order to link creative work to subjectivity, this section discusses the link between the creative industries and the culture industries (as discussed by authors such as Adorno and Horkheimer) to explore knowledge, creativity and labour.

The original term of culture industries which was derived from Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) who stated that culture, in the broader sense of the expression of the shared values of a group, were becoming increasingly commodified in an intensified alienation for the cultural worker. This leads them to state: "in the culture industry the notion of genuine style is seen to be the aesthetic equivalent of domination" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997:130). For these Marxist theorists, the culture industry was dominated by the consumerism and standardisation for the masses. Adorno (1991) then continued this critique within his study 'The Culture Industries' by discussing the false separation of high arts and low mass culture, to argue that all culture is formed through capitalism. This commodity fetish which occurs obscures production by focusing on consumption (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), and as a result, the production of the goods in obscured from society.

The Marxist view of culture contrasts sharply with market oriented views of culture: for example the economic perspective focuses on the financial value of the goods as if the industry were the same as any other industry (Hendon et al, 1984) This view, as supported by the UK Arts Council, sees the creative outputs as 'products' defined largely by their material value to the economy (Jeffcut et al, 2000). In a similar vein, the socio-political economy school rejects the "elitist, cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School" and instead focused on "the special features of the economic structure and dynamics of symbolic production, distribution and consumption" within the information economies (Garnham, 2005: 18). In other words, this view sees the culture industries as a means of returning social value, which is argued to promote particular political objectives (Pratt, 2005). Therefore these two perspectives differ in that one examines the universal characteristics of production while the other explores industry specific conditions of the creative industries, but both focus on the commercial value of the product. The socio-political perspective also proposes that conglomerate structures are increasingly being used by creative companies rather than separate publishing, film and broadcasting companies. This concentration of workers into large corporations enables economies of scale for those working in the industry. However one problem with these theories is that they see the work process itself as neutral, ignoring the precarious and fragmented nature of employment. Finally the romantic perspective views the integration of arts into mass industry as a simplification of the intellectual contribution of the arts. In many ways this final perspective reinforces a split between the elitist 'high' arts and the 'low' standardised mass consumer product (Jeffcut et al, 2000). However these viewpoints have limited potential for looking at corporate culture, as they give little consideration to the workforce and the nature of work itself (Garnham, 2005). The majority of the work within these perspectives focus on the nature of the product, centring the debate on the high/low culture split and ignoring the process of production in itself.

Garnham (2005) has argued that the change in name from the culture industries to the creative industries can be linked to the Labour party's initiatives in 1998. Instead of just a title change, instead it represented a shift in boundaries of policy, attempting to define creativity in terms of economic value (Garnham, 2005). The term creative industries on the other hand still draws on the wealth creation of culture, but celebrates this as stimulating art and education. "A feature of the creative industries is that they try to create wealth on the site of a universal human attribute" (Hartley, 2005: 12). One significant difference is that while all industry uses

some aspects of creativity, the product within the creative industries is almost exclusively reliant on the creative, intellectual abilities of the worker. However, the experience of workers in the creative industries is a relatively underexplored area, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 2) have noted in their recent contribution:

> Conversely, with some exceptions, these academic research fields [sociology of work, political theory, and organisation, business and management studies] have not examined the culture industries much. Given the special desirability of work in the culture industries, these fields of research, and policy-makers and activists, might benefit from analysis of this specific area of employment.

While culture studies have had a long concern with the production of the cultural product or the conditions under which it is accomplished, there is a strange silence about the nature of employment in itself. This gap in knowledge is particularly important to address due to what Hesmondhalgh and Baker term the 'special desirability' of work in these areas. Work in the creative industries is often romanticised, and perceived as 'good' work due to the degree of independence perceived with employment. They further argue that the labour process itself may be forgotten for two reasons. Firstly, much of the work conducted in these industries takes place internationally and therefore is hidden and spread out. Secondly the 'enchantment' with the end product, results in a focus on the individual producer rather than the process of production, and additionally a traditional focus on consumption rather than production.

Despite the increased focus on the creative industries and to a certain extent on the labour and production, insight into the experience of work in the creative industries remains limited. Much of the information which exists also sits in the romantic perspective, assuming that the work, through its creativity, is empowering, interesting and exciting for those working in the creative industries. For example, Hartley (2009: 29) states "creative workers include a vast multi-national workforce of talented people applying their individual creativity in design, production, performance, and writing." He goes on to note that while some creative workers are becoming unified into creative professionals gaining employment more easily, in general

creative workers have very weak bargaining power resulting from a "workforce [that] is increasingly casual, part-time, freelance, and relying on a 'portfolio' career with many jobs and employers" (Hartley, 2009: 29). As such he suggests that employees in the creative industries, working within the 'portfolio' career, are less likely to be attached to an organisation for a significant period and expect long term rewards for loyalty, such as promotion. Fun culture management programmes are aimed at specifically increasing production and willingness from a highly knowledgeable and skilled workforce (Kane, 2005). It may be that play has an appeal in a workforce which does not expect long term employment, forming a different type of engagement. The topic of control has been almost explicitly ignored within the work on the creative industries, partially as a result of the assumption that the work is naturally appealing. However authors such as Bilton (2007) have discussed the management of creative workers through a 'release and control', or allowing independence of the creative independence but controlling the process, for example 'setting boundaries' such as time around which they need to work. In particular it is likely that softer forms of organisational control, such as neo-normative control, might be appealing to these organisations as they encourage employees to be self-disciplinary while appearing to make the corporate culture diverse and authentic.

Conclusions

Corporate cultures remain a prevalent strategy in shaping employees' experiences of work. Long documented as a mechanism of control, this review has noted that 'fun' corporate cultures are becoming increasingly widespread, with several ethnographies and critical studies into their practices and policies. The critical perspectives in particular debate the nature of control which these strategies are enacting, critiquing their language of empowerment, diversity and authenticity to explore the pressures these cultures appear to place on employees to conform. There is a genuine concern that these cultures may be infantilising their employees, encouraging employees to take a simplistic, sweeping view of organisational life. In addition to theoretical material on this, a discussion from a blog on Google has been considered to investigate a variety of perspectives on their possibly infantilising culture. The data suggests that some view Google's culture in a romanticised manner, and supports Hesmondhalgh and Baker's statement that many view work in the creative industries as 'good' work, providing empowerment and independence in rewarding employment. However what

has emerged is a lack of studies researching into the experience of working in these industries, in particular studies which question the supposedly empowering and self-managing working conditions.

In order to understand why the creative industries may be an ideal site for the implementation of fun corporate cultures, Chapter Three will explore the specific strategies of controlling fun corporate cultures. As already stated, these relate to areas of organisation studies which have seen a move of non-work identities, emotions and spaces being increasing managed or manipulated to express organisational goals. The chapter will start with the more explicit strategies of corporate cultures: focusing on the management of humour, space and identity in organisations. Moving from the more explicit strategies to the increasingly implicit and subtle aspects, the chapter will then consider the management of emotion, sexuality and embodiment within these organisations. In doing so, the aim is to demonstrate the pervasiveness of fun corporate cultures, as they increasingly colonise the whole employee. This leaves the conclusion to consider the extent to which resistance is possible within these organisations, why it might occur and what effect the infantilisation of employees might be having on how humour is used.

Chapter Three: Dynamic sites of control and resistance in 'fun' corporate cultures

> It might be said that the discipline creates of the bodies it controls four types of individuality, or rather an individuality that is endowed with four characteristics: it is cellular (by the play of spatial distribution), it is organic (by the coding of activities), it is genetic (by the accumulation of time), it is combinatory (by the composition of forces). And in doing so it operates in four great techniques: it draws up tables; it prescribes movements; it imposes exercises; lastly, in order to obtain the combination of forces, it arranges 'tactics' (Foucault, 1977: 167).

Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish* opened up a discussion of the discipline of the body through the concept of individuality, the separation of one body from the others. 'Tactics' here are played out within the strategies of discipline and emerge from the concept of 'individuality' which orders and arranges movements and activities in space. In order to do so, it narrows possible discourses outside of the grid of discipline. Foucault uses the term tactics to describe how bodies are disciplined into docile, functioning entities. De Certeau (1984: xiv) draws upon Foucault's concept of tactics, however he moves beyond Foucault's focus on the disciplinary technology to "bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'". It is a move from the panoptic discipline of institutions to the movements of actors within space. This focus, De Certeau argues, is all the more important due to Foucault's claim of the increased disciplining through space where movements are increasingly regulated. In particular drawing on the discussion of control from Chapter Two, this chapter elaborates how the everyday activities in organisations offer an opportunity to see how space, embodiment, emotions and identity are constructed in relation to the disciplining effects of corporate culture. These normalising features of the corporate culture ask employees to work on their identity, body and emotions to align them with organisational interests.

As Chapter Two established, the 'fun' corporate cultures have been explored as a mechanism for control. The review so far has drawn out the concepts of corporate culture as a particular force of discipline over employees, acting to engage employees' 'hearts and minds' as well as their embodied productivity. In particular, Fleming and Sturdy's (2009) concept of neo-normative control sets out how the disciplining of employees has shifted from a normative control, expecting all employees to form workplace identities in line with corporate values, to values focusing on diversity, individuality and 'just be yourself'. However in practice employers expected employees to display a self that is 'fun' and 'unique'. Relating this to Costas and Fleming's (2009) concept of the alien corporate self, the employee discovers that there is no 'authentic' self under the constructed identity. Finally, when investigating the characteristics of the 'fun' cultures, many academics have noted the infantile feel which shapes these cultures. If control encourages infantile behaviours and identities, this has a profound impact on how critical employees may be of the disciplining strategies of corporate culture.

Chapter Two set up corporate culture as a strategy forming employees' identities around corporate expectations of how employees ought to behave. In particular it explored the nature of play in organisations, which has been suggested in management theory as being the solution to many organisational problems. In contrast to these positions, the concept of play from an ontological perspective has been established, recognising the role play has in constituting a temporary, spatial 'reality' with social rules. This concept can therefore be compared to De Certeau's concept of tactics, the temporary use of a space to express alternative meanings other than those designated by the institutional authority. The first section of this chapter will develop this ontology of play into an analysis of the tactical use of humour. In particular it will elaborate on how humour is conceptualised in the current literature and used by employees.

However, as this review will note, 'fun' cultures are more than discourses: they are enacted within the space and materiality of the organisation, drawing upon emotions and emotional labour and employees' sense of self. Additionally contributions from academics have indicated that identity work includes an embodiment of the fun self, and in particular, employees' expressions of sexuality in their identity work may be managed towards the goals of the organisation. This chapter will explore each of these themes within the current literature, first

by arguing that humour can be conceptualised as a tactic (De Certeau, 1984), before reviewing the literature on identity, emotions, sexuality and embodiment and space and materiality in organisations. These themes represent the ‘space’ where the meaning of being fun moves from being an abstract discourse to being enacted in everyday practices. The literature suggests that employees establish what it means ‘to be fun’ within their identity construction as they negotiate their workplace identity in relation to the corporate culture. This is developed with a discussion of performativity: the formation of subjectivity through multiple reiterations of acts which form a false sense of a solid self (Butler, 1990). In addition, humour involves an emotional response, both as an emotional reaction to particular contexts and as a mechanism to create emotional reactions in others. Thirdly, some studies have suggested that sexuality is an important part of fun corporate cultures (Fleming, 2006). This chapter develops this work to discuss how sexuality is a mechanism by which employees can embody the play discourses. Finally in a discussion of how humour as tactics are used to materialise the corporate play discourses into everyday practices, the space of the organisation is discussed. This explores not only how organisations design space but also how employees interact and shape the space in their everyday interactions. As such, the literature has noted a materialisation of the playful discourses, as Dale (2005) has suggested a social materiality in the mutually reinforcing relationship between social and material processes.

As this discussion will establish, humour is ambiguous in its intent. In order to conceptualise how humour is important to ‘fun’ organisations, this chapter will start by exploring humour as a process which is symbolic, emotional and embodied. In particular it argues humour can be conceptualised as a tactic from De Certeau’s (1984) theory through its ambiguous nature, forming meanings which are unclear and simultaneously questioning the status quo. Humour is often conceptualised as relatively straightforward by ‘humour consultants’, for example John Cremer from the Happiness Project claims “when you use humour at work, people's confidence grows, their appreciation of other people grows, and their team-building skills improve - it's simple, but very effective” (quoted in Personnel Today, 2007). This provides a functionalist view of humour, as a mechanism which is neutral and used solely for the benefit of the organisation. This review brings in a more critical view of humour that moves beyond a functionalist view of humour. In particular it examines the socially constructed nature of humour, the emotional and embodied dimensions of humour and finally the ambiguous characteristic of humour.

Bringing humour to work

Humour is central to 'fun' corporate cultures, as a purposeful, explicit inversion of expectations of seriousness and play. The use of humour at work is of course not restricted to those corporate cultures defining themselves as fun, for example classic studies of humour include shop floor and factory work (Roy, 1959; Linstead, 1985; Collinson, 1988; Pollert, 1981; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) and managers (Collinson, 2002). However, humour in classic case studies has an uneasy relationship with management. It has been viewed as at best complementary to work, and at worst resistant to management. Traditionally it has been seen as independent from designed corporate cultures. Alternatively in the case of 'fun' organisations, humour becomes an integral part of the strategy used in corporate culture. The case study conducted by Redman and Mathews (2002) on a DIY company develops this link between 'fun' cultures, humour and management, and in particular the stress put on employees by supervisors to be humorous and to 'take' a joke. This included encouraging teams, managers and customers to 'have a laugh', using jokes within the newsletters and management's use of humorous slogans such as 'KISS' the customer or 'Keep it Simple, Stupid'. However the pressure to be funny was not always welcomed by employees and managers, as the authors note:

> Employee resistance to having fun, especially when it was seen as being 'forced' on them ('somedays you just don't feel like having fun', 'it's not really right that you should be told by management to have fun', 'there is a limit to how much fun you can stomach sometimes') was building up amongst some employees (Redman and Mathews, 2002: 58).

Interestingly, Redman and Mathews (2002) found that the more pressure put on employees to use humour, the less employees found the company 'fun'. This would support the unmanageable aspects of organisational life (Gabriel and Lang, 1995), where, like play, once humour becomes managed it ceases to be appealing to employees. In other words it is no longer humorous (Collinson, 2002). While employees were encouraged to be themselves as 'fun-loving people' in Redman and Mathews' study, the employees who do not enjoy the

culture were left in a difficult position. Employees who were not perceived as appropriately participating were put up in a 'hall of shame' in the company newsletter, reinforcing the consequences of being named and shamed as *not fun enough*. Likewise managers did not always want to encourage their team to have fun, and resented fun programmes for masking wider problems with the staff recruitment. Redman and Mathews' study notes some of the problems with trying to 'manage' humour. What may be seen as a straightforward process often faces problems in practice. Humour within management literature is often assumed to be simple, mechanistic and universally applicable to all organisations. These works ignore the complex social factors behind humour, as they take the definition of humour to be straightforward, positioning humour as a tool rather than a social phenomenon.

Defining humour

Despite humour being widely discussed in sociology and organisation studies for the last fifty years, there remains little consensus about what actually constitutes humour. Does it come from the speaker, the recipient or is there an objective independent 'humour' that exists? Is humour located within the individual who 'has a sense of humour' or in the exchange between individuals, in the language or the context it functions within? Does humour have to produce laughter? What is the relation between jokes and humour? Many authors simply assume humour's definition and do not necessarily question what exactly forms humour. However, as Holmes (2000) points out, the analysts' identification of humour plays a significant role in its analysis. What constitutes humour is thus an important start in the study of humorous interactions.

Therefore, a definition of humour should not be taken for granted. A starting definition needs to capture the socially constructed nature of humour to recognise the interactional nature of joking. It needs to demonstrate how important group dynamics and social perspectives are to what is considered funny. Humour within work can be seen as a socially constructed 'symbolic resource' expressing the paradoxes and contradictions of organisational life (Sanders, 2004). Organisational symbolism is "a continuous process of social construction through symbols, values, beliefs and patterns of interaction which people in organisations learn, produce and recreate" (Strati, 1998: 1381). For Strati, this involves both immaterial and material objects,

which can be considered an 'open text', formed through the interaction of different forms of culture. For instance Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) define three instances of humour utilised by employees as a symbolic resource: *clowning*, where individuals position themselves as an object of humour; *teasing*, where a system of asymmetrical or symmetrical relationship(s) allowing one individual to make fun of another; and *satire*, which is aimed towards management and acts as a form of resistance. Humour within each plays a different social role, bonding certain individuals and outlying others. *Humour is formed through its own rules* which constitute who do the clowning; who can be the butt of the joke in teasing and satire, and to what degree the butt of the joke is included in the joke itself. As humour becomes part of a 'fun' corporate culture, it requires participants to take certain roles, with employees expected to be able to be the centre of the fun. As seen in the 'hall of shame' in Redman and Mathews' (2002) study, employees who do not participate in the fun may be singled out by management as a way of poking fun at them and also of controlling their behaviour towards the organisational prescribed norms.

Humour can be thought of as a process. This process has several factors, which can be distinguished as humour as a resource, the emotional reaction of amusement and the act of being humorous. Humour as a social construction is formed through the interaction between the actors, based on their shared understanding and the context in which they operate (i.e. their everyday experiences of work). Derived from a social constructivist perspective, humour is a phenomenon where the meaning of humour needs to be negotiated by the joke teller and the audience. It acts as a social mechanism expressed both linguistically or through embodiment, and located within a particular social and historical field. As such it derives its relevance from the particular context which it operates in; without this social and historical background humour becomes meaningless. As a symbolic resource, it plays on the common assumptions and understandings of the group.

This can be contrasted to the concept of 'being funny', where there is an emotional response of amusement (Francis, 1994). The purpose of humour is to invoke particular emotions within the audience and within oneself: both of amusement but also inclusiveness, of being 'in' on the joke. Alternatively, negative emotions and those of exclusion are also prevalent within humour, for example Collinson and Collinson's (1996) study describes the use of humour to

shame and exclude new female salespersons in order to re-establish the dominance of men within the organisations. As will be explored later in this chapter, the expression of humour is tied up with emotional rules, emotionologies, which guide the behaviour (Fineman, 2008). Thinking back to play as a temporary spatial and temporal reality with its own set of rules, it may be that play has a different emotionology to that of ‘normal’ emotional rules. Emotional displays during humour need to play along with the clowning, teasing and satire expressed. The teasing for example may require the person not to take offense if they are to be ‘in’ on the joke.

Finally these can operate within the act of being humorous. This uses humour to elicit a funny response, which can be successful or not by causing amusement. The act is the utterance or the embodied action which is used to convey the message intended. In this sense the process comes from a social constructivist perspective, establishing humorous interactions as part of the participants’ and respondents’ creation and recreation of a social world through the mechanisms of humour. While the act itself may not be purposeful, for example a Freudian slip of the tongue or a person falling over on a banana peel, it is the act of forming it into humour through laughing, smiling, speaking in a particular tone or other embodied actions, such as gesturing, to produce the humour. The production of the actual act of ‘being funny’ can be examined through the linguistic construction (Hatch, 1997). For example, Hatch (1997: 227) analyses the use of discourse to understand contradiction in management’s speech, looking at the “interpretive (textual) readings of both the cognitive and emotional aspects of managerial humor grounded in the sociology of humor and theories of irony.” By drawing on the discursive context of a situation, the teller and receiver draw upon their shared understanding of the reality in which they operate. This thesis recognises the importance of the ‘act’ of humour, while focusing on how the discourses are important in communicating the humour intended.

In regard to the ‘act’ of humour, a distinction can be made between two types which have different social interactions. As Crawford (1995) proposes, humour is experienced through exchanges between individuals, requiring a partaker to provide the joke and a respondent who is willing to hear and appreciate it through laughter, body language and/or verbal language.

Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997: 277) make an important distinction between conversational joking and 'joke telling':

> Joke telling is a highly conventionalized and socially bound speech behaviour; CJ [conversational joking] or situational humor is a play frame created by the participants, with a backdrop of in-group knowledge, encompassing not only verbal features but also suprasegmentals (such as stress, tone and intonation) and non-verbal communications (such as body language).

It is likely both are important in the organisational context and are translated through different media such as in conversation, body language and in textual forms such as emails. For example in Collinson's (1988) classic study of shop floor interactions, he noted that humour was ritualised into joke telling, for example practical jokes which were repeatedly used on new recruits as a form of initiation or the 'Porn Kings' use of sexist canned humour. Other jokes that emerged from the context played on group knowledge, in 'taking the piss' out of each other, or in the nicknames which emerged. In addition, joke telling and situational humour both rely on power dynamics established within groups. In Collinson's study, new apprentices had little control over the pranks played on them, feeling the pressure to conform and needing to 'laff back" rather than show embarrassment. Other conflicts were played out from humour, and also forming different sub groups based on allegiances and different forms of masculinity they ascribed to.

This section will examine the symbolic value of humour from a social constructionist perspective, where humour can be seen as a strategy, a mechanism to accomplish action (Crawford, 1995). Because this allows for meaning to be fluid, it rejects the idea that language simply reflects 'reality' and instead views language as fluctuating and dynamically responding to the speaker's goals and intentions. Spoken humour remains a "mode of speech that is indirect, ambiguous, fraught with multiple interpretations, and potentially subversive of the social order" (Crawford, 1995: 129). In this sense the meaning of spoken humour, the intention of the speaker and the effect of humour is often hard to pin down, and can vary drastically from person to person. As such it represents a complicated mode of communication with

others, in particular as it is often used to communicate complex and ambiguous concepts. Seen in this way, ambiguity is at the centre of the nature of humour and is integral to its character.

Understanding humour through ambiguity

Humour so far has been discussed as a social process which draws on emotional understanding and symbolic meaning. However Holmes (2000: 166) notes that within humour “all utterances are multifunctional” due to the different layers of meaning, in other words humour can have multiple functions at the same time. In particular “while humor amuses and entertains, and constructs good relations between co-workers, it may also be used to enact other aspects of worker’s identities” (Holmes, 2006: 27). Instead of focusing on humour as a ‘function’ in the traditional sense, humour can be examined instead as a form of social interaction which draws on the ambiguity to highlight contradictions. This ambiguity is essential to understanding humour as a tactic (De Certeau, 1984), a tactic which questions dominant meanings and can at least temporarily challenge the status quo.

Humour is reliant on its ambiguity, its multiple meanings and intentions in order to be effective (Gherardi, 1995). In the case of ‘fun’ corporate cultures there is ambiguity between management’s attempts to encourage fun and the discretion of employees in how to use humour. As such it is important to relocate humour within the context in which it operates. Through various methods, humour provides a discursive space to discuss the ambiguities and contradictions present within that particular context (Hatch, 1997). Höpfl (2007) describes this as establishing a ‘community of meaning’, or the shared understanding of the context of humour. She notes that humour is (an) “attempt to understand the rule that has been violated” (Höpfl, 2007: 35). In other words, humour engages with what we expect to occur within a social group, often calling this into question through overturning those expectations. The meaning is derived from:

> the way that humour functions to perform a phenomenological act, to challenge taken-for-granted meanings and understandings and to introduce disjuncture into the expectation of continuity (Höpfl, 2007: 33).

For Höpfl, the basic nature of humour then is to produce alternative meanings to what we take for granted. As such it works within our shared understanding to overturn the continuity of meaning. The purpose of humour is thus to be ambiguous and unclear, and through doing so, to challenge the status quo.

Humour provides a symbolic presentation of those ambiguities within organisations. Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997: 278) discuss the play frame within conversational joking which refers to the humorous context, but note how hard it is even for participants to identify, as the "intentional or unintentional ambiguity due to a lack of highly conversationalized means for signalling the 'play' frame can be problematic." Otherwise put, in 'spontaneous' humour, as compared to generic joking, the frame of reference for participants is more ambiguous, leaving room for different interpretations by different participants on the meaning of the joke (Boxer and Cortes-Conde, 1997). If the humour is unsuccessful the intention can be missed completely if the frame of reference is not understood, creating a 'discontinuity of meaning' (Höpfl, 2007). This results when the reading of the humour varies so considerably that the intention is lost altogether. As such the meaning is established through the collective efforts of the group, and may vary considerably from the intention of the speaker. An overlapping area to humour is sexuality. Sexual humour is claimed by some academics to be the most popular topic of humour (Leap and Smetlzer, 1984; Legman, 2006). In addition within these topics power relations and control become more evident and visible, as humour mirrors the inequalities found in organisations (Collinson, 2002). The use of humour to express sexuality draws on the ambiguous nature of humour, because the intention of the speaker is not always clear. As such there has been a long history of studies of humour being used in the case of sexual harassment, for example in Collinson and Collinson's (1996) study.

In contrast to how 'fun' organisations are envisioned, many ethnographic studies have studied humour as a form of misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Indeed they note that the "increased saliency of joking behaviour, and the innovations of new forms of such behaviour, are evidence of a shift in emphasis away from traditional sites of contestation between employees and their managers" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999: 100). For Ackroyd and Thompson humour is a site to contest management's control over employees, allowing the employees a freedom to express frustration and anger towards management. It marks a shift

from formal, organised resistance to a resistance which is played out at the local level of the everyday. Two examples of workplace humour as resistance are Rodriguez and Collinson's (1995) study of humour providing workplace unionised resistance and Taylor and Bain's (2003) study of workplace resistance in call centres (see also Bain and Taylor, 2000). Both view humorous exchanges as a resistance process against management initiatives. In both studies, humour was directed primarily by employees towards managers in order to expose the contradictions between management rhetoric and the realities of work. Humour was used to undermine management's authority and to resist the corporate culture designed to engender cohesiveness between employees and management's objectives. The subversive character of humorous exchanges, in these case studies in the form of spoken jokes, pranks, written correspondences and emails, allowed workers to challenge the conception of workers being controlled. While traditional studies such as Roy's (1959) banana time suggested that humour was a mechanism used to cope with the mundane daily working life, in Rodriguez and Collinson (1995) and Taylor and Bain (2003), humour is understood as an active, purposeful and political part of workers' struggle. This resistance applies to the opposition to the manner in which corporate culture works on employees' identities. The next section discusses how organisations ask employees to identify with their fun values and beliefs in corporate culture through the process of identity work.

Fun identities

The study of identity has taken a prominent role in the analysis of corporate culture, especially with authors such as Casey (1996) arguing that organisations work on and design employees' identities through culture management programs. For example in her study of Hephaestus, the intention of the culture program was to "design a 'new Hephaestus employee' who would believe that their self development, their source of self-fulfilment and identity are to be found in working for Hephaestus" through the promotion of particular beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Also work by Sennett (1998) has argued that the increased insecurity experienced within work has had a profound fragmentation of identity both inside and outside of work. A key component of fun-at-work is the manner in which it requires employees to work on their own identity in order to demonstrate a desired identity for the company. As Pullen et al.

(2007: 1, emphasis added) explain in their introduction to identity in contemporary organisations, there is an inherent tension in the messages organisations provide on identity:

> We have been told to *self-actualize* and to realize our *own unique potential* in the pursuit of our professional and work ambitions. We are also told that *our identities rely on identification with the culture* of the organizations where we work, and that organization identity is a key part of this culture management.

Identity is advocated as *both* a unique trait of the individual which should be nurtured and also simultaneously ought to fit with the desired goals of the organisation. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) understand this process of identifying with the organisational discursive practices as *identity regulation*, as contrasted to *identity work*, as the activity taken to (re)produce a '*self-identity*'. Self-identities are formed through their interactions with others and society. As such, identity operates on multiple levels, through different influences and in a variety of contexts, rather than being a permanent, static expression of the 'true' self. Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 625) describe identity regulation as the "more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction". For Alvesson and Willmott then, identity regulation shapes identity through the pressure to comply with institutional expectations. This process functions in relation to the self-identity work undertaken by individuals to be constantly "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 625). Identity is not predetermined but worked on and developed by the employee in relation to social practices, in their interactions with others both at work and in society at large. It is socially constructed and needs to be maintained and developed over time.

Organisational discourses influence our narratives of self, or how we talk about who we are (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Pullen, Beech and Sims, 2007); however they also hide the power relations which are inherent within these discourses (Willmott, 1993). As a result, we invest our self-identity within discourses aimed at being productive, content and passionate about our work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). However Collinson (2003) has also argued that

insecurity frames subjectivity through the normalising influence of organisations who 'correct' subjectivity. However Collinson and authors such as Kondo (1990) argue that we do not hold a singular subjectivity and many identities may be held in tension forming insecurity and ambiguity. As a result power relations discipline different forms of subjectivity: conformist, dramaturgical and resistant (Collinson, 2003). These are particularly important in this study as they recognise the way in which power relations are reproduced, rationalised, resisted and transformed through developing our subjectivity. For Collinson, these selves can be viewed as a 'survival practice': a manner of coping with the Foucauldian surveillance in organisations. In conformist subjectivity, the employees focus on how they are valued within the identity regulation of the organisation. In order to do so, they increasingly split their identity between the instrumental workplace self and the 'real me' outside of work. The second form, dramaturgical, draws on Goffman to describe employees who work on their sense of self as a performance to protect against intensive surveillance environments. Finally resistant identities form a self against the prescribed organisation practices. However this 'resistance' can also marginalise employees, reinforcing insecurity. These three positions note the link between the increasing insecure self in society and practices of surveillance and control in organisations. It also introduces complexity by holding multiple selves and the overlapping control and resistance when dealing with 'the gaze' of organisational surveillance.

As such, the development of fun organisational cultures has raised a different dimension in considering identity work, in that the discourses tend to argue that employees *should enjoy being fun*. It suggests that employees ought to take on behaviours desired by the organisation to be fun in order to be productive, and that this is also essential to who they are as individuals. However to what degree do employees identify with the fun corporate cultures? The work discussed so far has already hinted that a layer of scepticism exists and that employees may resist even 'being themselves' through cynicism and emphasising solidarity over diversity (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). The link between play and control appears to be a popular motif, despite the appearance that fun-at-work cultures give about encouraging 'open' and 'diverse' identities at work. Is fun and play a more subtle form of organisational control, and if so why? The relationship between play and identity itself needs to be further explored to look at this question, analysing what role play has in identity regulation in these organisations. In order to do so, the relationship between identity and fun organisations will be reviewed in the next section to explore these themes.

'Fun' identity regulation and narratives of the self

What has been present, but little discussed, in the studies mentioned so far is the role of others in establishing a sense of self. In other words, the importance of inter-subjectivity to identity formation seems to get somewhat lost. Others form an important aspect through comparison and similarity, distinguishing who they are similar to and who they are different from. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 625, e.g. in original) have noted, distinctiveness is an essential part of identity:

> 'Distinctiveness' means that somebody is definable, by herself and others, as different to someone else. Such a characteristic, sometimes deemed to be unique (e.g. a genius), is shared with others (e.g. men, employed), but still different from others (women, unemployed, retired).

Viewing identity as inter-subjective, a sense of self needs to be constructed around the sense of what the self *is not,* what is excluded and marginalised from a view of authentic subjectivity (Hall, 2000). Essentially all concepts within language have an 'other', to which they provide the boundaries of what they are. Employees form a sense of work self around organisational-specific and wider societal norms. Indeed 'others' also play a significant role in identity regulation undertaken, as for instance in comparison of the organisational self to perceived undesirable traits or categories (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The very concept of 'fun' corporate cultures is reliant on positioning itself against its 'other', of traditional, inefficient, uncreative, *un-meaningful* bureaucratic organisations. Part of establishing a concept of self and meaning for the employees within these organisations is to establish what they are not: boring, conventional, unsociable, unhappy and unauthentic (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). If the organisations are encouraging the employees to 'be themselves' this should suggest an authenticity compared to typical workplaces, although the point should be made that the acceptable authentic sense of self is fun, creative and willing. They encourage employees to form their identity in opposition to those employees (whether in their firm or other firms) who are seen as boring, miserable and un-humorous. Returning to Redman and Mathews (2002),

these employees who do display the correct identity are shamed, such as in their company newsletter's 'Hall of Shame'.

Employees are encouraged to express 'themselves' through the decoration of their workspace with fun objects as in opposition to the cold, un-personable bureaucratic organisation. An account of the Google workspace observed: "as soon as you walked in, you were hit with this onslaught of colors, lava lamps, people riding around on scooters in the hallway, things you didn't see anywhere else" (Vise and Malseed, 2005: 197). Being different from 'anywhere else' is key to the Google identity. Identities in these fun organisations are formed through the narratives of self as being fun while performing an identity (Goffman, 1959). Therefore the display of self as fun in employees' behaviour becomes an integral part to their workplace identity. This includes the correct emotional display by the employee, the embodiment of fun and behaving in a fun way. The theme of materiality will be returned to in later sections, exploring how space and materiality are important in these workplaces. Now we will consider these three aspects of 'fun' corporate cultures: emotions, the body and sexuality in organisations. The study of humour has already noted an emotional, embodied characteristic which is important to its functionality. These facets are drawn on in the fun-at-work culture, in both how the organisations design the culture and in how the employees experience them. Emotions, embodiment and space therefore become the sites in which strategies and tactics are played out.

Managing emotions

One well developed trend in organisation theory is the study of emotions embedded within a social context (e.g. Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Fineman, 2008). The study of emotions has a long history and is widespread throughout multiple disciplines, from ancient and enlightenment philosophy (including Aristotle and Plato, Descartes, Spinoza and Hume); psychology, particularly cognitive theories; neurobiology; sociology; linguistics and anthropology. The breadth and depth of all the studies into emotions would be too extensive to develop within this space, however of particular importance is the recent work within organisation studies to discuss emotions in regard to their social role within institutional and

discursive practices. Fineman (1999) distinguishes feelings, or the subjective experience, from emotions, or the social display of feelings. As such Fineman's work recognises the combination of subjective experience and social display of emotions. Emotions are more than just an 'inner' feeling, they are social and displayed through speech or embodied actions. Emotions are therefore communication about the subjective experience. Echoing Marx, Hochschild (1983) developed the distinction between *emotional labour*, or the way feelings are internally managed to create a public facial and bodily display and *emotion work*, or the emotional management we conduct within inter-personal relationships. Emotional labour refers to the extent to which we internally manage our emotions as part of the employment relationship, and in particular differentiates between surface acting, the appearance of emotions without the necessary inner feelings, and deep acting, the attempt to change feelings to coincide with organisational expectations.

Further research suggests that emotions and emotional labour can be part of the structures of control within organisations. Haman and Putnam (2008) suggest three forms of control are used within emotional labour: *managerial control*, enacted in the regulations and rules; *cultural control*, organisational norms of behaviour; and *peer based control*, other employees' role in monitoring and assessing behaviours. All three of these aspects can be seen in the concept of neo-normative control discussed by Fleming and Sturdy (2009) within fun organisations. Particular norms of authenticity are both managerially and culturally reinforced through fun practices, and monitored through peer recognition of their contribution. Employees appear passionate, fun, lighthearted, unique and zany through undertaking the correct emotional labour. This is accomplished through their inner state of emotions, but also by means of controlling and minimising 'negative' emotions such as cynicism or apathy.

Fineman (2008: 2) defines the social rules governing emotion and feeling as emotionologies, or "society's 'take' on the way certain emotions are to be directed and expressed", where emotions are "also a medium of valuation and power where objects of joy, celebration, revulsion, or distaste are socially prefigured." In this view, biological roots are overridden by the social rules of interaction which define our behaviour, within different social contexts: for instance different workplaces or professions. The power relations embedded within social structures direct the desired emotional state so that:

> emotionologies underpin – with varying degrees of consistency - what we 'do' with our frustration, boredom, anger, envy, sadness, embarrassment, lust, hope or happiness to make and sustain the routine and power balance (Fineman, 2008: 3).

To elaborate on Fineman's concept, emotions are what we 'do' with our feelings, guided by social rules on their display through our lived experience of the social world through an embodied display of emotions, or how we relate to the materiality of our bodies and the world. We not only feel emotions but express and understand them through smiles, laughter, frowns, tears and contact with the physical world. This entails a broadly phenomenological understanding of emotions and the body, of knowing and making sense of emotions through our interactions with the social world. Certainly, this pertains to not only supposedly 'positive' emotions, like those of love, pleasure and happiness, but also to those emotions which are experienced and socially perceived negatively, such as frustration, boredom, stress and anger. Fineman (2008) describes emotional arenas as particular contexts or audiences which call for tacit rules of emotional displays. Returning to the discussion of play in Chapter Two, play operates within its own temporary 'reality' guided by alternative social rules. During humour, the appropriate emotionology is likely to differ from those in a non-play environment.

Emotions, the subjective experiences of feeling, are necessary to the formation of subjectivity more generally. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 88-89) see emotional labour, the "act of suppressing socially desired emotions", in terms of behaviour compliance, as distinct from altering an employee's inner emotions. While employees may be able to 'perform' emotions, it may be that the inner emotional state alters as a result. Subjectivity can be viewed not as a 'true' fixed inner state but composed of multiple iterations over time (Butler, 1990). Displaying particular emotional states, we internalise our behaviours to form an identity, so that in Fineman's terms, identity work is "a process of holding and resolving different social-emotional narratives about who we are, who we were and who we wish to be" (2008: 5). Identity also needs to be accomplished through the actions taken within space, which express tacit emotional rules. This links Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) concept of identity regulation,

the processes of identity construction, to particular emotional rules: identities shape emotions, but the emotions also shape self-identity through the actions we take to present ourselves positively.

Organisations clearly play an active role in the management of employees' emotions. Traditionally emotions were perceived as being in opposition to rational elements in organisations, as Weber (cited in Watson, 2006: 215) discusses how bureaucracy should be 'pure', having no space for: "love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation". As Watson discusses, Weber thus viewed emotions as needing to be harnessed within organisations, and preferably towards organisational goals. Culture management aims to form employee identification with the company and the desired organisational goals; for example the employee should enjoy work, expressing a desire not only to come to work but to reach optimum performance. This identification is entangled with emotions such as pride, pleasure and enjoyment (Fineman, 2006). Emotions associated with positive thinking are pervasive in encouraging employees to think about themselves and their potential to produce in a manner which aligns the individual's goals with the organisations.

Appearing as the correct sort of employee within fun organisations also requires other behaviours which relate to specific emotional displays. In particular the 'partying' atmosphere described within Fleming and Sturdy (2009)'s study had a highly sexualised quality. Flirting and other sexual displays can be considered a form of play. Displaying the correct emotional display to this sexualised culture was deemed important, for example openly homophobic reactions would not have been accepted. With this in mind, the next section of this chapter analyses the use of embodiment and sexuality within fun corporate cultures, linking it to the identity and emotion work undertaken.

Sexuality and embodiment in corporate cultures

Exploring social constructions of sexuality

Gender studies have shifted from the structural explanations of workplaces towards understanding how gender and sexuality are organised through social interaction (Calás and Smircich, 1996). This shift is influenced by the impact of post-structuralism on feminism (although not without some conflicts between the two areas as noted by Bordo, 1993). One of the important contributions of post-structuralism lies in creating a more complex understanding of the relationship between gender, sex and the body, and questioning the normative assumptions of the fixed categorisation of men and women. Feminists have come to ask, if we are not 'born' with fixed masculine and feminine characteristics, how do we *become* men and women? West and Zimmerman's (1987) influential article proposed that gender should not be seen as something that is possessed by men and women, but rather something that they *do*, an approach which they term 'doing gender'. Doing gender draws on the social constructivist perspective of gender, which states that social reality is not real and out 'there', but rather something that humans must constantly produce and reproduce through interactions according to normalised discourses. Alvesson and Due Billing (1992: 76) have noted how traditional feminist theories have

> a tendency to reduce masculinity and femininity to a dualism and thereby to see them as rather uniform and clearcut categories… [which] tends to obscure the possibility of different forms of masculinity and femininity.

Gender discourses can be varied as they are produced as meaningful within certain contexts: for instance, what it means to be masculine and feminine may vary depending on class, race, ethnicity, institutions, and roles within the public and private spheres as well as many other contexts. Social constructivists often discuss multiple masculinities and femininities that are meaningful to both different contexts and within the same context.

Alternatively, the practising of gender can be either an unreflective or reflective *process*. Martin (2006) argues that an unintentional use of gender is more prevalent in organisations, where organisational employees inadvertently utilise gendered practices with harmful results for women. If men and women are unreflectively creating gendered processes, or making gender meaningful by acting as gendered persons, then practices which are aimed at reducing gender in the workplace could actually be counterintuitive. As demonstrated in the previous section, I view humour as a social mechanism, and being humorous as a process of using this mechanism to elicit an emotional reaction from participants. Humour is one of these repertoires, which is used to produce subjects as gendered. The literature has suggested being humorous is part of practising gender in this respect, for instance as can be seen in the expression of masculinity (Collinson, 1992; Collinson and Hearn, 1994; 1996; Linstead, 1985). When Collinson (1992) describes the humour undertaken within his research on shop floor masculinity, he notes that the joking he describes emphasises:

> The value of "production"; "independence"; "freedom"; "honesty"; "practical, common sense"; and "being a working man". Shaping each of these shared investments are deeply rooted values, discourses and identities of masculinity that are intended to elevate manual workers above women, white collar employees and managers (Collinson, 1992: 79).

Within their study, social values are part of the production of gender and class expectations by the participants. Humour was a vital part of communicating these characteristics, distinguishing those who did not match their expectations and in effect through humour controlling social displays of masculinity. While providing insights into masculinity, humour was often used to classify women as objects as well as the men using humour about outsiders to reinforce group norms. These studies also lack a voice for women by examining exclusively the construction of masculinity in all-male groups. Focusing on masculinity and humour exclusively could risk on falling back on Othering women, which Collinson goes to great length to point out within the discourses on masculinities.

Other authors have investigated humour from a perspective where the women have a voice to express their agency. For example Pollert (1981) discusses the humour used by the women in an ethnographic study within a cigarette rolling factory. In her chapter on culture in the organisation, she captures the way sexuality is negotiated through humour between the workers in different same-sex groups (joking about sexual antics) and between supervisors who are male and the female staff. Interestingly as well as discussing the supervisors' use of joking towards the staff, she also discusses the way that female workers used sexual joking towards their managers. The younger women of the group used coyness and sexual appeal, while some older women resisted the supervisor's control through ridiculing his power and sexuality. More recent studies such as Sanders (2004) also studies humour from women in a subordinate position to men as a coping mechanism in sex work, with humour being used to get one over on the client. In many ways the women used joking as a mechanism for ridiculing the punters and overturning the power they had over them. As Crawford (1995) notes, these sorts of actions are 'tiny acts of revenge' which may be dismissed as unimportant by some, but provided for the women a form of humour through which resistance can be exercised.

Mulkay (1988) explores the nature of humour through its ability to display serious messages in a non-serious format. As well as considering adolescent humour used for sexual development, he analyses adult humour, where there is less emphasis on the learning of sexual information and instead being able to express an "exploitative conception of the relationship between men and women which cannot normally be expressed so forcefully within serious discourse" (Mulkay, 1988: 142). His discussion focuses on men's use of the dirty joke, which is defined by its portrayal of women purely for sexual pleasure; the portrayal of women available for sex, by any man, even if they appear not to be; women as objects to be used by men for 'sexual, domestic and other services'; and finally the "subversion of women's discourse" where men overturn women's speech for their own sexual gratification. He then turns to female humour, arguing that current female humour does not escape the masculine dirty joke discourse above but instead overturns the assumptions from within it. He suggests feminists need to create their own humour, from their own discourses, in order to escape from this masculine construction of femininity. In many ways this reflects Spender's (1980) proposal that women need to create their own language as they cannot express themselves through men's language. However, Mulkay's analysis of female waitresses and male bartenders seems not to recognise women's ability to control humour. Take for instance the following exchange:

> In one case, for example, in which the bartender has given the wrong change to the waitress, the sequence ends with the bartender admonishing the waitress with the words, ‘Okay, chesty. Next time, get the amount right so I don’t have to go to all this trouble.’ In reply, the waitress *helplessly* sticks out her tongue, picks up her money which is now the correct amount, and *retreats to her tables in defeat* (Mulkay, 1988: 147, emphasis added).

Here the language used in Mulkay’s own account reflects discursive assumptions made about the passivity of women. The possible defiance enacted by the waitress to the man’s language is minimised, despite Mulkay’s supposedly neutral position. For instance, why has the linguistic act of calling a woman ‘chesty’ been given so much preference by the analyst over the bodily act of resistance of sticking her tongue out? How does the waitress retreat, is this expressed in her body language or is this the author’s interpretation of her actions. How does the space influence the interaction of humour, for example is the bar perceived as the bartender’s territory where he has power over those who enter, while the service space of the tables belong to the female waitress who needs to ‘control’ the customer. Much of what we understand from this account is the researcher’s observation of the interaction, rather than the waitress’s or bartender’s accounts of the humorous experience which may have led to a different understanding of the interaction.

In the study of sexuality, the body becomes an important medium for expressing sexual and non-sexual behaviours. It plays an important part in employees’ expression of themselves as fun persons, as can be seen in the expression of being a playful person. It also is essential to the expression of sexuality, although not always in a positive way. For example, in Fleming’s account he notes how the women would often feel uncomfortable with the ‘fun’ culture because of the overtly sexual tones. In particular he describes that ‘sleazy’ guys within the organisation would look at the women’s bodies as they walked past, making them feel particularly uneasy (Fleming, 2007). Even within organisations such as these which propose to be diverse and open, sexuality can produce negative effects by making individuals sexual objects. A further discussion of embodiment followed by a development of sexuality in the next two sections places this link of sexuality and the body into the context of play.

Embodiment

There is a danger in post-structural studies when discussing discourses and language of ignoring the physical aspects of embodiment, or how we experience the social world through our bodies. Like materiality and space, the study of embodiment recognises the role of the physical body in our experience of the world, while also recognising the effect of society upon the organisation of the body. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) influential work *Phenomenology of Perception* discussed an embodied understanding of space, where space is experienced through and shaped by actions. In this case, sensations become a way of knowing: "We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 5). His work breaks down the Cartesian split characterising Enlightenment reasoning which considers the body as an object, instead discussing how the body and consciousness are intertwined and mutually forming. He argues instead that the only way we know how to 'experience' is through the body: it is through being embodied persons that we form social reality. In addition, the body is not neutral; it is gendered and sexualised (not to mention expressing a wide range of characteristics such as age, class, race and ethnicity) as a social entity. The body within fun corporate cultures is in many senses controlled: employees are instructed on how to dress, in casual wear or fancy dress; on how to use their body to have fun in play; and on how to be a collective embodied representation for their company as fun people. Importantly this thesis is formed on the idea that *humour needs to be thought of as embodied*. Laughter and smiling form embodied responses to the internal emotions experienced. Fun practices can also only be enacted through the body, interacting with others in play. Play is a physical activity, not simply a mental function. The movement of bodies within play spaces is linked to the development of humorous activity, such as joking and having fun. Through this movement it becomes possible to discuss embodiment, rather than simply the body per se. The subjective experience of play and joking is conducted through embodiment of these values, expressed to others who are also taking part.

The interest in the academic study of embodiment and the body is reflective of more general social changes and in particular how modern subjectivities are shaped. Shilling (2003: 1) has suggested the growing interest in the body through modernity has seen a shift to an 'individualisation' of the body, where people are "increasingly concerned with the health,

shape and appearance of their own bodies as expressions of individual identity." For Shilling (2003) the body is increasingly seen as a project which is continuously worked on as part of an individual's identity, for example the self-management of the body's appearance through maintaining personal fitness, hair, makeup and nails (in the case of the airline stewardess in Hancock and Tyler, 2000), or receiving plastic surgery and breast implants (in the case of sex workers in Sanders, 2005). For many female service workers the presentation of their embodied self was controlled through discourses on the correct form of clothing, maintenance of hands and nails, makeup and general weight management through dieting and exercise. For airline stewardesses, the correct sort of body was discursively established in the recruitment policy and maintained through both self and group discipline. The aim of this body work was to present the employees as a sexually appealing, aesthetically pleasing image of the organisation for the high class businessmen (Hancock and Tyler, 2000). In Sanders' (2005) case study of sex workers, the presentation of the body was carefully worked on to create an identity matching a heterosexual image of femininity, to such a point that some sex workers claimed they would not be recognised by clients or co-workers in their 'outside' appearance (Sanders, 2005). In addition, Entwistle and Wissinger's (2006) work has looked at aesthetic labour in professional modelling, arguing that the models use a concept of embodiment which is both physical and emotional, forming an entire embodied self. However, even in less explicitly sexualised workplaces women's bodies are often viewed as objects for the sexual or aesthetic pleasure of men, a theme reinforced within humour seen in 'dirty joke(s)' (Mulkay, 1988). This link between larger societal discourses and organisations' sanctioned use of women's bodies suggests that wider society's tendency to objectify women is utilised within everyday organisational practices.

Sexuality

Hearn et al (1989) note that sexuality is an important feature throughout organisations, where "sexuality can be defined as the social expression or social relations of physical desire, by or for others, or for oneself" (Hearn et al, 1989: 2). The authors support an approach that moves away from either a biological or political-social view of sexuality, by instead noting how sexuality can be seen as a communicative practice rooted in discourses of power. While the authors found management's approach to sexuality to either ignore it or assume it was 'dealt with' through organisational practices, organisations remain highly sexualised locations.

Sexuality can be seen as a process within organisations in its own right that covers not only sexual harassment but sexual attraction, with both men and women engaging in flirting and sexual banter. Likewise, Fleming (2005: 2) takes up Burrell's point to note that sexuality is "neither strictly resistance nor control, but a complex and multileveled admixture of both". This literature therefore demonstrates the complexity of the sexuality of organisation, how and by whom sexuality is used is a reflection of and constitutive of power relations.

While recognising the possibility for mutual sexual social interaction between men and women, it is likely that in many organisations there is not openness to all forms of sexuality, those forms which break norms. The restriction of certain forms exposes the influence of sexual discourses and the power relations and the imbalance that can be seen in the 'politics of the body' or how sexuality is expressed through power enacted on the body (Hearn et al, 1989). Bordo (1993: 181) describes the 'politics of the body' as a "paradigm which re-conceptualised the body from a purely biological form to an historical construction and medium of social control." This movement combines previous feminist thought with post-structuralist work to describe the way the body is shaped and altered by gendered discourses (Bordo, 1993). Hearn et al's (1989) work exposes the prevalence of sexuality in workplaces and notes that in "most organisations such explicit displays are predominantly heterosexual, or apparently so" (Hearn et al, 1989: 20). It is not surprising then that through a discourse of asymmetrical heterosexuality some female occupations have become strongly sexualised. Alternatively Brewis and Linstead (2000) and Burrell (1992a) argue that management are increasingly using employees' sexuality. They remain concerned that sexuality is colonised into making more profits, narrowing sexuality's potential to create change (Brewis and Linstead, 2000). As will be discussed below, much of the literature on fun corporate cultures has noted the sexualised tone to the play, often encouraged by management in the organisation of fun events. This colonisation of sexuality usurps employees' control over it and minimising its potential to be used as resistance against a society which rationalises and measures employees. Instead sexuality is integrated, if not explicitly then implicitly, as employers organise employees' bodies and desires towards certain concepts of what it means to be sexual and fun.

Likewise Fleming (2006) has specifically discussed the colonisation of sexuality by fun corporate cultures. Within this study he demonstrates the complexity of sexuality, forming multiple roles simultaneously. Sexuality may be used as a facet of control, especially in the control of employees' identities under fun corporate cultures. There were both strong heterosexual and homosexual undertones to the culture he describes, where employees could 'be themselves'. In this sense the expression of sexuality could be empowering, especially for those individuals who would not be allowed to express their sexuality in other circumstances. This included fancy dress days where many employees would dress in drag, or the consistent use of joking and flirting about sexuality. Sexuality in this sense may also be a form of resistance, as Fleming found that there was opposition towards both the heterosexual and homosexual sexuality. The homosexual men in particular could be the centre of ridicule, and opposing the open expression of sexuality was a way of resisting the wider 'fun' culture.

As well as a mechanism of organisational control, however, sexuality is also a form of 'misbehaviour' (as argued for by instance Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999 and discussed by Fleming 2005, drawing on Burrell, 1992b). In this view by using company time and resources towards sexualised interactions, employees convey resistance towards the management of emotions, attitudes and even the bodies of employees. Expressions of sexuality can be formed through language, for instance Ackroyd and Thompson (1999: 134) note: "Joking rituals, pranks and 'horseplay' are the most pervasive forms of sexual misbehaviour". Here they view sexuality, in the form of banter between employees, as a form of micro-resistance to management. It is possible then that individuals might use the discourses of sexuality to be subversive to the larger discourses of capitalism. This does however vary, as sexuality can be a useful mechanism of getting worker compliance and therefore can also be sanctioned, and sometimes utilised by management (Warhurst and Nickson, 2009). For example, Filby's (1992) study of betting shops noted how expectations of demonstrating sexuality were codified in the language of 'personality'. However problems emerged when managers felt some displays of sexuality with clients to be inappropriate and needed to be 'contained' not to be 'over the top'.

As an example of sexuality in labour, Alison (1994) studied play within the context of female hostess work in Japan. Here, gender and sexuality were prevalent, with the women positioned

as objects, to be flirted with, discussed, touched and joked about. Alison considers the hostess bars as areas of play, which on top of the drinking, joking, singing and entertainment aspects, involved a space for breaking reality and the social conventions of hierarchies from work. While no sexual intercourse happened between clients and hostesses (in theory at least), the suspension of reality meant that men could bolster their self-image as playboys and at the same time develop important bonds with work colleagues. The hostess bars were spaces separated from corporate space in the sense that work conventions like hierarchy were abandoned, while at the same time important for the progression of work colleagues and business client relationships. The bars were selling the aesthetic of sexuality as a scenario where women could be objects for men's play. The women's bodies would be the centre of a lot of the joking, for instance commenting how small their breasts were, how another hostess was more attractive or asking embarrassing sexual questions. The play in this organisation was a male, patriarchal form of adult play, and as such it materialised the power inequalities of society and organisational life more generally. Alison's work links embodiment and sexuality to an organisational space which is designed around play. As may be the case for many people working within the entertainment industries, the aesthetic experience of the space encourages play. This is particularly the case of play as a temporary and spatial 'reality' where alternative own rules set expectations of behaviour.

This account of Alison's work highlights how play is contextualised in the space it operates through influencing the aesthetic of the workplace. With this in mind, we will now consider the contributions made to the topics of materiality and space within the current literature, again noting the relationship between the individual, social reality and the environment. Space, like humour, can be seen as ambiguous with layered meanings. Indeed as the critique of Mulkay's work above has demonstrated, space is likely to be important to understand the context in which humour is occurring. Space in this sense it not 'neutral' but embedded with social practices and also shapes the interactions which occur within it. Likewise, the body and its movement through the space, the social understanding of the body and the embodied nature of humour are as important in its communication as the spoken aspects of humour. These factors appear to be linked in our understanding of humour, and as such this thesis proposes that space and materiality and the corresponding relationship between embodiment and discourses are all important in understanding how humour is used in organisations.

Space and materiality in an organisational context

Surprisingly, the spatial and material elements of the organisation are often neglected in organisational studies (Baldry, 1999). Generally physical aspects are often considered as passive representations, for instance as artefacts of organisation culture (Schein, 1985). While the interest in space has increased within organisation analysis (Baldry, 1999; Dale, 2005; Taylor and Spicer, 2007) drawing on other fields such as sociology and geography to develop an analysis of the social relevance of space and materiality. These works explore how space both produces, and is embedded within, the social (Lefebvre, 1991). Henri Lefebvre's (1991) influential work on space has risen in popularity in organisation studies (Cairns et al, 2003; Dale, 2005; Van Marrewijk, 2009) because of his nuanced understanding of how different layers of social meaning can be explored through space.

> The fields we are concerned with are, first, the *physical* – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the *social.* In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias (Lefebvre, 1991: 11).

Space for Lefebvre is a knowledge embedded in the physical, mental and social. Space is natural, logical and rationalised, and social with symbolic meaning. Lefebvre states that space is not simply an abstract concept or a symbolic representation, but embedded within power relations, by focusing on how space is designed, used and experienced as persons move through it. In this sense space is not neutral and static, but is a social product shaped and organised through our understanding and actions. Lefebvre theorises three different types of space, although acknowledged this separation was only conceptual as in everyday practice the three would overlap. First, spatial practices (perceived space) are concerned with the everyday experience of places through an embodied historical understanding of how space is used, especially to ensure compliance and a desired level of performance. Spatial practices according to Lefebvre reflect a "specific use of that space" (1991: 16). In the case of modern society the

use of space is dominated by capitalism, what Lefebvre terms 'abstract space'. Secondly, representations of space (conceived space) make sense of how a space is designed, organised and managed. This relates to 'order' imposed through the relations of production related to the "knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). In other words, institutions design space to communicate messages to those experiencing it. Finally representational space (lived space) is the experience of the signs, images and symbols giving meaning to space. It is "embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life" (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). Representational space is concerned with phenomenological experience of the ordered space.

Lefebvre's approach is gaining popularity in organisation studies, for example Dale and Burrell (2008) use Lefebvre to evaluate how the physicality of work is ordered around organisational goals such as commitment, creativity and innovation. They elaborate on Lefebvre to note the process of enchantment (linking the physical and the symbolic creating power effects), emplacement (space designed for particular uses) and enactment within space (how movement allows enchantment and emplacement to be experienced in lived space). Taylor and Spicer (2007) note that in current studies space has been explained as three different concepts: as a distance that focuses on the physical attributes; secondly as a materialization of power relations to physically control the worker; and finally as an experience established through understanding the symbolic configurations of space. However they argue that it is through Lefebvre's work that the different scales of space (macro, meso and micro) can space be explored as multidimensional, encapsulating these different views. In a study of organisational change, Van Marrewijk (2009: 290) has drawn on Lefebvre to discuss how architecture was conceptualized to communicate a 'physical embodiment of the organizational change'. On the other hand Tyler and Cohen (2010: 192) use Lefebvre alongside Butler's heterosexual matrix to describe how women experienced space as gendered, and more significantly "materialized themselves in and through it [space]". Importantly this links Lefebvre's view of space to subjectivity, in this case the gendered subjectivity of women who often felt their space invaded and dominated by their male co-workers.

Dale and Burrell (2008) demonstrate how Lefebvre's theory combines 'physical' and 'imaginary' (the social, cultural and historical meanings) aspects of materiality, and apply this

within an organisational context. As Dale and Burrell (2008: 9) have noted recently “there has been a much more deliberate movement in the conscious design of workplaces to achieve certain values and business goals through the manipulation of space.” This highlights that employees’ experiences are altered via the managed space of a ‘fun’ organisation, where there is a purposeful design of these spaces to obtain greater identification from the employees. Dale and Burrell suggest that enactment allows for the movement through space, but in ways which are learnt and rountinised in our habitus (embodied understanding) of the world. While Dale and Burrell (2008: 68) focus on the “embedded and taken-for-granted aspects of spatial power”, this review discusses this from a different perspective of strategies and tactics in the spatial practices of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984). Humour often occurs in lived space through playing with the meanings and our understandings of how space is experienced. Yet, as has been explored, humour is purposely ambiguous and controversial to the established order. So while agreeing with Lefebvre, and Dale and Burrell, that spaces in organisations are often conceived around particular notions of work, this study explores how humour is a tactic for moving through the space. This is in both a linguistic metaphorical sense of spoken humour engaging with the conceived meaning of organisations and also an embodied experience of space as humorous. Take for example Warren and Fineman’s (2007) description of the scooters which employees would race around their office. In this case, the embodied movement through the space was humorous as it questioned the historical use of workspace as serious, productive and disciplinary. It did this from within the discourses it operated, that their workplace was now supposed to be ‘fun’. However management then banned the use of the scooters for ‘health and safety’ concerns, re-establishing the use of ‘fun’ for productive reasons and that the workplace was a disciplinary space. The employees then argued that use of ‘warning’ signs of scooters would appease health and safety concerns, questioning the reasons used by management for restraining their movement through the space. By using the framework of De Certeau, Lefebvre’s concept of space and the way movement is controlled through power struggles becomes ‘lived’ through humour as employees and managers used the space to convey messages about ‘fun’ in the organisation.

Taylor and Spicer (2007) argued that the study of organisational space can be experienced and made meaningful at multiple levels: employees move through organisational spaces, which are also manipulated by management in order to express the company ideals. However, employees also have their own lived experience of the organisational spaces which at times

reflects the organisational discourses and at times proposes alternative perspectives of organisational life. This raises the question of how employees respond to space when it is organised around particular attributes which are enticing to employees. Organisations want to manage space to appear fun, which counters the image of organisations as boring, mundane and serious. The next section discusses the way space has been explored within current studies on 'fun' corporate culture.

Creating space for fun

Fun corporate cultures may be grounded in discourses of pleasure, emotion and empowerment; however they are enacted and experienced through the materiality of the organisation and its occupants. One prominent aspect of fun organisations is the intentional manipulation (to use Lefebvre's terminology) of space to appeal to particular ideologies, in this case reflecting the proposed 'fun', creative, spontaneous and open ideologies of the corporation (Lefebvre, 1991). The design of the space in these cultures portrays the ideology of 'fun', with contemporary aesthetics, open plan spaces, colourful decorations, personalization of the workspace and the use of 'fun' objects such as games representing playful, childlike playgrounds for those at work (Warren and Fineman, 2007). As Fleming and Sturdy (2009: 213) recognise "the colonization of everyday life by management has involved an under-studied converse process [to normative control] in which the motifs of everyday life have been appropriated *inside* the organization [instead of kept 'outside']". As space within organisations is being increasingly manipulated to express fun sentiments, it reflects the larger breakdown of the private and work spheres which is found within fun corporate cultures, which in many ways can be perceived as oppressive by employees (Warren and Fineman, 2007). The creation of meaning within contemporary work appears to be accomplished through an identity construction that is reliant on appropriating private elements into the workplace.

Warren and Fineman's (2007) study of an IT department's 'fun' corporate culture reveals how organisations often combine organisational discourses of fun with control of the physical workplace. In other words, the organisational goals are represented materially through the way space is managed. Space is not neutral in identity work; instead space represents power relations such as 'domination', 'manipulation' and 'seduction' through control embedded

within social space (Lefebvre, 1991; Dale and Burrell, 2008). Seduction in particular is important in forming identities, where space articulates the 'occupant's interests, desires and self-identity' (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 45). As a result, the way that space is organised can be intended to secure identification from employees, encouraging the employees to compose themselves as particular types of employee within that space. The conceived space may reflect various collective ideals of 'Have Fun' cultures such as *equality* through the layout of work into open play offices, *creativity* through contemporary decoration in bright, cheerful colours and *individuality* though the personalisation of workplaces by employees.

As should be evident, space is not perceived as neutral by employees, but an aspect of organisations which employees engage with and play a role in shaping and forming to express meaning through their interactions with it. As such it ties into the expressions of identity, in the physical narratives of self. Just as the managed space of the organisation aims to create an organisational narrative to shape the perspectives of employees, individuals form their own space, for example through the use of photographs to tell stories of their self, their family, their interests and hobbies. However what do these 'fun' conceptions of space actually say about the employees' identities? It has already been noted in Chapter Two that 'fun' organisations support a certain 'childlike' feel, and these can be observed through the discourses of many of these organisations. In addition, the workspace itself mirrors these aspirations, as Baldry and Hallier (2010) state, the symbols of the organisational decor are that of youthfulness and the 'inner child'. As a result space both reflects and develops this infantile 'feeling', and embodied by employees through humour, emotions and sexuality in these organisations.

Conclusions

Studies such as those that have been considered here have identified some interesting links between humour, emotions and sexuality in organisations and corporate discourses aiming to instil particular feelings and behaviours within employees. These studies can be expanded with a consideration of how 'fun' cultures are spatially bounded in the material organisation and how they contribute towards the identity work employees undertake. By combining these

topics, it becomes possible to gain an embodied, material and social perspective on fun programmes in organisations. The presence of sexuality and the body for example is linked to the expression of an 'authentic' identity. In particular the aspects of emotion, space, sexuality and the body which have been discussed here represent areas which are being increasingly colonised into management strategy. Fun corporate cultures represent a powerful combination of these strategies, which encourage a more holistic view of the employee but also expect this 'whole' employee to be more tightly aligned with organisational goals.

In particular there is concern about the management of specific aspects of the individual employee which centre around what is kitsch or infantile. The company culture supports emotions such as passion, fun and happiness over more complex emotions, skimming over those aspects of cynicism, resentment or frustration. It provides emotions which are easy, simple and quick to achieve, rather than those emotions based on complexity and long term development. It reflects the fragmented character of identity in contemporary capitalism (Sennett, 1998), the pressure to be increasingly transient and as a result we have lost the longevity of work place identities. Instead it is replaced by those aspects which can be temporary, skimming over the details of how and why. Fun corporate cultures represent a form which this infantilisation has taken within corporate culture, and as such the effects of these cultures on the experiences of employees needs to be explored.

Fun corporate cultures have seen increased attention in recent years (Redman and Mathews, 2002; Fleming, 2005; Warren and Fineman, 2007). However there are holes in the current literature which need to be investigated. The creative industries appear to be a site where creativity, fun and corporate culture are coinciding, due to the nature of the work and the form of employees engaged in these organisations. Yet the link between the creative industries and fun corporate cultures has yet to be examined. Does neo-normative control work well in these industries, and why might that be the case? How do the values of creativity, individuality and education align with those of fun corporate cultures? The match between these goals would suggest that fun corporate cultures may be successful in the creative industries as a manner in which to control a fairly independent workforce. This study thus explores the link, attempting to match the style of work in the creative industries to the

implementation of fun corporate cultures. In particular it is interested in the experience of employees within these organisations.

In addition, the current studies on fun organisations have said surprisingly little about why play is so important to the corporate cultures. While authors such as Fleming and Sturdy have noted how neo-normative control is derived from the need for diversity and individuality, they comment very little on the role of play itself. This study will examine why the nature of play is important in fun corporate cultures. In particular studying play itself as a surreptitious form of control will be analysed. The nature of play seems to hold a common sense appeal, allowing employees to engage easily and quickly with it as an obvious way to work. It is also self-disciplinary in its nature, as employees are encouraged to organise themselves into play as a positive and rewarding manner of working. These two dynamics of the common sense appeal and self-disciplinary aspects combined mean that play may be able to engage employees on a deeper level than previous normative corporate culture programmes. This study therefore investigates the consequences, experiences and costs for employees who engage with these discourses on an everyday basis.

Finally, the play within these organisations, it is claimed, is infantilising to employees. However, the rationale for organisations encouraging infantile play is underexplored. Might there be particular reasons why organisations encourage this form of play over more adult forms of play? In particular, if infantile play lacks critique it may be a way to minimise resistance within the workforce. Busying employees with fairly meaningless play may be a method of distracting employees from the more serious, adult problems within organisations. The extent that play can minimise resistance in organisations will also be explored and developed within the findings of this research.

The management of sexuality has seen some attention in the fun-at-work literature (Fleming, 2005), but there is certainly a capacity and need to develop this further to examine the *embodied* nature of this relationship. With the focus on sexual joking and humorous discourses, somehow the body and embodiment often is left behind. The study of the embodied nature of sexual humour would allow expression of certain forms of sexuality to be

enacted within organisational spaces. In particular, how does sexuality fit within the proposed kitsch and infantile aspects to the fun cultures? Sexuality has the capacity to be a facet of control, an empowering expression of the self or a mode of resistance towards organisational goals. Will sexuality provide an adult critique and resistance to the infantilisation of work, or is sexuality also infantilised? Linking these areas may provide illumination into the infantilisation of work and how employees experience fun corporate cultures.

There are many areas which the literature does not address which leave many questions. This study will attempt to link what has been done in the current literature with wider questions about the nature of play, with infantilisation of employees and with wider society. How does the development of fun cultures fit with the wider trends in Western organisations and society at large? The manner of consumption discussed by Barber suggests that consumers are changing their buying practices for what is simple, easy and quick. Are we consuming working practices in a similar way? In particular, fun corporate cultures utilise a self-disciplining effect in the form of neo-normative control. Employees are expected to internalise the discourses of fun, pleasure and play and display the correct behaviours in the organisation. How do employees experience this self-disciplinary effect? Do they accept or resist the effects, and what experiences lead to these reactions? Or are employees more pragmatic, tactical even, appearing to display the correct attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, but reserving a part of their authenticity? Certainly the work on emotional labour has suggested that employees may do surface acting. It may be that in fun organisations employees are also surface acting in order to get by.

Additionally, in the current economic climate there are major concerns as to what degree organisations pay lip-service to fun practices and open, caring corporate cultures. While they may have been willing to enact fun practices when profits were high, what happens now that the economic climate is less friendly, and many companies are in a position where they have to enforce redundancies on their staff? Moreover should we be playing games while our co-workers are being laid-off? Perhaps organisations remain more 'serious' than fun culture management attitudes would suggest. Should we always be having a laugh? Where do the borders exist, and are the two concepts of 'fun' and 'serious' a necessary dichotomy?

Therefore, this thesis will analyse 'fun' corporate cultures, and especially consider how they construct a sense of meaning for employees through the development of the self through fun, pleasure and playfulness and in particular the presentation of the fun self as desirable. Finally, it will consider whether the construction of meaning through a playful self is perceived as meaningful by employees. It will analyse how these cultures are established discursively and materially, and especially through establishing a sense of self for the employees. However this sense of self is constantly negotiated through positioning themselves against an 'other' more traditional form of working. In order to do so, this thesis will examine empirical data collected on three self-espoused 'fun' organisations. The research methodology will be explored in Chapter Four, in order to set up the findings on these topics in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This research endeavours to investigate how humour is lived, experienced and managed in a 'fun' organisational environment. Chapter Two and Chapter Three discussed the relationship of humour as an everyday practice to the corporate cultures which proclaim employees should 'have fun' at work, and examined the relationship to the themes of identity, emotion, space and sexuality. As a result, several key questions have been formed which outline the aims of this research:

- How do employees experience 'fun' corporate cultures and the possible contradictions produced between the idea of 'having fun' and the 'realities of work' created in the employment relationship?
- How do neo-normative forms of control function within the creative industries where employees' identities are bound up in their creative work?
- Is 'play' a method of self-disciplining a relatively autonomous workforce? Why is play such an important theme within these cultures and how does it relate to the forms of control enacted by management?
- Is there an infantile character to play in 'fun' organisations, and if so what are the consequences for the experiences of employees?
- If we can view play as a strategy of control, what role does space play in materialising this strategy, and what space is available for alternative meanings of play?

With these questions in mind, the research was designed to capture instances of humour from the perspective of employees, using a phenomenological approach to gain insight into the participants' understanding and experiences of humorous interactions. This approach broadly includes understanding the use of play in these organisation, how employees may experience this play and how the context of working in a 'fun' organisation may affect the way play is viewed in these organisations. The use of phenomenology sits within critical ethnography, aiming to understand the power relations embedded within these cultures through taking part in the workplace activities, focusing on how participants viewed the culture and understood their experiences of having 'fun', humour, joking and play in these organisations.

The study allowed for a study of how *humour* was perceived as important by the participants, how it was used on an everyday basis and how it was important for understanding the fun-at-work corporate culture. Many of these programmes which encourage employees to have fun at work are designed for office workspaces, often open planned corporate spaces (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). Many previous studies on humour have focused on working class cultures such as shop floor work (Roy, 1959; Collinson, 1992) or call centres (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Taylor and Bain, 2003). Little research has been undertaken on humour within professional, white collar employment (with the exception of studies of management humour such as Fox, 1990 and Collinson, 2002) and in particular on the experience of workers within the creative industries (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). This gap is particularly interesting considering the rise of 'fun' culture management practices oriented towards professional workers (Warren and Fineman, 2007; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). While academic research into humour from anthropology, psychology and sociology has a long tradition (the extent of which is reviewed in Mulkay, 1988; Powell and Paton, 1988; and Fox, 1990), the shift in how humour is used within 'fun' organisations has been underexplored. Management texts (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Barsoux, 1993) propose that in these corporate cultures employees' use of humour is liberated, accepted and even rewarded. However, to access whether this is the case, it requires a deeper, more critical understanding of the everyday reality of humour in 'fun' organisations needing to be explored.

All research projects adopt certain assumptions about the social world when formulating their research design. This chapter will review the research methodology of my thesis, providing a case for exploring humour from a social constructivist perspective and positioning my research method within a critical ethnographic approach. In particular I will discuss how humour is conceptualised from a social constructivist perspective and how this fits more generally within a perspective of social realities from a social constructivist paradigm. Specifically, it will outline a methodology designed to capture how corporate culture is constructed through the production of culture in the form of strategy and then consumed and interpreted (read) by employees (De Certeau, 1994). In particular it will look at tactics (De Certeau, 1984) as a pragmatic reading of corporate culture (Hall, 2001). Pragmatic readings are those where the text is largely accepted, but necessitates some skimming over of inconsistencies which it might produce. Finally the chapter will then discuss the research methods used within data collection

and analysis through utilising a critical ethnographic methodology with interviews, observation and a diary/humour log. Then through adopting a phenomenological analysis of interviews and observation, the meaning of humour, the embodiment of humour and visual methods to capture the materiality of humour in the workplace are explored and evaluated.

Research aims

My research aims to create a greater understanding of the social experience of utilising humour within 'fun' corporate cultures. The rationale for studying this particular area is to understand how humour might be important in constructing and reconstructing employees' emotions and sense of self within the spaces negotiated by corporate cultures. In particular it analyses the interactions of strategies and tactics used to advance meaning within organisations (De Certeau, 1984). 'Fun' corporate culture represents a possible strategy used by organisations to endorse discourses of fun, pleasure and play within work, conceiving spaces where these discourses can be promoted, and encouraging employees to relate to organisations through positive emotion and identity work. Humour can represent a 'tactic' in which employees manage these experiences and open up space for alternative meanings. As De Certeau states that while strategies use the establishment of space as a proper place of power, tactics relies on opportunity and as such is located in time:

> Strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power (De Certeau, 1984: 38, emphasis in original).

Strategies therefore attempt to form 'proper' places which are presented as fact and established. Tactics are temporal opportunities, as De Certeau states, which *play* upon the opportunities presented. The ambiguous nature of humour and play more generally allows for this space, however it is exactly because of this transient nature that humour is so difficult to study within organisations. This leaves a gap in terms of analysing how employees make sense of 'fun' corporate cultures and also the impact which it has on employees' sense of self

through the tactics they deploy. This gap in particular relates to how employees discursively and materially open up 'space' – both in the metaphorical sense and in the physical, material sense of the world – when deciding how to cope with this strategy.

In order to address this gap in current research, using a critical ethnographic study allowed me to collect observations of the everyday practices in organisations and examples of every-day-to-day occurrences of humour. My research used several qualitative methods: participant and non-participant observation, diaries, interviews and also the collection of visual depictions of organisational life through photographs. The details of these methods will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, however the rationale was choosing a method which viewed how employees interacted and also felt about working in these environments, through a social constructivist perspective.

In particular my research will address the following questions: How do the participants of the organisation experience and actively construct humour in 'fun' organisations? Do participants identify with 'fun' discourses through humour or do they reject them? How are 'fun' identities materially and spatially enacted? And what is the relationship between humour and space? The research methodology was designed to study humour in a manner which could address these questions. However, in order to explain why I am concerned with employees' experiences and how employees allocate meaning in humour, I will first lay out the methodological position of social constructivism within an interpretive paradigm, considering how this position shapes the methodological approach adopted here.

Sociological paradigms of knowledge

The claims made within social science research vary depending upon their view of the nature of research and wider society. While there may be a dominance of scientific rationality, other methodological perspectives question the basis of research within the scientific method. In particular they differ in their position on the nature of truth and the validity of representing truth which researchers can claim. From a critical perspective truth claims are always problematic because they ignore the power structures upon which those claims are made. This

research is conducted from a critical perspective, and in particular notes how power structures reinforce particular truths which are masked within organisations, in particular the nature of control which is enacted in modern work.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest research on organisations can be classified into four paradigm perspectives. These paradigms are mutually exclusive due to their ontology and epistemology. These perspectives are labelled functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist paradigms. The paradigms are separated along two dimensions: their ontological orientation towards 'reality' as objective and measurable or subjective and constructed, and additionally their orientation towards addressing conflict or maintaining stability. As a result, the structure results in four, mutually exclusive clusters of approaches to research, within which different methodologies are located. While the methodologies in each section are different, they share the same underlying assumptions about the social world.

From an interpretive perspective, the social world is considered subjective, a 'reality' which is created through our social interactions. In this sense, there can be multiple 'realities' reflecting the multitude of different experiences. However from the critical perspective, as a result of the social world being constructed, patterns which are produced reinforce power relations between different groups and individuals. Through analysing different realities, the experiences of those who are dominated can be illuminated and questioned. While Burrell and Morgan (1979) envision phenomenology and critical theory as located within different approaches, interpretive for the former and radical humanist for the latter, Hassard (1991) argues that a paradigm heterodoxy, or research conducted using multiple paradigm perspectives, may be useful in creating 'epistemological variety'. This research recognises the phenomena of employees' experiences, whilst aiming to explore how these experiences are shaped through the institutional arrangements underpinning corporate culture management. As a result, it does view the social world as constructed, but acknowledges how power relations influence those constructions. It is thus located closer to the critical theorist than a pure phenomenological position. It uses critical ethnography as the methodology, while using a phenomenological analysis to understand the production of these experiences.

Because of the linguistic and discursive nature of humour in organisations, I wanted to analyse the use of humour while also recognising the power invested within these discourses. As a result of the linguistic, discursive and material nature of 'fun' practices, my research uses phenomenology, usually attributed to the work of Husserl and Schutz. Schutz is attributed as a significant contributor towards the field of 'existential' phenomenology (as opposed to Husserl's 'pure' transcendental phenomenology). Schutz's (1970) contribution is recognising the importance of 'stream of consciousness', lived experiences and meaning. In the stream of consciousness, we experience the world within the moment, as a constant transition of thought that is located in the now. Reflection on the other hand occurs in the spacio-temporal world of everyday life. For Schultz, experience is thus a combination of the stream of consciousness and our ability to have reflection by stopping this continuous stream. Meaning is derived from this act of reflection upon past experiences allowing discrete experiences to be identified after the event. It is the complex interrelations of these three aspects, the consciousness, the lived experience and the meanings we attribute reflectively to these which shape our everyday experience of the social world and the sense we make of it (Schutz, 1970).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) drew on Schutz's view of existential phenomenology when they wrote their influential work, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Within this they set out the basic principles of social constructivism, or the idea that humans form their own social reality through giving shared meaning to their actions, which in turn form institutions. Once these institutions are shared between more people, they become more concrete and solid (and harder to alter), or as Berger and Luckmann (1966: 45) describe it: "the institutions are now experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality which confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact." These institutions however remain constructed through meaning attributed to these actions by the collective, so that they remain part of a produced, constructed reality. The institutions of organisations, and the initiatives of corporate culture, can be understood from this perspective. As institutions, organisations produce meaning through strategies such as corporate culture which influence the realities of work; while at the level of everyday practices we constitute a sense of self in relation to institutions.

This perspective can be seen within the theory provided by De Certeau (1984) on the use of strategies and tactics in everyday practices. Institutions such as organisations make use of

strategies to produce meaning, which are located within the temporal and spatial elements of the workplace (although often they affect spaces and time outside of organisations as well). This includes strategies on what it means to be an employee within those organisations, creating discourses on the development of an ideal employee. In the case of 'fun' organisations, the envisioning of 'fun' corporate culture by management can be seen as one strategy to control meaning of what a good employee should be: what behaviours they should demonstrate, how they should feel about work and how employees form a sense of self in relation to their work. It is not only organisations who produce meaning however: employees are also active in producing meaning within these institutional spaces. They firstly need to interpret these discourses and their meaning, but also create their own meaning through carving out space. In the case of the 'fun' corporate cultures there may be an encouragement of employees to help conceive the space, and play an active role in creating meaning. If this is the case, the meaning may reflect the strategies of the organisation or it may be perceived as an opportunity to create other meanings. Similarly, while the organisations champion the use of humour, employees using humour have the ability to create alternative meaning through humour's ambiguity.

The advantage of a social constructivist perspective as a methodology is that it allows different employee's voices to be heard where they might usually be represented by a singular dominant voice in organisations, such as managerial versions of 'truth'. It also accounts for my own voice as a researcher, by acknowledging my assumptions and influence. In relation to humour this is particularly important, as it can be used to express complicated and contradictory positions as men/women, workers/managers and 'outside of work' identities, since as Collinson (1988) states all workers must 'manage' their self identity. Lastly it allows for identities to be fluid and constructed within a context, not as an abstract constant that other methodologies might assume.

In the study of 'fun' corporate cultures, using a methodology which utilises a social constructivist perspective investigates the creation of meaning within these scenarios, articulating different voices with their version of 'truth'. This is practically accomplished by articulating various voices within the research project by designing a method where employees give importance to events, rather than relying solely on the researcher's own

observations. Through bringing together multiple experiences, as a researcher I am able to formulate a wider picture of how play informs employees' experiences of work, and in particular shapes patterns of power and influence over employees as subjects within these organisations. However as the research draws on multiple voices, the results can be fragmented and at times even contradictory, representing the variety of experiences within these organisations. This can lead to a difficult position as a researcher: whose voice should I listen to, and why? While listening to the various voices within the organisation, I attempted to explore the rationale for those voices. What aims did that individual have? How could I reflect upon their intentions when articulating their voice? How did it fit into the wider context of the reality they were attempting to express? While it is of course not always possible to resolve these tensions, this reflection helped to form the wider picture about why contradictory voices were heard. Management for example may present an optimistic view of the effect on employees, partially as spokespersons of the corporate culture but also because of the possible distance they had from the actual practices taking place. Employees may start the interview sounding relatively positive, but by the second interview be willing to discuss some of the darker sides of the corporate culture. This may be because of their own reflection during the process, as well as being a result of the increased level of trust that was built over time. It also may be that while an employee's overall view was positive, sometimes the details of individual events were not. This research aims to discuss these contradictions, and in particular why it could be possible for an employee to be both positive and negative about aspects of the corporate culture. In order to accomplish this, as a researcher I took a critical view of the material which allowed for this reflection to emerge. In the next section I discuss the methods selected by this research and how a critical ethnography allows for an exploration of these tensions discussed.

Researching humour

Many traditional studies of humour in organisations have focused on how joking functions through a functionalist paradigm, for example Romero and Pescosolido's (2008) model of 'positive' and 'negative' humour on group effectiveness (see also Martin, 1996; Avolio et al., 1999). These studies tend to be functionalist in nature – assuming that the humour is consciously or unconsciously used towards a clear goal or purpose, rather than for frivolity's sake. Collinson's (2002) discussion of managerialist views of humour has pointed out some of

the perils of the functionalist perspective, in particular treating humour as a 'safety valve' overlooks the asymmetries in power and the complexities in humour. Many functionalist theories mentioned assume that humour is firstly quantifiable, for instance in the number of jokes told, the number of smiles or laughs produced or a categorisation of persons telling the joke by rank, race or gender. Again this fails to recognise the complexity of humour, where the meaning is often purposely ambiguous and needs to be interpreted by the recipient. Secondly, they tend to adopt a managerialist perspective, by either assuming humour is 'good' because it enables employees to communicate more effectively leading to greater profitability (Barsoux, 1993), or alternatively that humour is 'bad' due to its potential to subvert management policies (for example Romero and Pescosolido, 2008). These studies explore how humour can be contained or utilised towards a more productive organisation, rather than considering the wider sociological reasons which may influence its use.

While functionalist studies may be overly optimistic about the use of humour, critical studies tend to focus on humour as a form of conflict and resistance. Key studies include Rodriguez and Collinson (1995) and Taylor and Bain (2003), who discuss how humour can be an effective expression of resistance, especially when formal, collective protest is denied or silenced. Both studies focus on the relation of humour to collective resistance. However, these studies can be criticised for their strong emphasis on resistance and 'humour as emancipation', that is, from the repression of management. While humour can of course have a subversive quality, this may attribute too much importance to its ability to engender change, which even in these works is not supported. Taylor and Bain (2003: 1489) in particular claim to investigate "the relationship between union organizing and humour at the informal, workplace level." However they neglect to consider that all employees use humour, including managers, as a more basic aspect of organisational life. This is probably partially due to their selection of companies utilising a 'low trust', 'high regulation' regime of control, where direct control, denial of 'any employee 'voice'' and repression of unionisation resulted in collective employee misbehaviour.

In these studies humour can be seen as an active, collective action against management using explicit forms of control. They neglect to consider how humour may function against more subtle forms of control and where there is a lack of collective resistance. More importantly, Taylor and Bain's findings based on resistance seem to minimize the ways in which humour is a

more fundamental mode of organising, as suggested by Mulkay. Even when Taylor and Bain (2003) discuss using humour as a relief from boredom and routine, they then return to the idea that this behaviour was intended to reinforce group dynamics against management values.

This can be compared to Warren and Fineman's (2007) view of humour as part of the fabric of organisational life. In their case study, when management attempted to manage humour and play, employees had a mixed reaction, partially supporting the managers' initiatives but also feeling patronised and as a result subverting the culture. They offer a more nuanced view, exploring how humour both supports and subverts the corporate culture. Despite my critique of Taylor and Bain's analysis finding resistance everywhere, a critical perspective which recognises power dynamics is needed to counter the overly positive perspective of management texts. It is likely that when employees use humour it is somewhere between these perspectives, at times humour is 'useful' for employees and management to improve work activities, at times it is subversive, questioning 'serious' aspects of organisations in a playful manner. At other times humour may serve no purpose at all, but is simply there as human playfulness. Understanding how humour as a form of play is intrapersonal and constitutes who we are, rather than simply an active act of resistance to management, needs a research design which investigates it as part of the 'everyday life' of organisations. Therefore a fuller approach than those used by these authors could capture humour as an act of resistance, while recognising how this resistance is more subtle than in the active, collective and individual organised acts of resistance. In particular it needs to respond to the new forms of control, which call for new forms of resistance (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). In their discussion of the consumer as rebel, they draw on De Certeau's work to discuss how tactics of defiance are characterised by their *uses* as distinctly different from those intended by the producer. It calls for a research design which recognises humour as a method of resistance to management's more subtle initiatives to control the meaning of 'fun' and play at work.

While supporting the view that humour plays an important role in organisational culture, several researchers have begun to investigate humour as a process in organisations. For example Hay (2000) has noted humour can be used to express gender as 'situated' and 'dynamic' rather than simply an outcome of fixed structures. Viewing humour as a process

suggests a move to examining how humorous interactions are integral for participants' organisation of themselves and others as part of the 'everyday' fabric of the organisation. In many ways humour can be seen as a process of sense making and used to express the ambiguities and contradictions facing employees in modern organisations (Hatch, 1997; Warren and Fineman, 2007). This may suggest that humour has multiple goals or purposes, can be both subversive and helpful to management, and requires a more subjective understanding of the sense-making of meaning for participants engaged in it. Capturing this sense making in research is difficult, especially when using methods which simply analyse the content of humour while ignoring the context. As a result of the complexity of humour, a method which captures the context and the process is needed to understand how humour is part of everyday organisational life.

This research builds on ethnographic studies which gather employees' experiences of humour through the use of observation and interview data (Collinson, 1988; 2002; Pollert, 1981; Warren and Fineman, 2007). Like Warren and Finemen, Collinson (2002) positions humour as part of the social fabric of organisations. Drawing on a range of studies, he offers a critical understanding of power relations and complexities of managing humour, noting how:

> In seeking to manufacture humour, managers might actually suppress it. Conversely, in attempting to suppress humour, those in power may unintentionally provoke it (Collinson, 2002: 282).

Teasing out such contradictory and uncontrollable tendencies recognises that employees maintain agency in how to use humour in 'fun' corporate cultures. Previous studies have suggested that workplace humour can play a central role in how we constitute and express identities, especially as part of our inter-subjective collective identities. For example Collinson's (1988; 2002) influential work analysed the production of masculinity in shop floor humour and in management humour. Through humour, the employees' masculine identities could be accomplished by positioning themselves against others, forming women as objects instead of subjects and disciplining appropriate behaviour for the group. Alternatively, Pollert's (1981) analysis of a predominantly female factory noted the importance of femininity, sexuality and humour in how employees constructed a gendered self. Again humour was

explicitly used to form cohesive groups, which included using sexual humour against the male managers. Both of these authors study workplaces which are predominantly single sex and where humour is a method of constructing a sense of self against management initiatives.

One of the reasons for this unmanageable and uncontrollable nature of humour is that humour is a process which is ambiguous by nature: its meaning is often unclear and needs to be interpreted by the recipients. Humorous processes can be seen as consisting of multiple elements: the joke, the process of joking and finally the reaction created in the recipient and the joke teller. Firstly, jokes as objects are an expression of the humour itself, creating the 'humorous turn' through the mechanism of irony, satire, parody or mimicry. Jokes also operate within a particular context which provides meaning. Secondly, humour's success requires the communication of the joke, or in layman's terms, the process of 'being funny'. This entails that humour must be conveyed and shared, making it necessarily an essentially social practice. Finally, the purpose of humour is to invoke an emotional response once it is shared. This may be as simple as amusement, but also may involve many other complicated feelings and emotions (an example may be feeling included in a social group, or in contrast excluded, creating such emotions as resentment and shame). This means that humour needs to be studied as a social process, not only exploring the nature of the joke and the context in which it is told, but also investigating the relations between individuals, and the relation of humour to the emotions evoked within employees.

One of the methods of viewing how we construct our social reality is through the humorous exchanges we share with others. I would argue along with theorists like Mulkay (1998) that humour is particularly important in the construction of our social realities, because of the role it plays in exposing ambiguities and contradictions. These contradictions may be particularly apparent in workplaces where aspects of management control are felt: for instance Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) and Collinson (1988) discuss elements of both dissent and consent in workplace humour. In both cases, management exerted control, while workers used humour in their negotiation of self, creating a simultaneous dissent and consent. Warren and Fineman's (2007) study also notes conflicting emotions towards organisationally managed humour which may result from the appreciation of management initiatives to make work enjoyable while simultaneously manoeuvring employees into the role of 'fun' employees.

It is not just employees who use humour to express the contradictions of managing: research into management's use of humour notes contradictions which arise out of their position as both an employee and a representative of the company's interests (Collinson, 2002; Hatch, 1997). Hatch's (1997) discussion of irony demonstrates how it can be used to express the nature of management as lying in contradiction. While the management team in her account were encouraged to speak 'positively', their frustration with processes meant their emotions were negative. Through the use of irony they could speak 'positively' by using irony to demonstrate the contradictions of 'positive thinking'. Humour appears to have a role in both questioning the status quo but also in maintaining it, for example by noting incongruities but not overturning them, as Fox's (1990) ethnography of humour in semi-structured (formal) environments of a lecture theatre neatly points out. In this study it is the existence of seriousness in humour which demonstrates the inconsistencies and incongruities arising from multiple realities, where the lecturer is made fun of for repeating a whole lecture from earlier in the term. These inconsistencies of the serious mode need to be 'glossed over' through such mechanisms as humour (Fox, 1990). In other words, through humour inconsistencies can be spoken about in a way which played with reality, making the lecturer and other classmates question their memory, and altering the form of interaction occurring.

These contradictions are very prevalent in 'fun' corporate cultures. Employees are supposed to be experimental, yet recognise that they are measured on their performance. They are also supposed to be 'authentic' to their own identity, but are judged on their ability to match the corporate ideal of a participative, playful and happy employee. Inevitably at times these dynamics will conflict: experiments go wrong by their very nature and employees have a range of emotions, moods and moments when they do not agree with proposed activities. Denying these aspects would require employees to be machine-like in their attitudes and behaviours (Morgan, 2006). One of the interesting possible contradictions is the highly sexualised elements of 'fun' corporate cultures: employees are allowed to be themselves, including flirting and having relationships with other employees (Fleming, 2006). However, this does not extend to actually engaging in sexual activity at work or to demonstrating sexual behaviours which are against the law such as sexual harassment. This careful line between permissible sexual behaviour and non-permissible interaction is demonstrated through the process of humour: the establishment of gendered identities and boundaries create appropriate, gendered behaviours.

Sexuality and humour

It would be challenging to study humour without acknowledging how humour frequently draws on individual or collective notions of sexuality, with humour as a particularly powerful mechanism in the expression of sexuality (and sexual dominance). Collinson and Collinson (1996)'s study for example demonstrates the way sexual harassment is easily excused as 'just a joke'. However sexuality is not only seen in supposedly 'negative' humour which dominates and intimidates, but also in 'positive' humour which builds connections between individuals. Burrell's (1984; 1992) examination of sexuality at work advocates that sexuality has a long history of being prevalent in organisation, as opposed to either non-existent or excluded in the legal-rational authority conceptualised in bureaucracy (Burrell, 1984). However Burrell later noted that with increased culture management, academics would see an increase in sexuality or at least pseudo sexuality being used at work, as "management consultants have realised in the last few years that the liberation of creativity requires the unlocking of pleasure" (Burrell, 1992: 69a). Unfortunately, while Burrell (1992a) suggests a re-eroticization of organisations, one where sexuality is not being utilised towards organisational goals, this does not seem to have occurred. Instead the concept of sexual labour has become prevalent, and the body and the production of pleasure for consumers as a commodity to be exploited. Warhurst and Nickson (2009) developed a model to discuss the shift from employers focusing on emotional labour to the aesthetic, sexualized labour performed by employees and the shift from employees utilising their sexuality for their own personal benefits without management engagement to organisations using employees' sexuality towards the institutional goals and aims.

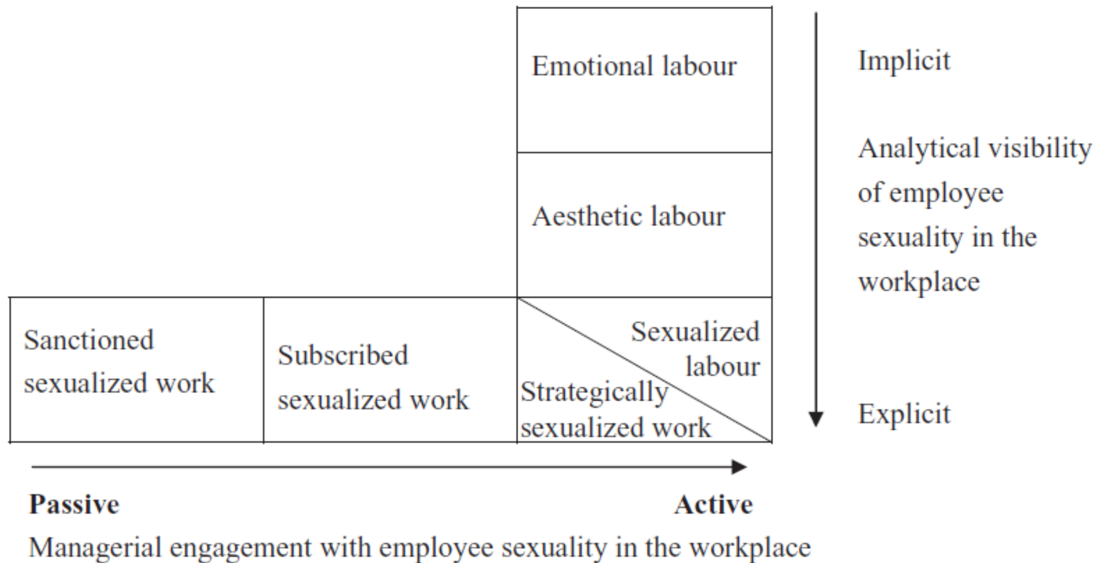


Figure 1: The double shift in employee sexuality in interactive services

Warhurst and Nickson (2009: 399)

In the vertical aspect of this diagram, the original focus has been on the feelings of employees and controlling the feelings of clients towards organisational aims. However, the aesthetic and sexual corporality of employees' labour has been more recently acknowledged within the literature suggesting that these aspects have been implicitly, and increasingly explicitly, managed in organisations. On the horizontal axis, the change reflects the level of management's involvement in the sexuality of employees. On the left, the utilisation of sexuality through aesthetic labour by employees towards their own gains, as Warhurst and Nickson (2009: 392) point out "to get in, get on and get off": or in other words, to be enticing as potential employers, to progress within their position and to have sexual engagements with other employees. In this axis, managers range from implicitly accepting this sexualised labour, to giving their approval, to actively incorporating sexuality into their corporate strategy. Utilising sexuality as a corporate strategy, as Warhurst and Nickson argue, is rare but seen in organisations such as Hooters where the corporate strategy is to 'sell' the waitresses' embodied sexuality through dress and behaviours.

Studies of sexuality as an organisational reality are often conducted as ethnographic studies, such as Pollert (1981)'s analysis of factory life for women and Collinson's (1988) study on

masculinity mentioned in the previous section. Mulkay (1998) describes the 'dirty joke' which portrays women in terms of a sexual object for men's gratification. The 'dirty joke' can be seen within organisations especially in situations when sexual humour is institutionalised. For example in Collinson and Collinson's (1996) ethnography of sexual joking certain male members of staff used sexual joking in the form of harassment of female sales employees. Behaviours such as surprising women in the toilets, walking into meetings with his flies undone and on occasion taking his penis out to embarrass female staff were excused as 'It's only Dick' (the man's pseudo-name), inferring that because these behaviours could be excused as long as the female staff 'knew how to handle him'. On the other hand Sanders' (2004) ethnographic study of sex workers in the UK provides an enlightening insight into how sex workers experience their sexuality as being a commodity, through using sexualised joking to shape the emotions around selling sex, client interactions and support networks with colleagues. For example the sex workers often used 'coded joking' which took place in front of the client, but without them noticing. It included laughing about the client's requests or one employee making joking gestures to another employee while the client was not looking. These studies used ethnographic methods to access the level of joking which was 'behind' the scenes of everyday life in these organisations. The use of humour in these contexts is not supposed to be seen by the client, and uses 'coded language' to express humour which is not intended to be understood by others.

Ethnography is a useful method for studying humour within organisations, as the numerous studies above have demonstrated. Humour often has a subterranean position within organisational culture, expressed at particular moments for a particular audience. Ethnographic explorations include both observing the humour in its everyday enactment and also interviewing and discussing the events with those involved. In that sense, it attempts to find out how and why the humour used is meaningful for those involved. It positions humour as a cultural text which can be explored in order to understand the culture. However, humour is also a dynamic process, drawing on shared understandings, recreating these through humour and also altering them as jokes develop and change in the context. The following section discusses cultural production in order to develop how this process occurs, and what it can tell us about the dynamic nature of humour and culture in organisations. The concept of 'having fun' at work brings an interesting context within which the humour is occurring, constituting and reconstituting the culture as dynamic and changeable.

Cultural production

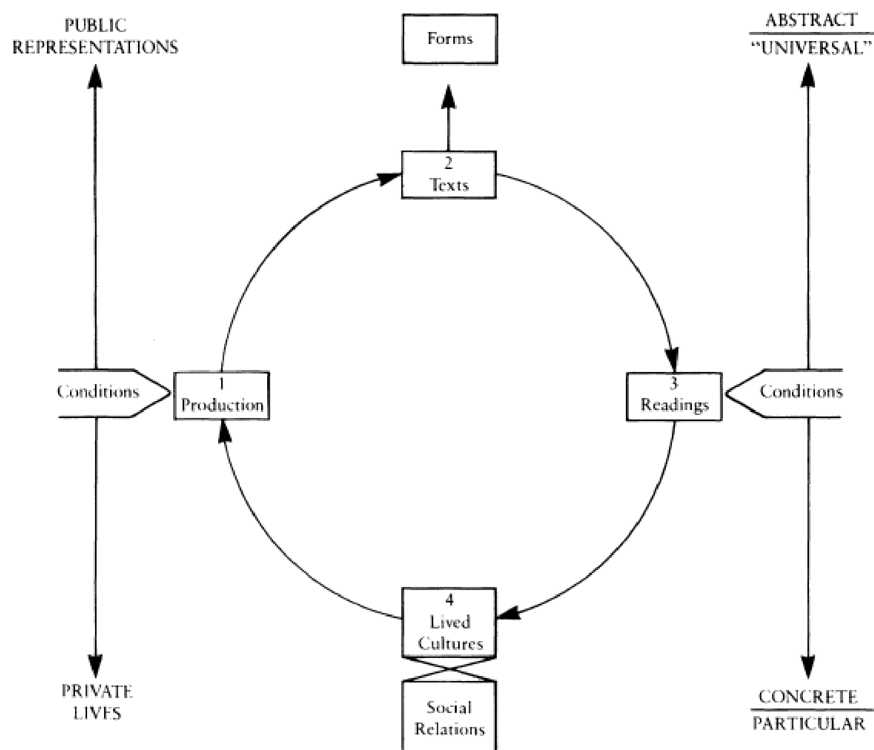
Organisational culture can be compared to cultural theory more generally, by examining the production and consumption of meaning through cultural texts. If organisational culture can be framed as part of culture more generally, the way that culture is conceptualised, produced and consumed is important for understanding how 'fun' corporate cultures work. In particular it creates an opportunity to consider how 'fun' corporate cultures are experienced, but also produced and consumed, and then reproduced and consumed again in a dynamic process within everyday life.

Framing culture from a social constructivist perspective allows for the creation, maintenance and alterations of culture to be explored. Culture more traditionally has been thought about as either the 'arts' or 'mass culture', the social expression of creativity which is supposed to state something about 'who we are'. Adorno's (1991) influential work was one of the first to recognise the importance of mass culture, and how cultural production is a central tenet of capitalism itself. For Adorno mass culture created false needs which could then be satisfied through standardised and unsophisticated products, rather than allowing workers to produce in a fulfilling and non-alienated manner. Culture for Adorno then is much more pervasive, discussing a social mentality which is concerned with instant, easy gratification. Thinking about corporate culture in this manner may be useful to think about how it is both produced and consumed.

This concept was elaborated in his essay on 'Free Time' (1991) in which Adorno notes the integrated relationship between supposedly 'work time' and 'free time', where free time is used to first rejuvenate the worker but also to spend the worker's earnings and energies into 'pseudo-activities' providing a false sense of productiveness. It is an argument that we consume work and 'leisure time' in a similar manner, and that both are used to perpetuate the capitalist system. Although Adorno was writing well before the rise of 'fun' corporate culture management, authors such as Fleming and Spicer (2004) draw on his work to note how "aspects of workplace culture like the work ethic, industrial efficiency and paternalism subtly pervade other aspects of society including places of leisure, the domicile and even intimate relations". The early paternalistic factories of Cadbury's and New Lanark in the United

Kingdom, and Ford in the US provide examples of management's attempts to regulate employees' behaviours, beliefs and morals outside of work as well as within (Davis, 1996; Zhang et al, 2008). If 'work' and 'fun' are not conceptualised as opposites, and if 'fun' is equally as managed and organised in 'non-work' time, then the extension of fun to work spaces operates within the sphere of capitalism, not in opposition to it. It suggests that corporate culture, and the production and consumption of it, should be contextualised within the wider capitalist system in which it operates.

While Adorno's theory is useful for noting that the institutions of capitalism have a role in the production of corporate culture, its limitation is that it does not discuss *how* institutions are able to produce meaning through culture. In order to understand how culture is a social construction, it is necessary to understand the process of the production and consumption of cultural texts. Johnson (1986) brought considerable insight into the production of mass cultures through exploring how culture is both produced and consumed, within a circular relationship of cultural production (see diagram below):



Johnson (1986: 47)

For Johnson, the production of culture occurs through the production and interpretation of texts which move from the abstract 'universal' culture to the individual 'particular' culture. Within this, texts (in their broadest sense as 'cultural products') on the left of the circle, must be conceptualised and produced, moving the text into the public and opening it to interpretation as it takes both a material and an abstract form. This moves it to be interpreted through readings of the text which move it away from the public (and abstract) to a more private (and concrete), situated or contextual form. Once read, texts then move to being incorporated into an individual's everyday experience as lived cultures. Texts become a method of organising everyday experiences and in particular social relations. We build shared meanings into the texts, and use them to interpret our private lives. They become a collection of meanings which reflect culture, sub-cultures and counter-cultures. Finally, this lived experience becomes a circular influence on the production of existing and new cultural texts.

Corporate culture can be understood within this framework, noting how culture within organisations is influenced both by the producers of the culture and the interpretation of those texts. It may be that management in many circumstances conceptualises an idea of a 'fun' culture (perhaps to solve current organisational problems such as low morale) and produces texts such as mission statements which state how certain aspects are key to the corporate culture. However, employees who consume the texts need to interpret these and assess them compared to their everyday experience of the organisation. This reading would then feed back into the production of future texts, such as games employees may be organised into playing. Employees may produce their own cultural texts, such as 'playing' in ways not envisioned by the dominant corporate culture. The dynamics of the production of meaning within corporate culture can thus be explored through this recognition of different interests, different interpretations and an emphasis on the importance of context and on the production and consumption of culture as a dynamic social (organisational) process.

In order to understand Johnson's model, Hall (2001) elaborates on how texts are encoded and decoded with meaning. In the diagram on the next page, Hall incorporates this process into the production of television, although this can apply to the production of cultural texts more generally.

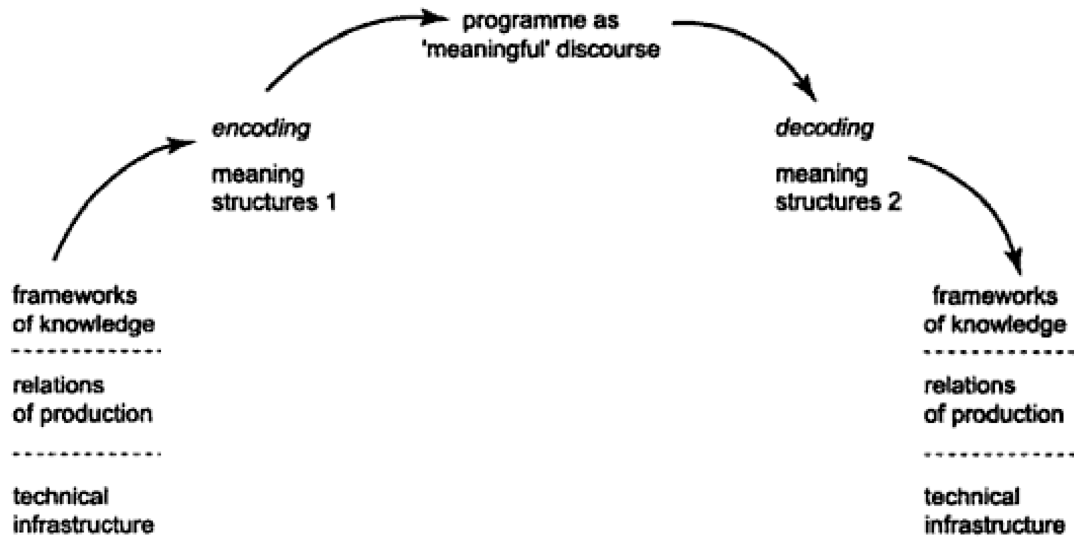


Figure 1

Hall (2001: 68)

In this diagram we can see the 'message form', the mode of symbolic exchange of meaning as 'the programme as 'meaningful' discourse'. On the left are the influences which shape this meaning: the historical and structural factors, as well as wider socio-cultural elements, which impact on the production of meaning. His significant contribution in this model is that the moments of production (encoding) and consumption/interpretation (decoding) are distinct, although related. In between the two, discourse takes on materiality, in this case audio and visual discourses, of which the meaning needs to be decoded at the moment of consumption. As is evident from the diagram, this can mean that there can actually be two meaning structures (one when it is encoded and a separate one when it is decoded), resulting in possible 'misunderstanding' or distortions. As a result of the differences which arise in the space between encoding and decoding, Hall identifies three possibilities decoding may take. The first, *hegemonic/dominant*, is where the dominant code which is used in the encoding is accepted and then used in decoding, in other words the meaning of the text is 'transparent' and read as intended. The second, *negotiated*, is where the meaning in the dominant code of encoding text may be understood, but is altered to fit with local practices and experiences. This pragmatic interpretation recognises that inconsistencies exist between the presentation of meaning in the text and the reality of the social world. In other words a negotiated reading:

> Acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule. (Hall, 2001: 175)

As a result contradictions between the dominant and the negotiated meanings are treated as 'misunderstandings' and as a result ignores these inconsistencies through making exceptions. Finally, within *oppositional* readings, the viewer may understand but reject the dominant discourses. This is because the decoding is conducted within an alternative frame of reference, resulting in a struggle between different meanings. Linking the oppositional reading back to Johnson's model, this may result in alternative cultural texts being created which open up space for different meanings to be made public.

These discourses are of course also influenced by the wider socio-cultural and political aspects of, in this case, Western capitalist cultures. Western socio-cultural norms have begun, through other cultural texts such as government papers, newspapers, academic and 'scientific' articles, and documentaries in the forms of books, television and movies, to question the nature of work and impact of the effects such as stress on our more general wellbeing. As such these discourses are encoded with meaning that work should be fun, and result in management producing cultural texts ranging from employee handbooks, corporate away days and office decorations. What such texts share is that they shape employees' behaviours and activities, through encouraging employees to identify with the organisational goals. Employees however need to consume these discourses, and in doing so decode their meaning. As Hall points out this can produce a different meaning than may have been encoded, as employees understand these discourses from their own historical, political and culture perspectives.

The degree to which they accept the text or not depends on how it sits with their own social experience. As a result a person does not take an oppositional reading of a text because they do not understand the 'preferred reading', but rather because they do not agree with the code of the text. On the other hand, if the preferred reading of the text does match, and as a result seems 'natural' and 'transparent', or common sense, then the reader is more likely to accept it. Depending on their interpretation of the text, they then may make different uses of the

culture as fun discourses within their lived experience of work. This is where I envision the use of humour, within the social relations which interpret culture and express it in lived experiences, and feed back into the production of discourses on fun. It is part of the enacted 'lived' experience of work, which needs to be produced and reproduced in order to have salience.

This thesis uses these two models to understand the production of play and humour in fun corporate cultures. However the models are of course not without their limitations. The strongest limitation is that they suppose the production of meaning within cultural texts is unified towards one meaning. In focusing on the multiple readings of the text, they overlook the fact that the organisation is not a thinking entity but requires the input of multiple persons, in particular managers, to conceptualise a cultural text with what appears to be a singular meaning. This production of meaning therefore may not be as singular as supposed; there may be, for instance, intended different meanings within the same text. Also, Hall's theory discusses three possible readings of the texts, but there may be other possibilities of ways in which we can interpret meaning (for example an apathetic reading may simply refuse to engage with the meaning of the text). Another weakness is that while Hall notes frames of reference for decoding texts, he does not explain why individuals in the same context may interpret the texts differently. In other words his model assumes that individuals decode texts solely on the basis of their environment. It does not account for individual preference, choice, or even experience which may alter how they view the text. While 'choice' may be a difficult concept in post-structuralist models of social interaction, Hall's model risks assuming that those who interpret the text only do so in a mechanistic, rationalised and reasoned approach. There may be different forms of pragmatic interpretations, for example, with different rationales for adopting a pragmatic reading. This is compounded by his lack of explanation of why those decoding the texts may choose to skim over inconsistencies. Exploring individual differences, such as employees' sense of self, their identity and their emotions may help to understand why so many differences in decoding occur.

This methodology aims to capture these inconsistencies and how employees may use different 'readings' of the cultural text. In particular it positions the use of humour within these organisations as a tactic (De Certeau, 1984) used by employees to create space for their own

meaning. It thus needed a combination of methods which examined both the strategies of corporate cultures and at the consumption and production of meaning by employees as a dynamic, interactive and often improvised process. The research explored humour in particular, but also wanted to be mindful of the context of the organisations. As a result, it utilised a critical ethnography to be witness to the experiences of employees within 'fun' organisations. The next section explains this choice and how critical ethnography can be used to explore the use of humour in organisations.

Methods of data collection

When researching humour, there is a longstanding "recognition that unearthing workers' humour requires the researchers to dig beneath the organizational surface" (Taylor and Bain, 2003: 1489). Humour, especially when it is subversive, can be a form of organizational misbehaviour, and it is likely that employees would hide such behaviour from management and other outsiders, including researchers (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Researchers may be seen as 'instruments of management' attempting to access the inner worlds of employees for further exploitation. While this was certainly not my intention, I was asked to give feedback to management which could force my research into this position. A method therefore which could gain trust while being honest about the use of the information was essential to accessing humour. Otherwise I would risk simply accessing a superficial level of the corporate culture and missing possible criticism and cynicism. This tricky position of researching humour led me to agree with the observation made by Taylor and Bain that to:

> Acquire data on, and develop insights into workplace humour, it is necessary to access the rich fabric of social interaction between workers, and between workers and managers. Researchers must acquire an intimate knowledge of an organization's 'underlife' and gain a high degree of trust from workers (Taylor and Bain, 2003: 1491).

They propose that having one view of an organisation is inefficient, where a more holistic multidimensional approach is more likely to uncover this hidden aspect of organisational life.

Within their study they researched two organisations: one using an ethnographic study of seven months involving observation and informal interviews, and a second study of a different organisation using formal 'off-site' interviews, transcripts of frequent meetings of a group, and follow-up interviews with key informants used to reflect on changes.

Many studies of humour in organisations have used ethnographic methods, especially to analyse the hidden aspect of organisational subcultures or counter-cultures (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Forester (1999) has pointed out that the point of a critical ethnography is to reveal the multi-layered complexity of power relations. This is in opposition to defining concretely a particular method or tool, but instead a method which aims to examine socially constructed meanings which shape the construction of our identity. As Van Maanen states in the debate between ethnography and critical theory, the process of ethnographic observation as discourse is:

> an ongoing dialectic between the researched and the researcher in which ideally a sort of hermeneutic circle develops such meanings are worked out for the materials that will eventually compose the ethnography (Putnam et al, 1993: 223).

In this debate, ethnography and critical theory are positioned as opposites, with ethnography claiming to represent culture in text and critical theory being underpinned by the analysis of power relations. The debate concludes with several differences between the positions: the way representations and meaning is established within the data, the goals of the research, the role of theory in influencing empirical data collection and finally the manner and standards by which data reports should be judged. However the debate also comes to the conclusion that both sides can learn from each other, and that "critical ethnography represents a new genre of research rather than simple an integration of opposing positions" (Putnam et al, 1993: 234). This idea of a *critical ethnography*, an alternative perspective of research juxtaposing different elements of each approach, is utilised in this research to view how respondents found meaning within their work while recognising the power dynamics embedded in the discourses.

One of the advantages of a critical ethnography as opposed to traditional ethnography is that it allows for the researcher to take a critical view of the data. According to Thomas (1993) being critical in ethnographic research involves framing the research in terms of injustices and control; being sceptical of data and information; de-familiarizing oneself from established ways of thinking; looks at language in regard to power; reflecting on the researcher's involvement in the data; and looking at the broader relevance of the reading to say 'so what?'. Authors such as Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 77) have been critical of traditional ethnographic accounts of corporate culture, noting: "students of corporate culture suffer from a lack of imagination... Too much of corporate life is often too familiar and researchers do not always succeed in making the familiar strange." Using a critical ethnography involves stepping back from the organisation of power relations which are embedded within capitalism in order to make this 'familiar strange', in other words: "achieving distance and critical perspective on things too easily seen as normal, natural and rational" (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 200). The data is thus contextualised through a reflexive process which takes into consideration the position of the participants, the organisation and the researcher. It is the dialogue which is established within the hermeneutic circle of understanding which explores meaning at various levels. Linstead (1997: 86) states that this is accomplished through:

> the constant exposure to the other, the constant revalidation of descriptions and accounts against the perceptions of the studied group, and the constant reflexive scrutiny of the anthropologist/author's role in relation to the accounts generated.

The Other thus plays an important part within the research. Recognising how employees are constituted as a subject required a comparison to the other, that which the employee (and the researcher) is not. It also necessitates that the perceptions of the group are validated and not taken as read, and how these perceptions are formulated through the discourses of the organisation. The perspective of the researcher is also important in this process, recognising their own construction of reality within the organisation and how this affects the data being collected. The end product, while trying to remain faithful to the accounts provided by participants and to the researcher's own experience, is not a reproduction of that experience, never completely capturing the rich data which was collected. Linstead (1993; 1997) points out

critical ethnographies can combine a wide range of techniques, from linguistics for recognising jargon, using audio-recording and field notes within observation, or occasionally quantitative techniques, depending on the context and nature of the group being studied. The approach entails a critical reflection on the part of the research and the use of multiple tools to engage with the different layers of meaning created.

There are still many studies of humour that follow a positivist perspective, however. Authors such as Holmes (2000) and Hay (2000) use ethnographic methods among interviews within a functionalist paradigm aiming to categorise and label the many roles humour plays within social relations, while authors such as Avolio et al (1999) and Romero and Pescosolido (2008) use models and surveys to view humour as a moderator of leadership effectiveness and group effectiveness. This approach fits with the objectivist ethnographic perspective, which assumes the author can represent an accurate reflection of reality (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). However there are critical ethnographies which question whether it is both feasible and desirable for the researcher's observations to be viewed as a neutral account of 'reality'. For instance in Collinson's (1992) study of the shop floor construction of subjectivity through masculinity and humour, he noted that positivist methods would only constrain the areas of interest the research could take, so that:

> Only a more open-ended methodology that encourages research respondents to define their own reality can be flexible enough to begin to explore the lived and subjective experience of organizational and social life (Collinson, 1992: 233).

As a result, Collinson used a combination of observation, formal interviewing and informal interviewing within a variety of locations both in and outside work which aimed to expose silenced voices, in this case the male workers of the organisation. Through using this combination of methods, he analyses the importance of humour in establishing employees' masculinity, which was accomplished through positioning women as the Other. Humour became one method in which this process occurred.

A thorough exploration of humour entails distinguishing between three key elements in the exchange: humour as a social mechanism, the emotional reaction of amusement and the process of being humorous (as set up in Chapter Three). As I was studying everyday activities in these organisations, I expected that situational humour (spontaneous humour used within conversation) would be particularly important as part of the fabric of social interactions (Boxer and Cortes-Conde, 1997). In this case, humour is context specific and is socially constructed by both the speaker and the listener through laughter, silences and other verbal or body recognition. This may especially be the case when through dialogue employees explore their understandings, the contradictions of organisation life and propose alternative perspectives. However as several studies have shown, often 'canned' humour or generic humour without context such as jokes told verbally or visually, can also be essential to workplaces (Leap and Smeltzer, 1984; Rodriguez and Collinson, 1995; Boxer and Cortes-Conde, 1997; Taylor and Bain, 2003). As a result and as I outline below, my methods aimed to collect both the discourses of 'fun' told through conversation and those expressed through other cultural products such as emails, pictures and personal workplace artefacts.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection

My research was conducted through the case study techniques of observation, diaries and semi-structured interviews. Since the aim of the research was to capture instances of humour within fun organisations from the experience of employees, my analysis explored how employees viewed humour, and experienced it emotionally within the organisational context. Because of this, the case studies were ethnographic in nature. I positioned myself within the daily life of the organisation, sitting in the workplace, attending meetings, joining in jokes and talking to employees about their experiences. In particular the research was conducted through critical ethnography allowing employees to speak for themselves rather than simply listening to the totalising accounts of management (Alvesson and Wlillmott, 1992). The purpose of using critical ethnography was to get underneath the simplistic explanation of 'fun' as always a positive experience. Within the analysis, a thematic analysis technique then allowed me to understand how the discourses of 'fun' were produced and reproduced within

the humorous exchanges, while also acknowledging the power relations behind these discourses.

It is necessary to study humour within its context (Mulkay, 1988; Speer, 2005). However, relying on the spoken word could potentially distance humour from its physical surroundings. This study therefore aimed to integrate the social, material and embodied aspects of humour through three methods: observation, interviews and a diary 'Humour Log'. Through a narrative approach, participants were encouraged to develop their own stories of humorous events as they experienced them. Finally I also analysed organisational texts and made use of photographs (where permitted) in order to capture a visual representation of the spaces through which humour is experienced.

A central component of the research was the humour log, which enabled employees to narrate moments of humour (Appendix One, p.323). It did not define humour for the employees, but asked them to record experiences of the workplace and their reactions to events. The participant was requested to complete a log for five days, after which the participant was interviewed about the humour log, other work experiences and the wider organisational culture. Semi-structured interviews were conducted within the company (but away from their workspace and colleagues). Several informal interviews and discussions also occurred outside of the organisation or working hours. In Marketing Inc. it was also possible to interview the participant beforehand, helping to establish rapport, while in Magazine Inc. and Smiley only one interview after the log was feasible. I gained consent from the participants to tape-record the interviews, first for accuracy and secondly, so as the researcher I could participate more fully in the interview. In a few interviews the interviewee did not wish to be recorded and as a result I took notes by hand and it was noticeable that the pausing to write notes detracted from personal rapport being built. As a researcher, using a tape recorder allowed my mind to formulate the next prompt question to continue the conversation instead of splitting my attention between taking part in the conversation and recording the data. After each interview I took notes on my reflections of the interview and in particular noted aspects of the interview which were missed by the recording such as body language, facial expressions, gestures and my own feelings of the tone of the interview.

Data analysis

With the exception of those noted above and with participants' permission, interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were analysed using the phenomenological tradition, although this is not to disregard the complexity of working with ethnographic data. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 77) have noted: "Even if the ethnographer claims that his or her first-hand experiences of the object of study are a strong basis for authority, the text produced is not just a document mirroring something 'out there'." In particular I referred to Hycner's (1985) guidelines on phenomenological analysis of interview data. These guidelines offer a practical guide to analysing interview data for its holistic meaning, while recognising the socially constructed nature of interviews and other data.

The first step was to recognize the researcher's own world view and presuppositions and bracket these from the interview in order to listen to the phenomena present. Bracketing of presuppositions should allow the researcher to be aware of possible influences their perspective may have on the data and attempts to minimise the effect of it on the phenomena. This process was challenging, and probably the biggest problem I faced in practically using this approach. While it is possible to recognise certain predispositions I may have, isolating these from the data was challenging. Additionally there was an appealing aspect to the corporate cultures in the play-at-work values: they are embedded in the concepts of individualism, freedom, pleasure, reduction of authoritarian control and overt discipline which have a positive ideological space within our society. In the end I set aside my research perspective and the common-sense appeal to the best of my ability and attempted to take an open mind to the themes emerging from the data. (This process, while not completely successful, did allow themes to emerge which were unexpected from the research questions, and I will return to this point in the paragraphs below). The second was to listen to the interview for a sense of the whole, rather than focus on the individual units of information. This included remaining open to the phenomena present within the text through paying attention to its holistic meaning, rather than pre-assigning the areas of analysis. This of course opened up the analysis to multiple readings, rather than one 'correct interpretation'. In order to do so, I listened to each interview several times as a whole to gain the overall context before subdividing it for closer analysis.

The third step was to closely scrutinize every line for meaning. When reading the interviews initial thoughts were noted to the side of each quote on how employees appeared to experience the corporate culture. The fourth step was to identify those lines of meaning which are relevant for the research question. Obviously within the interview a wide range of material was covered and it was necessary to decide which data were related to the phenomena of 'fun' corporate cultures. After reading all interviews, it was possible to identify relevant themes, which were contextualised within the holistic meaning of the interviews and observations in the field. This was the fifth stage, where a clustering of relevant themes takes place, leading to the sixth and final stage where themes were attached to each cluster.

The four themes which emerged centred on how employees experienced 'fun' as an essential component of their identity; how emotions were consistently referred to in their discussion of humorous events; how space and the movements through space were essential to understanding the context of the humorous exchanges; and how sexual humour was a prevailing theme in almost all participants' accounts. Bracketing in step one allowed these themes to emerge: for example I was not expecting emotions to be such a prevalent theme in the data. Also there was no prompting of employees to discuss sexuality or sexual joking, yet in all three organisations this theme strongly became visible. A selection of the interviews was then checked by my supervisory panel in order to agree on the themes emerging. The final stage was to contextualise the themes presented. My own observations of conversations, team meetings, lunch time activities, breaks from work, presentations and everyday work activities enriched my understanding, and often allowed me to witness the events described by participants.

Integrating visual methods

It became quickly apparent when I started interviewing that space was perceived as important to how employees interpreted 'have fun' as a corporate value. As a result I felt it would be useful to use visual research methods to capture my impressions of the space, and used photographs to make representations of the materiality of the organisation to analyse material and visual artefacts as data. Just as Dale and Burrell (2008) have noted, organisations often

conceive space to reflect what they hope to express to employees and outsiders about who they are: the organisational identity. This led to the argument that:

> surely a more ‘sensually complete’ methodology than a narrow and limiting focus on those aspects of organization which can be spoken or written down is demanded (Warren, 2002: 230).

As a result, within her ethnographic study of an IT department, Warren made extensive use of photography, especially of employees capturing images, in order that the “photographs add to the verbal data through their imagery” (Warren, 2002: 232). She presented these images not as a form of ‘realistic proof’ of how things were, but instead as an expression of the employees’ view of the organisation.

Capturing these visual elements in my own research allowed for the exploration of materiality of ‘fun’ organisations, and as such in two organisations access was granted to take photographs which, where possible, did not compromise the identities of the organisations or the employees. Unfortunately in the third organisation, because of the size and identity of the organisation, it was not possible to capture images; however written descriptions of the visual elements of the company were carefully noted, as well as research into the design of the building. This limited the ability to have a ‘sensually complete’ methodology (as advocated by Warren) by restricting the visual to my own written descriptions, as an unfortunate but necessary step to gain access to the company. I also collected copies of organisational materials which could be used later in my analysis. The pictures and descriptions of the materiality of the organisation added rich examples of not only how the spaces were designed aesthetically, but also how these ‘fun’ spaces were experienced by employees. Often *where* humour occurred became as important to the research as how it occurred or with whom. However as Warren (2002: 236) noted “photographs are only a partial, fragmented and contextually bound version of reality.” More importantly in my research, they are *my* version of the materiality. Presenting these as some sort of neutral ‘fact’ that backed up what I believed the organisations to be would be unjust, they are simply my own visual impressions of how the organisations and the employees communicated the materiality of a ‘fun’

discourse. However, despite this limitation, they still add a valuable element to the research by communicating aesthetic elements in an alternative method to language.

Sample

Three companies were selected within the creative industries: Smiley, Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc[i]. The companies were selected based on the criteria of 'having fun' as being a key component of the corporate culture, which included being formally recognised in company rhetoric. Two companies were recruited through known contacts within the firms who also acted as key informants, and the third organisation was contacted after I heard about the culture through word of mouth and researched the company on the internet. In the case of the third company where the fun attitude was important for their clients, the company was advertised as being a fun place to work through their company image (for example, one of their logos was a smiling face). In the other two companies they focused on presenting themselves as fun to potential employees rather than the general public. For example, Marketing Inc. took the personality of the potential employee into account when selecting employees, as one employee describes:

> The people who got through [the assessment day] were the more sociable, outgoing personalities, who tend to get along well in a team. If they have all those sort of people it helps with the social things, they want people to participate in things... I think they want it here is that you have to be an all-rounder, you have to be good at numbers, confident and want to present and be interesting (Gina, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

In all three companies, however, behaviour which reflected 'having fun' was formally encouraged and rewarded by senior management and the organisations made an effort to present themselves as open and fun places to work. This often included partaking in group activities such as games, tasks aimed at getting to know each other better, and brainstorming sessions. They also all made an effort to aesthetically design their organisation in a manner which they thought reflected them as 'fun' places and people. Having researched the

companies beforehand, access was negotiated with management, with the aim of the research stated as investigating the experiences of employees within 'fun' corporate cultures. Employees in all organisations were made aware of my presence, and in Magazine Inc. management insisted that all employees agreed to the research before it could be undertaken.

In each organisation employees were selected to participate in the research on a voluntary basis, with access granted from management to approach employees via email or in person. In all three companies key employees were also useful in promoting the research to encourage participation and in introducing me to other employees. In Smiley, three weeks of observation were conducted, and 7 interviews were conducted with 6 employees who all completed humour logs. Within Marketing Inc. four weeks of observation were carried out, 32 interviews were conducted with 19 employees, and 13 of these employees completed a humour log. As Magazine Inc. had a much smaller team of only 12 employees, two weeks of observation, 5 interviews with 3 participants, and 3 humour logs from these employees were completed. In total 44 interviews were conducted, representing a mix of experience, position, age, gender and ethnicity where possible. Informal discussions and observations in the three organisations also meant that I was interacting with a wider distribution of employees than those interviewed.

In recognition of ethical codes, no employees were forced to participate in interviews, but volunteered. This being unavoidable, a degree of bias was expected in the responses, although the demographic biases were in general representative of the organisations researched. Unfortunately in Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc. no participants other than of Caucasian descent were interviewed, while there was one person of Asian descent represented in Smiley. There were only a very small minority of non-caucasian employees in both these organisations, supporting findings by McLeod et al (2009) that the creative industries such as advertising are still dominated by white, middle class (and often male) employees. Magazine Inc. consisted only of female employees as no men working full time were hired on the team (although one informal interview with a man working part-time did occur), while in the other two firms both males and females were interviewed. In all three companies employees of a range of ages and experiences were interviewed, although due to the significantly youthful employee population in Marketing Inc. (one employee, Bea, estimated the average age of employees was in the

range of 22 to 35), this company had more participants (70%) aged 18 to 30 than the other two companies. While details of sexual preference were not actively collected, it became apparent from open conversations that a range of sexual orientations were represented.

Three case studies of 'fun' organizations

Smiley

Smiley is an IT consultancy providing computer and people management training in their London training centre and at client sites. The employees consisted of trainers and 'smoothies'. 'Smoothies' were administrative and sales staff who were allegedly called so because of their office role in making operations run smoothly. Trainers on the other hand could be hired as full time staff or 'associates' who were contracted by the organisations for periods of time or on particular projects. Of the 41 employees hired by the company, 27 were full-time staff, and 14 were part-time staff, with 24 women and 17 men.

The company was founded by Harry Campbell[ii], who acted as a figurehead for the company (see Deal and Kennedy, 1982 on founder cultures). The narrative of the company centred on Harry 'founding' the company around principles that both employees and clients want to learn and develop by having fun. It integrated this belief into a business strategy of trying new approaches and 'celebrating' mistakes. Employees had a share in the profits, and the structure was purposely egalitarian (there was only one manager besides Harry), articulated through self-managing employees who 'defined' their own job role and positions. However employee performance was also tightly monitored in customer and internal 360° appraisals. The corporate culture and its evaluation meant employees were often encouraged to be funny, in order to be perceived positively by the customer and other employees. In common with the other two companies, Smiley made a distinct effort to translate their fun corporate culture into the material aspects of the building. The training centre was brightly decorated, with sofas, tables, company awards and games such as giant Jenga left around for employees and clients to play. Likewise the training rooms, the 'smoothie' office and trainers' office contained 'fun' objects like a glitter ball and toys, as seen in Figure 1: Smoothie office with disco ball and stuffed toys on the following page.

Figure 1: Smoothie office with disco ball and stuffed toys

Marketing Inc.

Marketing Inc. represented the central British office of an international conglomerate specialising in advertising research. The client services department studied was 'bottom heavy' and hired many graduates, resulting in a fairly young, sociable workforce. Most of the work centred on analysing market research results and presenting these to clients.

Two years before the research was undertaken, the company introduced four discursive pillars to reinforce its corporate culture: “Client First”, “Brave and Resourceful”, “Have Fun” and “Stronger Together”. Due to the company’s expansion and growth, management felt the need to endorse these as appropriate behaviour through forming corporate values around them, integrating them into formal ‘fun’ competitions and encouraging and rewarding employees for identifying with them (see Figure 2 for example of a competition posters).

Figure 2: 'Have Fun' Wow awards

The group had expanded to three floors, and was split into three client teams and one specialist services team who supported these with a range of technical skills. The client teams averaged 50 employees per team, while the specialist services team had 25 employees, making the group around 175 employees. There were slightly more females than males represented within the teams, which did lead one male employee to describe the corporate culture as too ‘nice’. New employees were quickly initiated into the company culture, solidifying social relationships. For instance it was not uncommon for employees to socialise and even live with other employees. Employees were organised into ‘pods’ (or small teams allocated to a client with one director allocated to each group) that sat together.

Figure 3: Competition for sales

The four pillars and the corresponding team themes were reinforced during ‘fun’ activities such as team meetings, nominations and awards, and were extensively used to decorate the space and materiality of the organisation (see Figure 3). For instance in the corridor from the entryway the mottos were written on the walls as well as displayed on a television, and were put into posters and decorations of the workspace (see Figure 11: ‘Social Area’ and Figure 12: Workspace in Marketing Inc. with kite designed for ‘Inspiration’ motto on p.199). The floors were brightly decorated, with designated social areas for each team including sofas, televisions and games. Group activities included the pods making posters on the mottos which were then hung up in the pod’s area and ‘fun’ initiatives to promote corporate initiatives. One initiative

which was occurring was the ‘Leave on Time’ sign out sheet, encouraging employees to celebrate when it occurred (see Figure 4).

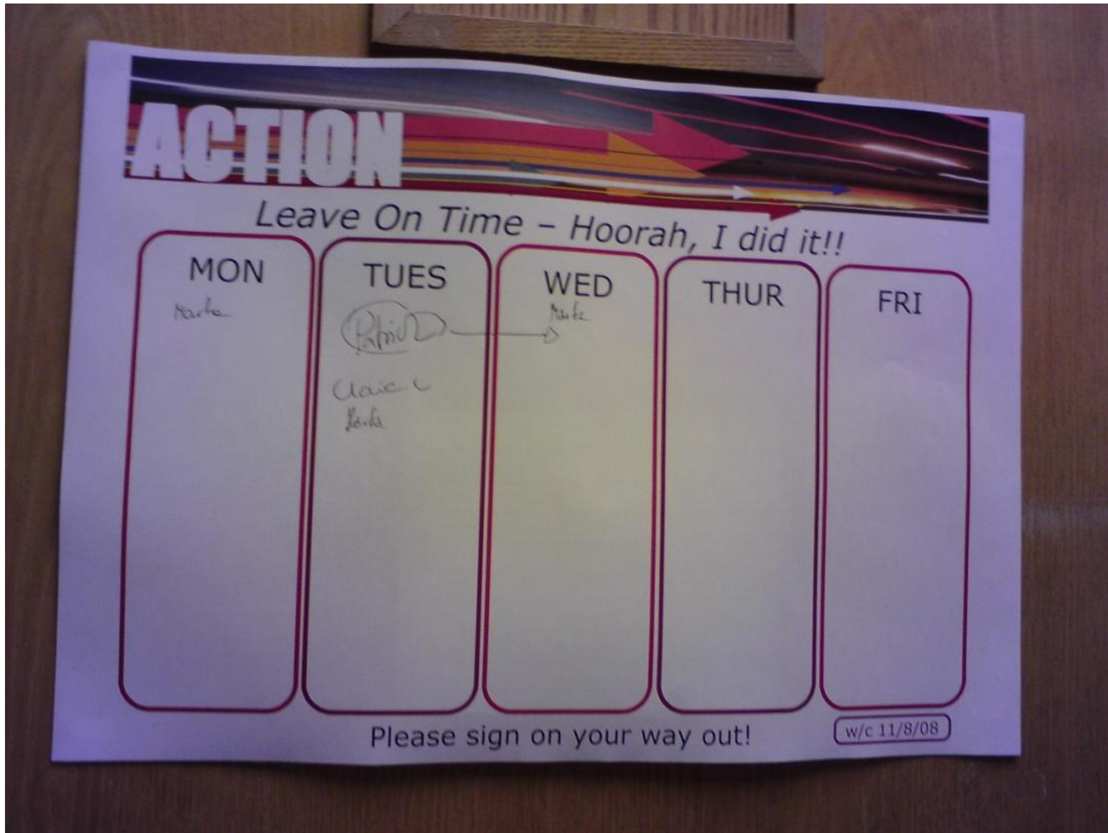


Figure 4: 'Leave on time' signing out sheet

Magazine Inc.

The final case study, Magazine Inc., focused on a smaller, more intimate group of 12 permanent employees working on a magazine aimed at girls aged 7 to 11. The staff were all women, with a mix of ages and experience, although two temporary staff were seen during the research process, one of which was male. The magazine was one of many produced by a larger media corporation based in London. The artistically designed building itself was large, displaying images of the media organisation’s wide range of products. The work area featured posters of celebrities, props used in photo-shoots and blow ups of the magazine’s cover page. Apart from that the workplace was minimalist: for example employees officially ‘hot-desked’ (although in reality employees always used the same desk) and were not encouraged to personalise their workspace. The office was open plan and contained all the magazine units.

The magazine content was based around the themes of friendship, belonging, having fun, growing up and being happy. The magazine at all times was conscious of remaining wholesome and certain topics were not permitted, such as boys, kissing, sex and toilet humour. As well as the theme of friendship, there was a corresponding 'aspirational' theme, focusing on celebrities, pre-teen TV shows and fashion. The editors were very aware of the constraints of writing for a pre-teen audience, and as such they aimed to create a sanitised, happy, conflict-free reality for their readership.

Magazine Inc.'s management focused heavily on overt forms of control. Employees described being very conscious of management and colleagues. There were times when fun was allowed, such as at the beginning and end of work. For example management provided a monthly Friday afternoon drinks trolley, supplying snacks and alcoholic drinks. Other socialising was grabbed at moments in between work as long it did not disturb others or was conducted outside of work hours, for instance in lunches and during after-work socials.

Selection of organisations

As in many case studies, my organisations were selected through a combination of practical and theoretical requirements. Practical concerns included obtaining access to the organisations, which had to be negotiated through contacts, networking or cold calling potential organisations. For example, another company was considered but despite several encouraging engagements access was never granted. The time commitment needed from employees also had to be negotiated, as all the organisations were concerned that the research did not interfere with other commitments. Time given to conduct the research also became important in the final requirement, which was that several of the organisations requested feedback after the research was completed. As a result, the organisations expected the research to be completed in a time frame within which the information would be useful.

The three companies chosen were interesting examples of firms within the creative industries who adopted a 'fun' working culture, aiming to increase motivation and commitment from staff. The creative industries in themselves represent a fairly understudied group (Garnham,

2005), despite accounting for a significant and increasing proportion of the workforce; constituting an estimated 1.97 million jobs within 157,000 businesses in the UK (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010). Of these businesses, it is unclear how many adopt 'fun' corporate cultures. Studies of the informal cultural practices of the creative industries suggest that fun and play are already important. The study conducted by Nixon and Crewe (2004) of male-oriented magazine publishing and advertising agencies portrays the importance of self-identity in the dress, fashionable drinking locations, the sexualisation of women and identification with a risk-taking lifestyle. Likewise in the study by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 174) they note:

> There is a great deal of camaraderie and fun involved in working together on a television show – pub lunches, shared jokes, team drinks after work, dancing in Soho bars, discussing the sexual merits of good-looking contributors.

The existence of 'fun', humour and sexual banter in these industries is not a new phenomenon therefore, and as the authors suggest is integral to the process of production through the creation of camaraderie. However, this study is concerned with the organisations' role in forming 'fun' opportunities for those in the creative industries to enhance their productivity.

The motivation for using 'fun' corporate cultures is often linked to the promotion of creativity in organisations (see for example Stewart and Simmons' *The Business Playground,* 2010). This may make it logical to assume that play may be linked to creativity in organisations, and that creative industries represent the optimal location to investigate creativity. Bilton (2007), concerned with the management of creativity, notes that there is a romanticised myth of the creative worker as a self-motivated creative employee. He argues that in practice a process of boundaries and constraints exist in creative work, a release of operational control and an increased centralisation of strategic control. However Clark (2009) demonstrates that not all work in creative industries is creative, and that creative work is not limited to the creative industries. Instead, McKinley and Smith (2009) discuss how creative labour is unique not in the content of their work as more or less creative than others, but in the relations to the means of production. In the creative industries, the product and the worker are more closely linked than in many industries. This is because they are more likely to own the means of production (their

artistic talent or learnt skills in applying this to the product) which cannot be easily reproduced. In addition, the product is closely linked to their individual identity and reputation (McKinley and Smith, 2009). This suggests that workers within this industry may be harder to control, as they are more able than other workers to remove a key aspect of production if they leave the organisation. As a result employers need to engage with their workforce rather than replacing or displacing them (McKinley and Smith, 2009; Bilton, 2007; Flew, 2005). Considering the particular position of labour within these industries, corporate culture may be a method which employers use to engage with employees. By promoting the workplace as 'fun' and pleasurable, it may also be that this is perceived as providing freedom for employees, and allowing them a high degree of discretion in their work while simultaneously encouraging them to remain in an environment controlled by the organisation. As such, undertaking case studies of the creative industries appeared to be a fruitful site for research both for adding knowledge to an industry which is under studied, but also as likely sites where employers may use 'fun' to gain control over the workforce.

Returning to the questions at the beginning of the chapter, therefore, this project is concerned with examining the role of space have in materialising a strategy of play as a method of control. Despite myths that creative workers are dispersed geographically and self-managed, in practice they are often employed in open plan corporate environments (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). Therefore the way this space is organised remains an important part of the employment relationship as a method of engaging the workforce and controlling their work.

In the companies selected for this research, humour was encouraged in the workplace, and various fun events such as games, brainstorming sessions and outside work get-togethers are arranged in order to help employees feel appreciated. The companies were also highly responsive to their clients, with employees being aware of the client needs and under constant pressure to perform with these needs in mind, such as the training sessions in Smiley, the presentations to clients in Marketing Inc., and the response from the readership in Magazine Inc. As a result it was expected that there would be conflicts of time and work pressures with the 'fun' organised in these organisations.

The companies I researched could be compared to the IT department in Warren and Fineman's (2007) study of 'fun' cultures. Here the IT department, with the aim to make the workplace more stimulating and creative, introduced humour into the workplace, especially by creating several games and creative breakout areas. However, the employees had an ambivalent position towards these practices, largely due to the antagonistic position towards management. An ambivalent position could sit within Hall's (2001) pragmatic adoption within his model of interpreting texts, as it roughly adopts the strategy but recognises that in order to do so, the reading will need to sweep over contradictions it might have with their experience. By using an ethnographic study combining methods of observation, interviewing and asking the participants to take visual pictures of fun aspects of the organisation, the research built a complex understanding of the contradictions in the humorous responses by employees (Warren and Fineman, 2007). Warren and Fineman (2007) discussed the perspective that 'well at least management tried'. In essence this contradiction lies at the heart 'fun' corporate cultures: it is a gesture made by management to address the boredom and mundane experiences of work, which does not overturn the relationship of employment. Which is to say, management use play to increase productivity of their workforce, continuing the tradition of trying to squeeze more effort from their employees. My own study builds on this observation by explaining the inherent contradiction behind employers making work more enjoyable, but at the same time employees' pragmatic view that these practices reinforce the power dynamics. It examines the nature of play within these cultures and how the 'common sense' appeal of these corporate cultures changes the power dynamics of management and employees.

Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses

Methodological contributions and limitations

From a critical perspective there are serious concerns about the way in which traditional, positivist studies objectify those they are researching, whose own meanings and experiences are ignored by a pre-assigned set of questions reflecting the perspective of the researcher. This can have the effect of silencing the less powerful (the research respondents) into the definitions defined by the research, rather than as subjective persons who have their own legitimate understanding of the world (Alvesson and Du Billing, 1997). In this research, I felt it

was important to note both my own perspective and the participants'. Being open to the phenomena present within the texts rather than pre-setting my own research topics is an important element of the phenomenological position adopted. A phenomenological analysis was purposely adopted where the themes were allowed to emerge from the discussions generated between myself and the participants, informed by the humour logs conducted, and from the observations of the organisations and from the analysis of the photographs taken.

The results should as a result be a combination of voices from the research, for example both men and women's voices can be heard in discussing humour, sexuality and identity, contradicting myths that women do not joke about sex (Kotthoff, 2006). In Kotthoff's (2006) study, she discusses how Freud's analysis of sexual joking through psychoanalysis explained sexual jokes as the result of men's frustration with women as desirable and unobtainable, and as a result verbally 'undresses' the woman. As a result Kotthoff argues it both normalised this joking, now called sexual harassment, and also essentialised the passive role of women. However Kotthoff also studies the sketch of a feminist comedian to demonstrate how sexual joking overturns the sexual harassment from a male colleague. This study follows the spirit of Kotthoff's work to analyse the way women, as well as men, in the organisation utilised sexual humour, within power dynamics that relate to 'body politics'. However, this being said, the discussion and analysis ultimately provides a reflection of how a theoretical contribution can reflect the larger picture of employees' experiences and as a result can only provide a partial view of each these voices. The study analyses how women and men discussed their use of humour, as well as any observations of humour from my own perspective, and as a result represents the perspective of the social construction of these power dynamics.

To elaborate on this point, the theoretical perspective is presented not as a 'truth' but rather as one reality amongst many. My own identity, as a feminist, poststructuralist and critical organisational researcher, is not neutral (a statement I would make for all positions of research including 'scientific'). It necessarily carries particular ideologies and perspectives which influenced how I viewed my data. I was, for example, more likely to view sexuality from a feminist perspective, and similarly to view management's actions from a critical one. Part of the research process entails conducting the analysis from these perspectives, which will ultimately shape the results and how they are presented. However I feel that this perspective

can provide an interesting dimension to the research on 'fun' corporate cultures. While a pro-management perspective may endorse play in organisations as emancipating, a critical perspective notes the inherent power dimensions within work which is taken for granted in positivist studies. By understanding control within these processes, it may increase our understanding of the rationale behind the increased uptake of these practices.

However, this does not preclude several drawbacks to the methodology. Phenomenology advocates constructing a separate reality, breaking down pre-existing categories and questioning the methods of work in our current society. That being said, phenomenological positions are difficult to maintain, as while they advocate no fixed 'reality' they often slip back into the reality presented within a functionalist and structuralist perspective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). As a researcher, it is tempting to be drawn into the 'reality' of fun in these organisations, to believe management discourses of equality, pleasure, openness and play which they propose, as the discourses are designed to be seductive to employees. I certainly experienced this upon entering the organisation, and discussing the corporate cultures with employees. Within my reflections I noted my internal struggle to sympathise with management's attempt to make work enjoyable while recognising some of the inherent aspects of control being displayed. It is also fair to say that employees in these organisations often believed these discourses, ignoring or explaining away the contradictions that they created. As a researcher however this creates a dilemma. How do I give employees a voice to express their own reality and experience, while at the same time recognise the power imbalance created in these discourses that may influence their view? In the end, I can only partially excuse the privileging of my own view. One advantage of being a critical ethnographic researcher is that some distance between the organisation and yourself can be maintained. Through hearing many voices within the organisation it also allows for patterns to develop from linking many voices together, noting the contradictions between these voices and attempting to explain how I believe they articulated different experiences of the organisations.

This is, of course, assuming that employees will openly voice their views and experiences, while in practice employees have their own political agendas in choosing what to and what not to discuss. Employees also were presenting an identity that they wished others to see, as part of their project of self (Du Gay, 1996). In other words, "a person's sense of who he or she is is

constituted and confirmed through his or hers [sic] positioning within particular relations of power" (Du Gay, 1996: 63); including, of course, those underpinning the research process discussed here. However, keeping this in mind, as a researcher I have little choice but to accept the participant's interview as being a reflection of *their* reality and to use my own observations and intuition. The presentation of self was partial to how employees wanted to be perceived, and it was possible to link many of the aspects they described to the rhetoric of the corporate culture. Over time it was possible to link these into patterns of the employees' presentation of self as 'fun people' as intrinsic to how they viewed themselves in relation to the organisation.

As a critical researcher I needed to conceptualise meanings attributed to experiencing fun corporate cultures through my own understandings of organisations as embedded in a hierarchical, political and gendered context. I therefore offer my perspective as a possible understanding of the experience of humour, and where appropriate emotion, aesthetics and sexuality, in organisations rather than as an absolute truth. This could result in an epistemological relativism (Schwandt, 2003). However, I would counter, in agreement with Alvesson and Du Billing's (1997: 11) perspective that the aim of interpretivist research is:

> Not to produce robust and unquestionable research results which claim to establish the truth once and for all… one must be open to ambiguities involved and the historical and situated character of the empirical object as well as the constructed and interpreted character of so-called data.

In this sense critical research allows for an examination of ambiguity, rather than glossing over these aspects of organisational life. Data and analysis are recognised as social constructions, rather than being a definitive 'truth'. What may be the 'reality' for one organisation, or indeed for one employee, may not be so for others. Focusing on contradictions in these constructed realities may give insight into how employees simultaneously claim to play at work while also acknowledging that their work output has serious consequences on aspects such as pay and promotion. It opens up the possibility that employees can play while recognising the control and power dynamics of the organisation, rather than being cultural 'dupes' who are simply fooled by management initiatives.

Contributions and limitations of methods

This research was designed in particular to address the topic of humour from the participants' perspective and to explore emergent themes discussed by the participants. As such the research methods were designed to be open and to be guided by the participants' experiences. It was designed to investigate the questions which emerged from the literature: How do employees experience 'fun' corporate cultures and the possible contradictions these corporate cultures produce? How do neo-normative forms of control function in organisations in the creative industries where employees' identities are bound up in their creative work? Do 'fun' strategies aim to promote self-discipline in a relatively autonomous workforce? Why is play such an important theme within these cultures, and how does it relate to the forms of control enacted by management? Is the play seen in 'fun' organisations infantile, and if so what is the consequence for the experiences of employees? If we can view play as a strategy of control, what role does space play in establishing the strategy, and what space is available for alternative meanings of play?

Through using participative observation I was able to reflect on my own influence, by recognising the impact I had on my surroundings and participants (although it would be a fair argument to say this could also be a drawback of my approach). On a daily basis I interacted with employees, sat with them during their work, overheard their work and informal conversations and joined them for coffees and lunch. Within Smiley, observation was possible for the three week period while doing an internship position, and the work I did for the company included producing posters as cultural texts of the corporate discourses, analysing and making recommendations on the image and 'feel' of the website, and more mundane activities such as filing. While the observation was 'non-participative' in the other two companies, I would often unintentionally participate; joining in conversations, participating in games, introducing myself in meetings and being greeted by the participants while walking around. Despite being present in each organisation for a relatively short time for ethnographic research (between two to four weeks), I noticed how employees' attitudes would alter from viewing me as a stranger to a person they would have a chat with, involving me in conversations and joking about my research.

The exception to this was in Magazine Inc., where only two weeks' research was conducted, and my position was firmly located as an outsider. This was probably related to three factors: the size of the organisation; the frequency of outsiders within it; and the heightened internal political dynamics which caused management to be hostile towards my research. Between the time access was granted and the research was conducted, the organisation came under pressure from outside parties to demonstrate their worth, as well as negative publicity for overpaying their executives while at the same time implementing cuts in the workforce. Research was conducted during an unstable financial time period, the winter of 2008, when the UK and many other countries were experiencing a period of economic turbulence. As a result, the atmosphere of the corporation as I experienced it was closed, hostile and suspicious. Despite approval at the time of negotiating access, on arriving at the organisation I was denied access to particular spaces including meetings, and management kept its distance (in fact they never even spoke to me, despite several requests to meet). Employees were also hesitant to meet and were in general very reserved when being interviewed, which was related to increased workloads and the possibility of layoffs. After persisting for several weeks at the organisation, I felt the barriers from the current context would make the research I had designed ineffective and decided to complete the research. It was only some time later when I reviewed the data that I found many of the tensions between fun and the realities of work linked with other conflicts employees were experiencing in all of the organisations. I decided to include the data in my analysis as a result. On reflection perhaps I should have persisted with the research in Magazine Inc. for the full intended time. However, on following up with participants, the context of the organisation only appeared to darken further, with many of the team leaving or moved into different roles shortly after the research was conducted.

Another aspect which shaped the research was the role I played as a 'specialist' on play. Positioning myself as a researcher on humour, I was often met with a degree of interest and/or scepticism. Four participants recorded in their humour logs sharing a laugh with colleagues about the log itself. Some employees expressed how the humour log made them more reflective about their behaviour; however the majority of participants seemed to view it as an assessment of themselves and their workplace behaviour. On one occasion I was greeted as 'Fun Lady', causing me to reflect on my own role in the research. Was I supposed to be fun? While I did feel compelled to perform a fun identity, I think it is more likely I was viewed as an evaluator of 'fun'. I certainly felt pressure to verify to participants that they were funny, and

frequently within my interviews I found myself reaffirming how funny participant's jokes were and how important it was to participants that I 'got' the joke. For example, Mary who was one of my participants in Marketing Inc. commented about feeling pressure to be funny while being interviewed:

> Well we were messing around last week. It is really hard, I feel really under pressure in this interview to be funny [laughs] (Mary, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

This was related to employees wanting to be seen as being a fun person. It was also related to feeling uncomfortable about being interviewed on a topic which is largely unobtrusive and taken for granted. The employees were not used to reflecting on how fun occurred, simply the assumption that it did occur was sufficient for most of my interviewees on a day to day basis. Within all three companies I was asked 'So are we fun?' (perhaps with a sense of irony), but also to affirm their identities as fun people within a 'fun' company.

Just as they accepted their own identity as being influenced by the 'fun' corporate cultures, the research participants were fairly uncritical of what I am sure they viewed as an assessment of their 'fun-ness'. Indeed being assessed on their 'fun-ness' was a key to the fun programmes, through formal and informal acknowledgement such as award nominations and performance reviews (Marketing Inc.), recognition of writing 'funny' puns (Magazine Inc.) or client and co-worker assessments (Smiley). As a result, there may be a form of a social desirability effect, where employees perceive fun as positive and overemphasize these aspects of their everyday life (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Indeed through the research process some of the participants recognised this presentation of fun as desirable, for example when discussing her humour log, one participant from Marketing Inc. commented:

> But it wasn't 'have fun' as much as I thought it did. Yeah it was like 'I have loads of fun at work' but when it came down to actually documenting it... (Gina, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The strength of the research design, and my role as a participant researcher, could also be a weakness. I did not claim a neutral objective standpoint, but this meant acknowledging the role I held in constructing discourses in the workplace as both a researcher and within interactions with my respondents. I played an active part in constructing discourses of 'fun' through questioning people about humour, fun, work, emotions and spaces. While I wanted employees' voices to come through in my data, the interviews were conversations with two people attributing meaning to the humorous episodes. I was 'involved' in the presentation of these companies as fun: through selecting them to be researched as a representation of 'fun' contexts, through management agreeing to the research to demonstrate they were 'fun', and through encouraging employees agreeing to participate and construct a view that they were 'fun employees'. Through my very presence as a researcher investigating humour in organisations (and with the risk of over-emphasising my importance), it is probable I influenced the organisations through highlighting that they were a worthy example of 'fun' corporate culture. Depending on the context of the group, this could mean that more or less jokes were told and that the content of the jokes may also have changed.

It is likely that even within the diaries and interviews, respondents may have attempted to guess my research aims when selecting examples of humour, overemphasising the importance of some examples and excluding others. While I did feel to a certain extent this did occur, it actually appeared to happen less than I expected. Participants were surprisingly candid about their frustrations with their managers, gossip from the office or their own awkward and embarrassing moments. As occurs in much research some participants were more open and possibly analytical than others, with these people being key informants, while other participants may have remained more distant or detached. Collinson (1992) gives a detailed account of this within his study of workplace humour, and how eventually gaining acceptance by having pranks played on him allowed him to observe and discuss power relations with employees. Alternatively studying 'fun' corporate cultures, Fleming (2005) noted how four key informants provided a significant contribution to his research, due to their cynical perspective, and this use of extensive interviewing of them gave rich data. While in two of the organisations I researched I felt I was able to have candid conversations with most of the employees, in Magazine Inc. all the employees apart from one key informant maintained a distance from me. In Magazine Inc. I assume this 'distancing' was due to the problems of politics and distrust in

the organisational culture referred to above, and which some employees discussed in their interviews.

However, the possibility that employees in all three companies may have been managing impressions of themselves to myself as a researcher provided interesting data in itself, (i.e. that participants were actively managing their identities as 'being funny'). They wanted, to a certain extent, to be seen as such. For example, when Doug at Marketing Inc. was asked what the company motto meant to him, he responded by outlining how it reflected him personally:

> For me personally I am a fairly laid back person as far as a sense of humour. As long as things get done, I don't mind how they get done in the end. So I am fairly joking, almost want to restrain things a little because I have a very dry sense of humour... For me it's just enjoying coming to work (Doug, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

For Doug, and for many others who were interviewed, the company motto was related to how he wanted to view himself. He was a manager of a team, and encouraged his team members to joke with him. In addition to participants identifying with the play ethos, the impression of themselves through the humour log was important. Several of the participants would apologise for vague answers, or ones which they felt were silly or stupid. Portraying their sense of humour as being funny emerged in these interviews as important to the participants' sense of self.

Additionally, what about the people who did not participate? A major limitation was the voluntary nature of the research. Those who were either unhappy with work or were over-worked and did not have time to participate were likely to exclude themselves. While I would not have wanted to force any employee to participate due to the obvious ethical implications of doing so, it does bring up an interesting point of what this may have excluded from my data. Did it exclude those employees who did not 'buy-in'? Did they more actively resist the 'fun' discourse and not wish to be seen as funny or be seen to endorse managed fun? Informal

conversations with employees did go some way to overcome this, although obviously not entirely.

Summary

This chapter has outlined my perspective on humorous processes which can be explored through a social constructivist perspective. This falls broadly within the phenomenological tradition and explores how employees attribute meaning through their understandings and interpretations of 'social reality'. Research into humour comes from many perspectives, most notably functionalist, critical and interpretivist. This research emphasises that humour is a social construction which involves a process relating 'being fun' to becoming a 'fun person'. To do so, it made use of ethnographic methods including interviews, diaries, participant observation and the collection of visual data through photographs. Three companies were selected from the creative industries, each of which adopted 'fun' as a key business principle in their corporate culture, and were explored in relation to how employees experienced humour as part of everyday lived culture. Chapter Five will discuss the findings from the three organisations, and develop these findings in Chapter Six to explore the emotional, embodied experience of employees within fun corporate cultures.

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[i] Pseudonyms are used for the companies and all employees.
[ii] Again a pseudonym has been used for the founder of the company.

Chapter Five: Strategies of 'fun' and tactics of humour

This critical ethnography was undertaken to explore the use of humour as an element of 'fun' corporate cultures within the creative industries. It aims to analyse how organisations established 'fun' corporate cultures as strategies to provide dominant meaning through conceiving 'fun' values and embedding these in the space of the organisation (De Certeau, 1984). The research findings suggest that these are materially and spatially enacted, with a negotiation of meaning at different levels of space within the organisation (Lefebvre, 1991). As such it aims to explore how employees experience 'fun' corporate cultures. In particular, do employees adopt the organisationally sanctioned version of 'fun' or do they reject it? Secondly, it aims to investigate how experiences are understood in an emotional and embodied manner. It therefore asks what role does emotion play in how employees respond to these spaces? By considering how these spaces are embedded with particular values which reflect corporate culture, the data within this chapter lays out how employees respond to these initiatives to encourage fun at work. As such it aims to contribute towards the debate on the possible contradictions employees may have found with the values of the organisation and their everyday experience of work (e.g. Willmott, 1993) by analysing how employees used humour in a space which has been deliberately designed as 'fun'.

In order to accomplish this, this chapter explores first the production of 'fun' corporate cultures within three organisations. It draws on the concept of production of meaning from De Certeau (1984: xix) who states "a strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it." In other words, institutions use strategies to form meaning within dominant spaces, 'proper' space, which influence the behaviour of those within them. The chapter then analyses possible interpretations of these cultures and suggests that many employees take a pragmatic approach towards the corporate culture. This pragmatic approach is accomplished through the tactical use of humour. Humour produces the ability for employees to interpret and reinterpret the corporate culture values through its ambiguous nature of humour. Humour provides a good example of a tactic, as according to De Certeau "a tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety... [it is] the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is 'seized'" (De Certeau, 1984: xix). Tactics, such

as humour, operate by seizing the opportunity to ‘play’ with concepts and ideas, presenting them in ironic, subversive or a manner counter to those intended by the institution. The chapter then discusses some contradictions which cause tension for employees within these organisations. The final section of the chapter turns to analyse how the everyday experiences of work are lived through the spatial and material aspects of the corporate culture. Using Lefebvre (1991) and Gabriel (1999) to explain different social constructions of space, the section then demonstrates how the everyday experience is embedded within the space of the organisations (De Certeau, 1984). In the final section of the chapter, I also analyse the use of unmanaged space; employees use space to express humour outside of those meanings envisioned by the organisations. Alternative meanings were established through carving out temporary space within the organisations, reclaiming the use of humour for employees.

In Chapter Six I develop five features of humour as a tactic: (i) the negotiation of meaning through employees’ identities; (ii) the embodiment of fun; (iii) the bounded fun; (iv) the emotional rules within these organisations; and (v) the reference to sexuality in humour signalling a subtle management of meaning for employees. The context of these themes will be set up within this chapter, through exploring how employees discuss the corporate culture. The two chapters work in parallel to each other, with this chapter focusing on the strategies of corporate culture and the tactic of humour, and Chapter Six setting out this struggle within the sites of identity, embodiment, emotions and sexuality. However, before discussing each of these in detail, this chapter will provide a broader overview of strategies and tactics. It begins by considering how corporate culture can be considered a strategy with a proper space, before turning to the tactical use of humour at the everyday level.

'Have Fun': fun as a discourse and a cultural text

The corporate materials collected during the research, such as mission statements, training manuals, employee handbooks, management presentations and other ‘official’ documents from the corporations, reinforced the idea that play was desirable at work. These documents were collected in the process of the ethnographic research to help provide a context for the way ‘fun’ was conceived by the organisation, and how this was translated into strategies. In all three companies, the rationale for having fun at work was strongly based on the rhetoric of

play as progress (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Within this rhetoric, play is seen as part of childhood, linking playful activities to stages of development, where the child learns rules and values of engaging in social activity. According to the logic of this rhetoric:

> Play as practical reflection (in action) on this or that essence of child experience is the mechanism of adoption, reproduction and transformation of intellectual, affective, social and moral experience by the child (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 37).

It is therefore a learning process where the child develops an understanding of the rules of social standards, creating their ability to function within society. In this discourse, play is conceptualised as beneficial for learning as a "child develops imagination and curiosity" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 37). This ability to be creative and to have imagination plays an important role in the development of the self in relation to society. This rhetoric of play forming a creative process of development appeared prevalent within the materials collected from the three organisations, who maintained that having fun was not only a key value, but a mechanism to encourage employee's sense of creativity and ultimately their productivity as a worker. Each of the organisations used material guidance, visual and written, on how employees could use 'fun' to develop their sense of self. The details of each organisation are provided below: however it is useful to note beforehand that there were similarities and differences in the way this rhetoric of progress was enacted. First, all the organisations expected employees to embody the fun through demonstrating particular behaviours which were recognised as fun. However, this varied in the degree to which fun in the everyday sense, such as humour, was positioned inside of work activities (Smiley), alongside work (Marketing Inc.) and in opposition to work (Magazine Inc.). The employees were all to a varying extent assessed and rewarded on how fun they were perceived to be, both by senior managers and by clients external to the organisation. Secondly, within two of the organisations employees linked the idea of 'fun' to a 'culture of openness' and 'positive' thinking, which referred to their self-managing behaviour. These values were important in the way 'fun' was conceived and how they encouraged ownership of play by the employees. In the third organisation, Magazine Inc., which did not use the idea of 'openness' as part of their corporate culture, employees seemed to find the concept of fun more constrained. Finally, there was an element of 'common-sense' behind the values for Smiley and Marketing Inc., where employees appeared

more open to accepting fun as it made sense to them in relation to their own views. Each of these three organisations will be considered in regard to how they conceived 'fun' as part of their strategy of corporate culture, and how employees understood these attempts to be fun through personal and business aims.

Smiley

In Smiley the corporate motto was 'make learning fun' and suggested that employees should "recognise and celebrate your mistakes – always own up to your mistakes, learn from them and try to identify solutions." (Smiley, Training Manual, 2009). These texts proposed that employees could learn to approach problems in new directions through play. Fun was encouraged for an instrumental business end, for example the following comments were used in relation to the purpose of 'fun': during activities "we do silly things. It's not meant to be [just silly], it's more like team building" (Andy, Smiley, May 2009) where fun was designed to increase team interaction; on the trainers' day to discuss trainer issues (Beth, Smiley, July 2009); "you can really have fun with them [clients], you know, if they are up for it" (Beth, Smiley, July 2009); and to encourage employees to be "very social" (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009). Employees' comments about the uses of fun demonstrated their awareness of the ends for which it was designed. Fun was linked directly to attracting employees, obtaining engagement from them and encouraging employees to be better at their job (especially in a client-facing role). Fun was seen as an important approach to engage clients, as Faye stated:

> So they [clients] might come in feeling a bit intimidated and nervous and that's really what the whole [point], the bright colours and the way we are, because that's about setting them at their ease. Because people are nervous and then they relax (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

The fun at Smiley was perceived as an approach which coincided with how employees delivered their training and how they related to each other as a community. Employees were encouraged to think of fun as part of their work performance and integrate this value into

their everyday behaviour, especially with clients. In addition they were expected to ensure the client had fun as well.

Fun as a method of control

Within the corporate documents, the idea of fun was referred to as an approach to working which countered traditional forms of business experience. They aimed to encourage employees to use a fun, positive approach as a form of 'play ethos' (Kane, 2005) which encouraged experimentation rather than restricting creativity. However this experimentation and creativity from employees was expected to be directed towards the organisation's aims. As a result, fun was seen as a method of controlling the employee without having to use direct forms of control such as surveillance. Fun, supposedly, allowed employees to be themselves who would naturally align their interests with those of the business. Harry, the founder of the company, explains this idea in his narrative of the company background:

> *When I founded Smiley Computers I was told a lot of things by people with more business experience than me: I was told that business was a serious thing, that we couldn't succeed with such a silly company name, that work couldn't be fun, that you had to put profit first and that you had to keep careful control of your staff or they would take advantage.*
>
> *All of that proved false. The fun, positive approach of the company is one of its key advantages. It attracts new people, motivates those who work here, is seen as vitally important by clients and, most important, makes it easier to learn about computers [our core job] (Harry, 'Be Different', Training Manual, 2009).*

The essence of the narrative of the company was that work could be both serious and fun and that if organisations engaged employees through fun, employees would be better at their jobs. Even the title of the section, 'Be Different', suggests both that the company was unique in its approach and that the employees could also be unique if they adopted this approach. Related to the narrative of the company was the core values of the company: to be 'passionate' about the business, service and other people; to provide to the best of their ability; to "make a

difference in the world"; to be a great place to work; to celebrate diversity; to always be there for each other; and to "make work fun" and as a result make learning fun for clients *(Smiley, 'Core Values', Training Manual, 2009).* Throughout the corporate rhetoric there was a positioning of the company as an alternative to the traditional work organisation. It focused on the long-term profits through satisfying clients and maintaining good staff, rather than focusing on short term profit. There was also investment in activities which benefited wider society (many of their clients were public or charity sector employers), and they allocated funds towards employees providing training in developing countries.

Hierarchy and fun

The result was that the organisation mirrored many of the family attributes with a paternalistic figurehead as the founder. Casey (1999: 162) discusses that the family metaphor in corporate culture is "hierarchical, repressive, paternalistic and deferential to higher authorities" organised by family rules and processes. In this case, the paternalism emerges in the founder figure of Harry and in the personal way he relates to employees and encourages employees to relate to each other. When asked about the ethos of 'have fun' in Smiley, one employee attributed this to the personal perspective of Harry:

> I think once again that ['have fun'] comes largely from Harry. It's a silly little thing, like he always includes that ['have fun'] in his emails. But once you get to know Harry you know that he genuinely means that, he wants you enjoy your work (Lee, Smiley, July 2009).

Harry was the advocate for the corporate value of having fun. This advocate role also extended to his main function within the business which was to generate new clients through sales. The perception of the company was very important to word of mouth within the industry. The founder's role as a business development and slightly eccentric personality was matched by Elaine, the only managing director in the company who controlled intra-organisational activities. Lee described the dynamic of the roles of Harry and Elaine:

> We don't always see him a lot depending on what is going on but he is an immense presence, usually by his energy as much as anything. So we have Harry very much firing off, bouncing off the walls, and then you have Elaine sort of being a more calming influence (Lee, Smiley, July 2009).

These two managers acted in a parental role to the various office employees and permanent and associate trainers who worked for the company. However as the two managers generally maintained a hands-off approach, the obligation for creating this fun culture was left on the whole to employees. As a result ‘having a laugh’ was prevalent in the back office as well as in the training rooms. Dessa, who worked as a Smoothie, illustrated this point by referring to the ability to have a laugh even when Harry was in the office.

> I mean the fact that we are allowed to be very relaxed, very informal, there isn't really a hierarchy; we can have a laugh when the MD are in and everyone kind of is in the same place (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009).

In Dessa’s description, having a laugh is important because it symbolised the egalitarian nature of the office, the ability to be relaxed and informal even in the presence of the managing directors. However her quote also points out two factors of this egalitarian culture. First employees still felt they had to have permission to have a laugh, indicated by her statement of ‘the fact that we are allowed’. Secondly, the statement indicates that there is hierarchy by use of hedging statements such ‘isn’t really’ and ‘kind of is in the same place’. The hierarchy still exists, although in a more subtle form, and ‘allows’ the employees to joke around. It suggests that Dessa viewed it necessary for the corporate culture to be in place in order for her to ‘have a laugh’. Her ability to feel comfortable in using humour in front of the MD is only possible because the corporate culture gives her permission to do so. However, despite the appearances of an egalitarian workplace, power differentials still exist and employees are still aware of them.

Naturalisation of fun and negativity as a 'serious' offence

This idea that employees should have fun was only abstractly referred to in the corporate materials, such as in the core values above. There was an expectation that employees in this environment would have fun and enjoy work, however the details of how this should be accomplished were generally undefined. It was expressed as a natural inevitability that employees would "take delight in the process, including the obstacles and blockages, which appear to get in the way. Relax, and have fun" (Smiley Training Manual, 2009). Recruitment at the company was competitive and employees' values and attitudes were seen as key criteria for selection. On their website, they advocate recruiting based on the person's attitude: 'Hire for Attitude, Train for Skill' (Smiley, website, 2009). Faye described the 'attitude' they looked for in recruiting:

> Everyone we recruit, we look for, are those sorts of people. Can they create that sort of atmosphere? Are they nice? For the trainers we watch them train, but for Smoothies we get them to do little group games and things when they are in their interviews so we can see and we look for those sorts of things. So we pick someone who is nice and supportive and then sort of let them get on with it. We don't kind of say do this nice thing at the beginning and then do this other bit, we can't prescribe that (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

From this perspective other attributes such as their knowledge of the subject could be developed, but having the correct attitude in training and customer service was perceived to be innate to particular individuals. When potential employees demonstrated that they had the correct type of attitude, to be warm, friendly and supportive of the process, they were seen as desirable as they could help clients enjoy the learning process. Only a particular type of person was therefore correct for the organisation, one who 'naturally' had fun, was nice and supportive, and was 'able to get on with it'. The ability to demonstrate the correct attitude, and as a result 'have fun' and ensure clients have fun during training, was perceived to be innate within the individuals rather than in the corporate culture. As such, there was a supposed inevitability in the play within work. While it may appear that this contradicts the statement made by Dessa in the previous section that they were 'allowed' to have fun, on

closer inspection the two maintained each other. If employees buy in to the concept that their use of humour is 'natural', they also reinforce that the corporate culture is appropriate. In this rhetoric, traditional approaches repress these natural behaviours through controlling employees' actions. Instead, through the language of emancipation (allowing employees to have fun), employees can behaviour in a manner which is deemed natural.

Not having fun?

As part of the view that having fun was human nature, the exact behaviours of 'having fun' on the level of everyday behaviours were not prescribed. However the organisation made an effort to specify the sort of behaviours which it did *not* want employees to engage in. In particular having a cynical attitude was frowned upon and management encouraged employees to monitor their own and others' behaviours against expressing such attitudes. For example the extract from Smiley's training manual below establishes this expectation to internalise and monitor their own behaviour in accordance with these expectations. Responsibility for having a fun workplace was placed with the employees and employees were expected to demonstrate the correct positive attitude:

> *At Smiley it is a serious offense to be negative about yourself, a client, or anyone else at Smiley. There are no excuses!... If you are caught moaning in the general office – expect to be picked up about it if caught and take responsibility for picking others up if you notice them doing it. Positivity is also about believing in yourself. Positive thinking (Smiley Training Manual).*

Figure 5 - Smiley Sunflower

This positivity was also reinforced in the materiality of the company, with cheerful objects placed around the organisation (for example Figure 5 - Smiley Sunflower). Dale (2005) uses the term 'social materiality' to describe the way in which the physical and social interact, with the material objects both forming social relations and social relations forming the material object. Of particular relevance here, she notes there are elements of control and choice which are embedded and embodied in this process. The material objects such as the sunflower provided visual reminders that the workplace was 'fun' and 'positive' for the employees and the clients. The organisation moved the impetus for 'positivity' back onto the employee, who was expected to change negative sentiments into 'positive thinking'. Many of the objects around the office such as the sunflower were placed there by employees who felt it reflected the company. Much like in Hochschild's (1983) study where airhostesses were warned against blowing off steam with each other in the galleys, here the employees were expected to monitor themselves against such negative sentiments, turning these feelings instead into 'positive thinking'. This perspective also reinforces the 'have fun' as natural and positive.

Employees needed to stay vigilant against the possibility of their own positive, nice, and fun 'natural' behaviours being corrupted by negative, destructive thinking (from other employees or within themselves) which might question their belief in themselves.

Self-management and the 'culture of openness'

In exchange for employees monitoring their own and other's attitudes, managerial supervision was minimal, at least in the manner of direct control. Instead employees were expected to 'self-manage' their own performance. Lee, a trainer who had been with the company for four and a half years, discussed getting used to the mentality of self-managing:

> I was more familiar with being quite tightly managed in certain ways. So coming here into this culture of openness and being self-managing, I found I was very insecure for the first month, wandering around and waiting for people to tell me what to do and how to do it. Which doesn't happen (Lee, Smiley, July 2009).

The culture of 'openness' to which Lee referred expected employees to take ownership of their work through taking the initiative. The result was that employees were to be given 'freedom' and discretion within their daily activities. Within the 'play ethos', employees were encouraged to demonstrate the expected behaviours of being 'fun' on an everyday level through the idea of 'openness' and informality. The idea of openness also appeared within the highly hierarchical Marketing Inc., but not within Magazine Inc. Within Smiley, 'fun' was orchestrated by the organisation into 'activities', for example there was a daily 'ice cream' time where the employees and clients could have a free ice cream on the company. The ice creams were seen as a perk and the employees would use it as a form of break in the afternoon of the day. While this mirrors humorous rituals of organisational time such as Roy's (1959) 'Banana Time', they were profoundly different in the sense that the communal rituals of play were designed and encouraged by the organisation according to what management thought would be fun. This included other organised activities such as team meetings and days away. 'Smiley days' or fun away days were usually linked to successful profits or to winning awards and were seen as a perk of the job. During my research the team took part in the

yearly 'Smiley Day' which involved a day off work with a boat trip in London and a game of rounders in a park, followed by a picnic. Prior to the research, other away days included a day trip to Spain and sponsored trips to Africa to develop IT in community support work. These events were seen as a method of rewarding employees for good performance and to increase group cohesion. They were often arranged by the employees themselves, for example one of the employees took responsibility for arranging the day out in London.

Assessing fun in performance

Despite having a self-managing approach and using fun activities to encourage enjoying work, the employees' performance was monitored closely through appraisals from other employees. All employees completed a 360° evaluation of every employee, which had seven criteria of assessment: how approachable they were; their ability to communicate; their willingness to be flexible; their stress; their overall commitment; their attitude towards diversity and inclusivity of others; and a section for general comments.

> We have peer appraisals we have to do. And upward appraisals and things and they actually ask those questions. So I have to fill in about everyone else here, well are they approachable, are they friendly, are they supportive when I am stuck. How do they deal with their stress. So they really kind of look at the personable, how you are behaving as a person as well (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

Each measure was ranked from 1 to 5 and there was a space for comments with each question. While none of these assessed their ability to be fun specifically, it was likely that the perception of them as being fun would contribute to positive rankings on several of these categories. Characteristics such as approachability, attitudes to others, stress and commitment to the group may all have been affected by the use of humour, as later sections will develop. These measures also encouraged employees to focus on personality rather than behaviours. In the example I saw, in the general comments section the individual had written 'lovely to work with' about their colleagues suggesting a subjective element to the appraisal which was based highly on their ability to get along. As such the strategy within Smiley appeared to be hands-off

from the management, but using appraisals from other staff to monitor behaviours and create norms.

Similarly, trainers in Smiley were also assessed by the client, who completed an assessment form at the end of each session. This would rate a variety of areas on how satisfied each client was, and the company then collated the scores and posted them on a database visible to the employee. The trainers' performance was mostly considered in relation to these scores, as they were expected to get a high percentage of top scores. The clients' perspective on their performance was thus used to regulate and control their behaviour. Consistently poor or average performance would be noted, resulting in a mentor discussing the results and if they continued, consulting the employees if the job was a good fit for them. In addition, it was expected that the employees would take complete responsibility for the clients' learning.

> When we get annoyed with people for being 'stupid' or 'slow' we are in fact getting annoyed with our own inability to easily pass on information. We must find our own ways to deal with, and overcome, such personal frustrations but we must not impose them on our students (Smiley, Training Manual Smiley, 2009).

The training manual suggested that if clients were finding the training difficult, that it was the trainers' responsibility to present a positive attitude to enable their learning. Emotions such as frustration needed to be dealt with as these were 'personal', and suggested that the employee may need to undergo a significant amount of emotional labour within the process of training. It placed responsibility for the emotional experience of the client on the individual, who needed to 'work' on their own feelings because they were, according to the section above, the person at fault.

Smiley therefore took the approach of integrating fun and self-management, where employees were expected to assess their own and others' performance in alignment with the values of the organisation. The strategies of the corporate culture were of integrating fun into the everyday lives of the employees, expecting them to express the values in their approach to work, their willingness to take risks and to manage the fun of customers they interacted with.

The fun was integrated into work activities but also asked employees to be active in applying the idea of 'have fun'. Despite proposing that the organisation was 'flat', layers of authority became evident in the founder and managing director of the organisation, who oversaw that the values were being used. The employees viewed the culture as 'allowing' them to have fun, suggesting that they seeked permission within the corporate values to guide their actions. At the same time there was also a compulsion to have fun in Smiley through the performative reviews, where the ability to present the company and themselves as fun was measured in 360° evaluations and trainer assessments. As we will see in Marketing Inc., many of these attributes of the 'fun' corporate culture were reinforced in a similar manner of 'openness'. The distinction within Marketing Inc. was that the 'fun' was more organised into specific activities which functioned in relation to work, rather than within it.

Marketing Inc.

In Marketing Inc. play and 'openness' was also linked to providing an innovative product and facilitating communication both between employees and from employees to clients. Similar to Smiley, the rationale for 'having fun' at work was linked to the instrumental end of appeasing their clients. Neil, a commercial director (CM), explained this link to me in an interview when we discussed a presentation he planned to make to his team. In this presentation he stated the rationale as an equation: 'Happy People = Happy Clients = profits / Happy Board and CEO' (Neil, Marketing Inc. July 2008). He wanted to communicate this perceived relationship to the employees in his team, to explain why he is concerned about them being happy at work. This rationale, Neil felt, acted as a basis for the seven aims employees should strive for:

1. Happiness: Making yourself and other people happy and passionate.
2. Learn: Try new things and be paid for it. Know about new things in their work such as great ads and brand media.
3. Being Open: The culture should be open and transparent.
4. Love: Build relationships and friendships in projects, not just in their own team but between pods and other departments.
5. Finding Meaning: Look for meaning and appreciate work day in and out. Look for what adds value to their clients.

6. Be positive: Choose your attitude. Drive a positive workplace and get rid of outside worries. (based on the FISH! philosophy)
7. Participate: get involved. Follow our passion and contribute to ideas.

(Neil, Marketing Inc., July 2008)

These seven aspects mirror many of the attributes seen previously in Smiley's culture: in particular 'being open' and 'be positive' were stressed as important aspects of the corporate culture. The individual maintains responsibility for their participation, their knowledge of related areas to their work and their attitude towards work. It is suggested that outside worries can be driven out through the individual adopting a positive attitude while in the space and time of the organisation, while also suggesting that outside worries did not have a place in workplace. Attitudes in this case should be used for organisational gain. The emotionally charged language such as 'love', 'passion', 'happiness' and 'being positive' aimed to instil these as values held by employees, for employees to work upon their own emotions and mindset towards the organisational goals. This is also built through relationships with others, most importantly their 'pod' or the group working on a client's account. The word 'pod' itself has connotations of inclusivity, as another word for a 'flock', or nurturing, as well as the fruit-bearing case which splits when ripe. For example, aims suggest that employees should find meaning through their work and the meaning should be defined through adding value for the client. The corporate rhetoric suggested that employees should want to play while working, and drew upon the concept of the *homo luden* underpinned by the idea of man [sic] as a natural player (Huizinga, 1949). As such, the idea that play was 'common sense' emerged, which mirrored findings in Smiley that play was natural.

Play as common sense

Play at work was seen as a common sense way of engaging employees, in particular by drawing on discourses of play from outside the world of work. The managers at Marketing Inc., for example within the aims stated above, were candid with employees about the business rationale behind the 'fun' corporate culture. Many employees recognised that the mindset was supposed to make them better at their jobs, as Bea's comment on the meaning of 'have fun' points out:

> To me it means 'work hard, play hard'. I think the balance here is quite good, because people do work long hours. They do put in the effort because at the end of the day we have to put our client first. But they do balance it out really nice with the events they do (Bea, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

In Marketing Inc. the fun was perceived by employees as parallel to the hard work the employees took part in, rather than being intrinsic to the job itself. It was seen as being a balance between work and play, to adjust for the long hours they put into their job and the commitment they showed to the client. While many employees did share a laugh with their colleagues while they were working, the 'fun' was seen as occurring in parallel to work activities rather than directly contributing to the activities themselves. The employees saw fun in their corporate culture as a mindset within their everyday experiences, rather than stemming from the work itself. As such, employees saw the play within work as helping them to be happy which supposedly helped them to be creative. Humour was seen as a mechanism in order to help employees be in a good mood and enjoy their work, rather than being linked directly to increasing their creative capacity within the role:

> If you are in a better mood you are more likely to put some more of yourself into what you're doing and more likely to go that extra mile. For the sort of stuff that I do, you can only go the extra mile if you have all the other crap out of the way (Andrea, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

'Fun' as such was linked to employees' mindset of being in a good mood and was a mechanism to help them find 'positive' thinking. Following the guidance in the aims, being in a positive frame of thinking was seen as an important enabler for completing their work. As much of the work, especially in the early career positions, dealt with processing numbers, creating spreadsheets and forming presentations to their clients, employees wanted to find ways to engage with the work which could be considered fairly mundane when repeated on a daily basis. How to attract and maintain employees was a key concern of the employers, and this was reflected by employees choosing to work for Marketing Inc. because of the friendly, relaxed culture.

Youthful images of fun

However it was noticeable within Marketing Inc. that there was a significant age difference between many of the employees and management (in both the CM's and the directors, or managers underneath the CM's who managed a 'pod' or a client relationship). The managers were generally in their late 30's or older, while the majority of the workforce was fairly young: on average around 18 to mid-20's. The difference between the management and the employees was pronounced in the messages within the texts which drew upon youthful images and incorporated positive emotions. For example, the image below (Figure 6: 'Have Fun') was displayed on a TV screen as employees entered the building, rotating amongst a variety of images displaying the corporate philosophies of 'Have Fun', 'Brave and Resourceful', 'Client First' and 'Stronger Together'.

Figure 6: 'Have Fun'

Keith, an IT specialist designed the images seen above. The management had requested that he create them as part of the internal marketing of the firm to communicate the ideology of the corporate rhetoric. When asked about the images and the rationale for why he chose them, he responded that he wanted them to be bright and colourful. In particular they reflected 'children's games' and 'rainbows', as this conveyed 'having fun'. The use of images of green fields and child's play was purposely chosen as an alternative to the conventional idea of organisations:

> So it is just all about, you know, because some people say you can't really make an office look fun, so I stayed away from the whole office environment thing. Well outside, bright sunshine, rays of sun, people holding hands, couples having fun together, child on a swing, child playing, that's basically where it came from (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The use of child's play was purposely chosen in this case, as a materialisation of what he felt others would associate with the corporate ethos. Keith's statement that he did not think offices could be fun in themselves suggested that there remained contradictions between having fun and work spaces, and that it was necessary to draw on images of child's play in order to create the fantasy of innocent play. It suggested that a suspension of reality might be needed in order for the ideal form of play to be communicated. This association of the office with outside space suggests that the organisation, through Keith's actions, was trying to communicate that the space of the organisation was indeed fun through *not* being an office space. It also questioned the extent to which an office space could 'really' be perceived as fun. This tension between the discourses of work and fun, and the degree to which employees could 'really' view organisations as fun, was presented in an alternative view of work as child's play. Employees should be willing to play: however it was the form of this play, as seen in the image above, which encouraged employees to engage in play as an escape from work. This idea of play being an escape from work has been well documented (for example Knights and McCabe, 1998 discuss 'escape' from the pressures in call centres), however the idea that employers are encouraging play as a form of escape is interesting. It suggests that managers were actively encouraging employees to invoke ideas of the outside, childhood, innocence and escape within their play at work.

Group play

In addition to the written and visual discourses in the organisations, in Marketing Inc. there were group activities designed to encourage employees to have fun. Three examples of these activities I witnessed were the weekly half hour 'time out' for each team, where they played games such as quizzes or darts; a monthly team meeting where the employees were encouraged to throw balls at the CM if they disagreed with his presentation and another team

meeting where the employees competed in teams to build the tallest tower out of straws. Group activities also included the pods decorating the work space, for example one activity encouraged them to make posters around a motto which were then hung up in the pod's area.

These activities which took place within the working day encouraged employees to bond with other members of their pod. These activities usually involved a competition or a quiz, where one team would receive a reward for 'winning'. In the competition above the pods had to take ownership for a motto, and then materialise it within their pod's space. Other competitions involved each floor competing for profit or linking competitions to reports being in on time. This competitive side was enjoyed by many of the employees, such as Doug:

> Definitely lots of fun activities are competition based: the Olympics competition at the moment, the large team meetings, the teams' socials, with the pods, the timesheet tracker. So yeah, I think it is very competitive, which I love (Doug, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The competitive side of the play was perceived as positive and motivating by employees such as Doug. He described this competition as 'bringing out the best in people'. He also stated that competition was one of his strengths, reinforced by a questionnaire on strengths which he had completed for the company. He felt the trait of competitiveness was generally shared by those people he worked with, and that friends he had in other teams would gloat if they won a competition over him. The 'fun' corporate culture nurtured this feeling of competition between staff and different teams. For example Doug described to me a competition they had created which related to turning in their timesheets for billing clients on time, which they had been having some problems with. As a result the team who had the lowest percentage over 8 weeks had to buy a present for the team with the highest percentage, playing on both the group pressures and the competition between groups:

> We now feel obliged to do it not for the corporate company, but the guy who sits next to you. Because you're going to let down your mate, as it were, and then for

> the others it is the competitive element versus the other team (Doug, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

However since Doug's pod had still had a low percentage, they decided to add an extra incentive within the pod that if anyone did not hand it on time they would have to bake a cake for the rest of the pod. This increased competition resulted in 30 cakes since they started and an increase in their percentage. The employees were using competition as a form of self-discipline, which when the team-wide competition did not work, they placed even more competitive pressure on themselves to comply.

Playing family

Finally in Marketing Inc. teams also had 'fun' away days, usually involving planned activities such as pottery making, BBQ's or community service projects. Other local activities included a treasure hunt around the local area, ending up in a pub where employees would receive awards for their team. These were designed as opportunities to socialise but also as a reward for good performance:

> For me, fun is something [...] you get rewarded for it, they take you out. My first week here we were out on three socials; it was a great introduction to meeting people. We went bowling (Bea, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

This idea that the fun activities were a reward was prominent in the interviews, seen as one of the perks of the job. The organisation put considerable effort into organising these outside of work events through devoting employees' time and organisational resources towards them. The fun activities in Marketing Inc. were arranged by the social committee: a group of non-managerial employees who volunteered to organise events for each team. Whether the activity was inside or outside of work, they would aim to mix employees from different pods within a team and from different layers within the hierarchy. While all employees from a team would be invited, it was often the case that only a few of the higher level managers (directors)

would attend. The one director who agreed to be interviewed discussed her frustration with some entrenched senior members of staff who still viewed themselves as too serious to take part (Mary, Marketing Inc., August 2008). It was also the case that these older members of staff were more likely to have families and so did not want to take part in after work drinking, as suggested to me by one part-time staff member (Rebecca, Marketing Inc., August 2008). Therefore the majority of the activities were organised by and attended by mostly non-management employees.

The strategies within Marketing Inc. were based on notions of the family, encouraging employees' involvement through a youthful, playful construction of meaning. They used 'organised' activities as a mechanism for constructing work as playful and encouraging employees' to think of the firm as a family through this engagement (see Casey, 1999). Employees would need 'breaks' from their work as well as rewards, for which the organisation designed 'fun' activities. These activities were designed to increase staff interaction with each other, either within their own pod or interacting with other people on their teams. These activities also had the effect of solidifying the family feel: "I do find that this is a large company but they have the same family feel, you don't feel like a member, you feel like a person" (Bea, Marketing Inc., July 2008). These sentiments were reinforced by other employees, especially those who had been mentored within the company: "I had a few people who were mentors and managers who would definitely express the idea that you're here, that it is not just a job, that it is *your family as* well" (Nicola, Marketing Inc., August 2008, emphasis added). The idea of senior members of staff mentoring newer recruits, who were often young and inexperienced in marketing, reinforced the distinction between managers as being more serious and junior members of staff who took part in the fun activities.

Magazine Inc.

In Magazine Inc. employees shared a strong dedication to children's education and communicated this through the discourse of childhood development in their magazine. In particular 'fun' messages were seen as very important for both communicating to their readership and ensuring children enjoyed their magazine and continued to purchase it. Play in the magazine itself included 'learning' how to be an adult through growing up, communicated

through moral lessons in the magazine. It also was communicated through 'playing' at being an adult, for example replicating adult fashion in fashion spreads. Finally, the magazine used a 'fun' language of puns, games and jargon (such as 'bezzies' for best friends, '4EVA', 'fave', 'totally', 'FAB', 'cuties' for pets, 'buds', 'bro', 'BFF', 'cringiest' or 'Cring!' for embarrassing, 'rocks', 'mad about', 'Rockin'', 'rate it or hate it', 'HOT', 'Crimbo' for Christmas, 'glitzy', 'glam', 'groovin'', 'locks', 'glitz', 'Geddit?', 'wacky', 'spilling', 'wicked', 'WOW!') (Field notes, Magazine Inc., December 2008). The language used was often mirrored by the speech of the employees. It represents how employees were encouraged to get inside the minds of the readership, to understand 'their world' and to produce a product which would sell. Apart from this necessity, management on the whole had a laissez-faire attitude towards their employees, resulting in everyday play remaining mostly at the level of the informal culture of the organisation.

Playful attitudes in the informal culture

Magazine Inc. differed from the other two organisations in that the management did not make a 'hard sell' to communicate the corporate culture to the employees, as in the other two organisations. Instead employees were expected to understand children's playful mindset, to produce a product which reproduced ideas of child's play and to be rewarded with fun activities for their efforts. Employees were recruited who advocated values of childhood play as well as having expertise in the publishing industry. For instance, a job description for the magazine stated the important themes as "friendship, belonging, having fun, growing up and being happy. We have themes that we do not touch: boys, kissing, toilet humour, and anything to do with sex" (Magazine Inc., Job description, December 2008). The playfulness in the magazine was concerned with childhood innocence, rather than complex, real world problems. The 'reality' which the organisation formed for its readers did not contain controversial topics, or even less controversial, ones such as the existence of boys. Play within this context was built on the bonds of 'sisterhood', albeit a rather limited, sanitized version. One of the underlying values of the media corporation is to deliver value for their audiences, and a concern for the audience was embedded in the culture and in the everyday discourse of the group. Conversations concerning the appropriateness of the product, the reaction of parents to the content and the educational messages were frequently noted in my field notes. In line with the other two companies, the culture was focused on pleasing the customer, which in the case of Magazine Inc. often resulted in focusing on celebrities and fashion content.

Humour was perceived as important in conveying this 'reality' for their young female readership. Moral lessons would often be told in a humorous way, for example. Humour was seen as an essential part of the content of the magazine, as one writer described to me the tendency to use puns and humour in the magazine: "I think because it is kids: if you are doing anything serious, it is a nice way to bring it back down to a child level by making it humorous" (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008). This idea of being humorous as part of the work related to how the employees saw themselves. The world which they created for their readers also shaped their own interests, keeping on top of the fashion or using the language of the magazine. As one participant noted:

> You are kind of in a very girlie world though, so it probably does affect the way you think, just in general, and that probably does affect your humour. You are in a very pink, quite safe, shallow, kind of… there is a focus on what you look like, and to be funny… so I think those things are valued in the magazine, probably (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

What was valued in the magazine was also what employees valued in their social interactions, such as the emphasis on appearance and on being funny. However, as Tina noticed there was a perceived shallowness in the humour, not really meaning a lot to the employees. The frivolity of the humour aimed to keep things happy in the magazine corporate culture, rather than being particularly full of substance.

Despite understanding and embracing this idea of 'fun', fun was seen as being firmly in opposition to work. While it was not that employees *should not* have fun, it had to be accomplished in a manner which was subtle and unobtrusive. Thinking about work as 'fun' was encouraged, but being 'seen' to have *too much* fun would be distracting to others.

Fun, but outside of work time

One of the most noticeable characteristics of Magazine Inc. was how quiet the space was in comparison to the other two companies, especially considering it contained all the magazine

units and other parts of the company, with well over one hundred employees within the space. It was one of the first things which I observed, especially as I had recently completed my research at Marketing Inc. which in comparison was buzzing with activity. I recall a slight panic after the first few hours in the organisation of wondering *what* exactly I was going to observe, as employees appeared to focus on their computers and have little interaction unless it was to ask a question about a detail of the magazine or a due date for a particular version of the copy. There certainly did not appear to be communal humorous interactions of the kind I had observed at Marketing Inc., except for the occasional quiet joke between two employees as they discussed an aspect of work (which I was often unable to hear). As one of my participants noted, this related to the feeling of 'visibility' in the office:

> Where we are here you can see where the directors are, other teams which are really busy working, and it pulls you in a bit, reigns you in a bit and stops you maybe getting carried away (Kerry, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

There were moments where communal laughter was shared within the group. For example 'someone' had played a prank on the cleaner by placing a Dr. Who toy in the large bin she was pushing around, which loudly proclaimed 'Exterminate' for all those around to hear. However these events were definitely the exception rather than the norm. As in Kerry's quote above, being located in an open plan office meant that the group's actions were visible to both their director and other teams and their directors. 'Getting carried away' meant that employees felt the need to restrain their behaviour while in the presence of these people, as having fun may distract those who were working hard and demonstrate that you were not working hard yourself. Work and play in this organisation were strictly separated, at least in regard to what employees *ought* to be 'seen' to be doing.

Despite this, humour was prevalent in the organisation through the use of email. Employees often shared humour in this way, using photographs and stories, or simply encapsulating humour within their written humour to each other. While there was a strict informal hierarchy (a subeditor would be below a designer for example), these jokes would cross the hierarchy. The editor was in charge of the group and was the individual responsible for restricting my access to meetings during my research. However humour was shared with the editor as well,

as Becca noted to me that she had sent a funny email to the editor in her humour log. She had stated this right after telling me that she had been trying to appear 'studious', which I brought up again:

> I think it's alright if it is the sort of thing that *takes just a second* to drag a picture. And then we will all do stuff like that, and it's alright to do stuff like that (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

Adding a humorous image to an email she was already planning to send to the editor was thus seen as acceptable, because as it only took a second and she was still working. The editor seemed to take part in the email joking, as accounts like this one demonstrated, as long as her staff were seen to be working. However these emails could be distinguished from being seen to be messing around in the office, as Becca noted 'half an hour of laughing and joking' would not have been appropriate in the office on that particular day. While the employees did send many humorous emails to each other, there were times when they did share humour within the group. These 'times for fun' were located in distinct times or in certain spaces which could be distinguished from normal work.

Times for fun

Like the other two organisations, Magazine Inc. also had 'fun' activities planned for its employees. These included traditional corporate events such as the Christmas party, which in previous years had been at a comedy club. As it was approaching Christmas as I entered the organisation, the Christmas party was prevalent in the conversations of the group. Unlike previous years, the Christmas party had been restricted to a party within the workplace in order to be frugal. It had been a difficult financial year for the company and they had reduced the departmental budgets for such events. This also applied to other 'fun' activities which had traditionally occurred. One example of this was the fortnightly 'drinks trolley' where from 4pm on a Friday the management provided alcoholic drinks and snacks for employees to consume while socialising at their desks. However in the month I researched in the organisation the drinks trolley was cancelled to also allow them to be seen as sensitive to cuts made in the

organisation (especially staff cuts). The team decided to organise their own drinking session for that month in order to continue the tradition. However this marked the end of the tradition of the drinks provided by management, and I discovered after completing the research that the ritual eventually stopped altogether.

In comparison to other organisations, 'fun' as a strategy was less defined within Magazine Inc. The 'fun' was expressed through the employees' attempts to put themselves within the mindset of their readership: by understanding the 'reality' of childhood that they were presenting. As a result, employees often used the language discussed above in everyday conversation; discuss gossip about the celebrities in the magazine and organised the photo shoots of the child models and children's TV stars for the magazine. 'Fun' was less enshrined as a value for its own sake, instead being related to the mentality required by the employees in order to produce their product. As this was not officially enshrined in the corporate culture, these informal fun practices appeared to disappear when the organisation came under strain, as can be seen in the examples of the Christmas party and the fortnightly drinks trolley. This related to the idea that fun was still a deviant activity and to be seen as having too much fun was distracting for others.

In summary, the three organisations used a 'fun' corporate culture as a strategy to communicate the meaning of work to their employees. In each case, fun held a slightly different position. As we saw in Smiley, 'fun' was seen as being essential to their everyday work activities and through maintaining a positive view on their work they were able to perform well. In Marketing Inc. 'fun' was mostly seen as an activity that was parallel to work, not necessarily intrinsic to it, but helping employees to get into a positive frame of mind. It was seen as a reward for good performance as well as a break throughout the day. In Magazine Inc., being 'fun' was essential to producing the magazine, but having too much fun was very problematic for employees who needed to be seen to be working. While the organisations used these strategies to attempt to control the meaning of work, employees used fun within their everyday lived experiences of the organisation to make sense of their work and their interactions with others. One method of doing so was to use humour as a tactic for employees to establish their own meaning about work. These can be seen as 'readings' of the corporate

culture as a text (Hall, 2001), as set up in the methodology of this thesis as a framework by which tactics can be understood.

Humour within the 'fun' cultures

The readings of the fun cultural texts were complex, fragmented and frequently contradictory. At times, employees appeared to accept the play ethic (Kane, 2005), while during other instances rejected the corporate culture as being childish, forced or disingenuous. In many cases, even within the same interview, an employee would express two or more of these readings of the corporate culture. They may for instance speak enthusiastically about 'fun' aspects as a pleasurable feature of their work, and then discuss the falseness they saw within the culture later in the interview. Humour was an important mechanism in their 'reading' or interpretation of the corporate texts. Employees would discuss how they were an outgoing sociable personality to whom joking was natural and then discuss how joking only was conducted with particular groups at particular times. Despite humour being allowed in the organisations as part of the culture, they noted how 'boundaries' within the humour were important to establish, a feature I will return to later. Despite this, humour was widely used on a variety of topics, ranging from 'silly' playfulness to the serious critique of management and the organisation.

The majority of the humour which employees reported was either spoken or sent by email, often involving embodied actions; virtual materials such as photographs or video; or online forms of communication such as instant messaging and Facebook. It was noticeable that in Smiley the majority of the events reported in the humour log were spoken, while in Marketing Inc. there was a more even split between emailed/written and spoken. In Magazine Inc. much of the humour was through email or within small groups, for example around a computer displaying an image.

Magazine Inc. was by far the quietest of the workplaces, with Marketing Inc. also fairly hushed for significant periods. In Smiley, the back office usually had a constant buzz of activity with answering phones and discussing work. This also related to the role of 'fun' within these

organisations: in Smiley fun was based in the everyday activities and attitude to work; in Marketing Inc. fun was often organised into group activities at points throughout the day; and in Magazine Inc. socialising was seen as more appropriate either outside of work or at the beginning or end of the day. The 'feel' of the office related to how employees chose to express their humour, the acceptance of humour and how 'watched' they felt while they were doing it. Humour represents a tactic in using a concept of 'fun' which matches the employee's own understanding of the workplace. Even within Magazine Inc., where employees felt uncomfortable being visibly seen to have too much 'fun' during the day, they made use of humour in emails and quiet conversations in their everyday experiences.

The instances of humour were often multilayered: they related to previous events, experiences and knowledge the participants had of the group, or could result from a joke built upon previous jokes. Occasionally there would be a joke which stood alone from other events or was a form of 'canned' humour, however it was more likely that jokes were set into the context of what was occurring in the organisations. There may be for instance a funny event which occurred days before which would be returned to throughout the following days with further jokes adding to the humour. Joking would also relate to particular in-group knowledge such as team members' personalities or traits.

The results of the humour log demonstrated how difficult humour was to communicate to outsiders because of its contextual nature. Participants would jot down notes about the event, and then later describe it within the interview. As described in the methodology there would be a lot of effort by the participants to check that I 'got' the joke and we explored the context of the humour to understand the references it made. Occasionally, participants themselves would forget the meaning of the joke, as it occurred within the moment of work. Quotes like the following one from Dessa in Smiley were common. She had forgotten why she had written down an event:

> I don't know why that is funny anymore. Yeah. I don't know how to pin it down. I found it quite difficult to identify why that was still funny. I think also we do have quite a funny office (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009).

The joke related to the upcoming 50th birthday of Harry, the founder of the company, and the possible gifts they could give him. Somehow the conversation had turned to buying him a huge 'chocolate god', although Dessa couldn't remember how the conversation had got there apart from the fact that Harry liked chocolate. In my field notes I had noted the conversation in how they had discussed chocolate cakes they could buy and several jokes which had come out of it. However for Dessa this context had disappeared with time and despite making notes of the event the relevance was no longer clear. The last sentence in the quote however links this to the context of the office, which was that she perceived it as being a funny place. She viewed the back office as a space where the group could regularly share their humour. The following sections set up how humour was viewed by participants, from 'frivolous' performative humour, to forming inclusivity, and finally using in-group humour.

Frivolity and performative humour

When the participants discussed their humour logs, at times the content of the humour was less important than the effects upon their audiences. These jokes were told for the amusement of others with little critical reflection on any meaning itself. When recounting these jokes, they often came with a warning that these jokes were stupid, or that they did not know why they were funny. One example from Marketing Inc. demonstrates the sort of humour this entailed:

> Ok *sorry this was really stupid* but the coffee machine was going 'Beep, Beep, Beep' and everyone was going 'What the hell is that noise?' and I just went 'Oh the coffee machine is reversing' or something like that. That was to the people in my pod and that got a laugh (Mary, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Examples such as the one above were generally spontaneous and designed to make others in the group laugh. Around five out of the forty-two spoken jokes fell into this group, with the others including having a giggle with a colleague about her holiday, laughing about 'recycling' reports instead of writing new ones, conversations about what the possible children would look like if employees bred and the chocolate god joke mentioned in the previous section.

Other jokes which fell into this category also reflected explicitly on the embodied nature of the spoken humour. An example from Jen in Marketing Inc. demonstrates how the employees used material aspects of the office and their own bodies to convey the humour:

> *I don't know why I found this so funny.* The guy who I sit next to, Evan, who you have also interviewed, we have these headphones that you set down and you speak. I don't know how they work, we can't get them to work. Anyway we put them on our heads and started talking to each other with them, even though we couldn't hear each other, and pretending we worked at a call centre. We started going like 'hello' for about an hour (Jen, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

One similarity between these accounts was the statements that employees did not know why the jokes were so funny, and their apologies for the humour sounding stupid. They appeared to be, as employees described it, as a 'random moment' (Gina, Marketing Inc., August 2008), 'random bursts' (Hugh, Marketing Inc., August 2008), 'cracking a few silly jokes' (Lee, Smiley, July 2009) or 'something silly' (Kerry, Magazine Inc., December 2008). Out of the twenty-one jokes which could be classified as embodied, three fell into this description: the other two concerned someone who had been eating suspicious potatoes being off sick and a gay man who was holding a female co-worker's handbag not looking 'sufficiently gay enough' (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009).

Many of the employees viewed this humour as frivolous, fairly meaningless and embedded within the everyday to such a degree that they rarely reflected upon it. However analysing the context of the jokes, many of them were concerned with gaining the correct response from the audience, usually their colleagues. They may have been 'silly' and 'random' but on reflection of the context of the joking, it still contained meaning. The light hearted jokes were embedded within the context of the workplace, commenting on their work, their co-workers and their employers. They often communicated something about the group dynamics, for example one person described an email she had received around about a dancing egg, which while the egg itself was not particularly relevant, it was an example of a normal joking email which the group would send around. Another example of email humour from Magazine Inc. demonstrates how the humour within these jokes was both frivolous and meaningful. Kerry

discussed a picture they had been considering for inclusion in the magazine, which unfortunately emphasised the star's genital area:

> [The movie star] he was in [a photo] with American football gear, with very tight trousers on, and umm basically ... a cup sort of thing. But the way it was and the lighting made it look like he had a bigger whatever, and it just looked like, and we just all could not stop laughing... (Kerry, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

Kerry and the other employees perceived this to be frivolous fun, however the joke played on the norms of the organisational culture as well as a function of the job. The women were reviewing the photograph for inclusion into the magazine. They needed to notice sexualised aspects in order to avoid what was deemed to be inappropriate photographs being in the children's magazine (Kerry, Magazine Inc., December 2008). Of the thirty-eight humour logs which were virtual in nature, twenty-three of these were considered frivolous humour (thirteen of which came from the humour in Magazine Inc. and ten from Marketing Inc.).

The humour discussed above commented on the social environment they were working in, whether that be the reversing coffee machine, the useless headphones or the pictures they were reviewing for the magazine. They created bonds between the employees who 'shared a laugh'. Humour, as set up in previous chapters, is always social. In this case, the employees appeared to be using humour to demonstrate that they were funny people to their colleagues. As will be explored in Chapter Six, this impression management was important to how others viewed them and how they felt about their identity in the workplace. It was thus performative: humour was being used to be seen as funny. The next category also plays on this theme of bonding between employees more explicitly: jokes which were perceived to create inclusion in groups through joking.

Inclusivity through joking

While many of the jokes in this section were still considered frivolous by the participants, the use of the jokes was perceived as having an additional function: they were perceived as

directly contributing towards building a feeling of involvement within a group. The following example was ‘random’ in the same sense as the above section, but also was concerned with the group adoption of the humour:

> So she [a colleague] came back one day and she came up with short acronyms for things, like SADO was Sainsbury’s and Och, can’t remember what it was for, but giving us like a vocabulary for everyone on the team to use, so we all started laughing. And how to fit them into our daily words (Bea, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The humour was created around the idea of forming a special language for the group, which they could use on a daily basis. The quote suggested that the colleague was purposely creating humour which the other group members should adopt (‘giving us a vocabulary’), and that the group collectively found this an amusing concept (‘we *all* started laughing’). This sense of group inclusivity was found in other activities, for example Tina from Magazine Inc. described embodied ‘fun’ which was also aimed at creating inclusivity within the group:

> And there is definitely a lot of humour in our nights out for instance where we will wear silly moustaches and sing karaoke. Having a laugh. So I think it is quite important that when we all get together we do have a laugh because otherwise we will just kill each other (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

The group inclusivity in this example was formed around having a laugh by dressing in ‘silly moustaches’ and performing karaoke. Considering the team included only women, the wearing of fake moustaches suggested a parody of gender norms similar that of the carnivalesque. In addition, the team then performed karaoke, a ritual which involves a degree of possible embarrassment through the performance. These activities are perceived as fun, through the statement ‘have a laugh’, and as important in their ability to get the group together to share the experience. The participants described moments of intense stress within the office, countered with these planned activities.

At times the humour that was used to form inclusivity within a group would not happen in a single event, but would be repeated when employees could re-experience group activities. Virtual media was particularly useful in this, as photographs could capture events and be relived in group humour which reinforced the involvement of individuals in the group. Chris, in Marketing Inc., described in his humour log some jokes which were shared in reliving a charitable gardening event they had taken part in.

> When you go on Facebook, someone can tag you and it sends you a notification. So essentially they tagged people in the photograph no matter what they were doing. So my back was tagged.
>
> [So did you then talk about it in the office?]
>
> Yea it was sort of staged. So we would mention it as we were passing by the person (Chris, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The photographs presented a representation of the fun event for the employees, who could then have a laugh at the odd positions they were caught in. The posting of the photographs meant that those in the team could be included through being 'tagged', which alerted them to the presence of the photographs and let them in on the joke. Eleven of the humour logs were concerned with the inclusivity of group members, six of which were spoken, one was embodied and four were through virtual communications. The next category plays on the idea of inclusivity, but was formed around in-jokes rather than 'random' humour. The humour in these was based on the group understandings which excluded others and was meaningful to how the employees saw themselves as part of the group.

In-jokes

In-jokes played specifically on the informal norms of the teams and of smaller groups of employees. Thirteen of the jokes within the humour log fell into this cluster, four of which were spoken, seven were embodied and two were expressed through virtual communications. These jokes usually had long-standing, esoteric humour and were context specific, through

being related to attributes of the work or the personal characteristics of employees. These often comment on the strange irregularities of other employees' characteristics, the knowledge of which increases when colleagues work together. One example of this came from Marketing Inc. where Gina confessed to 'randomly' bursting into singing and how jokes were made about this trait.

> I didn't realise I did it. When I first came, I had been here a couple of months, and my account manager... said how I randomly sing, and I didn't know I did it, so I was like 'Do I?' And she was like 'Yeah, you just randomly burst out into songs'. And normally it is related to the work... So one evening we were in really late and I started to sing Queen 'I Want To Break Free' (Gina, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

She continued in her story to describe how singing had become a topic the others joked with her about, but also stated that they enjoyed it and other employees had begun to sing as well. Other in-jokes concerned the nature of work and how employees experienced it. One example from Smiley concerned a joke an employee made about a client who was having difficulties with her computer:

> I've got one lady on the apprenticeship, she is really sweet and I say, can we just delete that now, and she is looking on the keyboard for the delete key. And she doesn't even know the keyboard. So alarm bells start going off that this is a person who isn't using computers in any kind of (laugh) meaningful way! (Beth, Smiley, June 2009).

These sorts of jokes were specific to the job, in the sense of having to be patient when teaching those with little experience new programmes, but also generic in the sense that the joke could have represented many of their clients and the wider population which struggle with computers. However they also expressed the frustration that some of the trainers felt when dealing with clients who were ill prepared to come on the course in the first place. Humour became a way of expressing this frustration away from the client.

These examples of group joking, group inclusivity and group in-jokes in the humour log often affirmed the corporate culture as being 'fun'. They used humour to form strong group ties with other employees, although often this meant placing other employees or clients as the 'butt' of the joke. Many of these were perceived by employees to be frivolous in their nature, humorous occurrences during their day which were largely without meaning, in the jokes themselves. They were therefore fairly shallow in their meaning. They were often context specific in that they commented on the work, the organisation or on other employees. However they were not reflected on or perceived by the employees as being a critique of the organisations. The purpose of much of this humour was also to build bonds between employees, which reflected why they perceived this humour as 'just silly', as it was not intended to cause any offense to those they wished to bond with. However, employees were not always positive about working in these organisations. In the next section more critical viewpoints are discussed, representing moments where employees rejected the corporate culture, their work and their colleagues.

'It is not all sunshine and smiles'

The previous section discussed the use of humour by employees, confirming that employees did use the 'have fun' values of the organisation to engage in humorous behaviour. While employees I interviewed did discuss having fun at work, they had to negotiate this with their everyday experiences of work. As Beth in Smiley stated: "it is not all sunshine and smiles all the time" (Beth, Smiley, June 2009). Even though they may use humour, there were employees who rejected the corporate cultures. This suggested that while their behaviour may conform to expectations set out in the corporate cultures, for some employees in their perspective organised 'fun' at work could be problematic. This included playing along with activities to meet expectations. These employees would not necessarily express these cynical views within the workplace, they were often involved in the organisation of 'fun' and would take part in the everyday banter that occurred. Often the rejection was of the 'fun' culture and the assumptions made within the culture, rather than of having fun in itself. Many of the issues below relate to the superficiality of the corporate cultures. While in principle it seemed like a good idea to 'have fun' at work, these employees recognised the limitations that 'fun' at work

had to change many of the work related problems they faced. It was therefore possible to play along with the culture, accepting some uses of it while finding other aspects of it problematic.

Marketing Inc.

In Marketing Inc. some employees discussed 'playing along' with the activities. For example in an informal interview with Dale, who was one of my key informants, he described to me having to repress frustration with the 'fun' work. While he stated that generally he agreed with the 'have fun' statements and activities, they contradicted his actual experience of work, which was working long hours in a stressful and highly pressured environment. As he progressed into a more senior role, he found he was increasingly annoyed with others having fun around him at work. For him, the culture was too 'nice', and especially new employees appeared to be oblivious to the office politics which occurred. He attributed this 'nice' aspect of the culture to his perception of the organisation as being dominated by women who avoid conflict. The reality for Dale however was that when he became more senior he began to experience the office politics which result in veiled power struggles. He was an ambitious employee, and while he remained at Marketing Inc. for the friendships he had developed over time, he was at that time considering moving to other organisations to get the promotion and related pay increase he desired. The 'have fun' elements did little to counter the long hours culture he experienced.

Dale described to me how the long hours were socially reinforced through feeling 'watched' by other employees if you left on time. As a result, working long hours became normalised, so that "seven o'clock comes around almost without noticing it" (Dale, Marketing Inc., August 2008). The long-hour culture was considered a problem by management who initiated a variety of competitions to encourage employees to leave on time at least one day a week. Despite this, the norm remained a culture of presence in the organisation, reinforced by an industry expectation that people employed in advertising would work long hours. The irony was that employees would take 'time-outs' during the day to play games or to have fun in their monthly team meetings but would often work till 8pm or even midnight to meet their deadlines for clients. While employees could opt-out of fun activities due to deadlines, the consistent long hours which employees seemed to work meant that fun and time were

entwined in the organisation. The employees would also take part in fun activities which occurred outside of work hours, including going to the pub, socialising with other employees or organised work activities in the evenings. Most employees did not view this as a problem, accepting that it was useful to have 'fun' breaks in their day to help them work longer hours.

Another employee who expressed his frustration with Marketing Inc. was Chris, who was initially quite reserved when talking to me. He did however present a view of the 'fun' aspects of the corporate culture in a more narrow definition than most, but referring exclusively to the organised activities:

> To me the way it is implemented is that it is encouraged at specific times. So I mean the 'Have Fun' team will say, right, we are going to have an event, some event, something like a Christmas party. And then we sometimes just get together more spontaneously. Generally I don't think there is anything that says 'make it a fun environment'. I think to some extent they might, they might [sic] think there is, the management talk about that... (Chris, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

In Chris's view, the concept of 'have fun' by the management was 'implemented' at specific times where fun events were organised. Occasionally there may also be some spontaneous socialising; however this did not extend to the everyday social context of work. Management may desire there to be 'fun' in a more pervasive way, however attempts to encourage this, such as the visual decoration of the floor, were described as 'going a bit overboard' (Chris, Marketing Inc., July 2008). While Chris was an active member of the specialist services team and also took part in organising fun activities in the social committee, he did not always buy in to the values. As a result he expressed a more cynical position towards the 'fun' culture when discussing certain values such as 'love':

> I think it is kind of tacky. I mean you have got all these teams and posters about relationships and having fun, but it doesn't seem like there is anything real behind it. They like the idea of people having a good time at work and they are trying to

> push it... They just don't particularly seem to be sincere (Chris, August, Marketing Inc.).

It surprised me when Chris described the corporate culture as 'tacky' when he had appeared to be quite positive about working in the organisation in earlier conversations. This false 'front' (as Chris described it) to the corporate culture was important however. Chris could feel the culture was superficial but still play along with it, suggesting that he experienced the culture as 'kitsch', or the ability to "turn thought and feeling into formula" encouraging unreflective consumption of thought and feeling within institutional structures (Linstead, 2002: 660). In this case, the idea of having fun is understood through formulaic discourses which attempt to provide meaning which is simplified, unified and pleasing, and lacking any relation to the lived sensations of 'love' and 'relationships'. Employees go through the motions of routine thoughts and feelings. In this sense the corporate culture is a simplified reality of values such as 'love' and 'fun' without the substance behind these concepts: instead it sweeps over the contradictions that employers supposedly 'love' their employees yet hold power over them and can dispose of them with ease; that work is stressful and tiring rather than light-hearted 'fun' in the child-like play seen in the images of Marketing Inc. (Figure 6: 'Have Fun' as seen on page 157). For Chris, the real activities which formed a culture took place when employees met outside of work, even if these were paid for out of the team's budgets. Ironically Chris has also mentioned earlier that he rarely socialised with other employees outside of the work activities.

Finally Hugh was also cynical about the way the discourses were understood by men in particular. For him the discourses such as 'love' and 'relationships' were feminine, and did not relate to how men saw the world instrumentally:

> They [men] are happy to buy into it because either a) they are happy and enjoy it or b) it furthers the business. That's another reason why I would be quite cynical. I would never ever think they are doing it because they enjoy it, I think they are doing it because they get something out of it (Hugh, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

For him, he believed men in the organisation bought into the corporate values in only a shallow, performative capacity. With the two options of their genuine enjoyment or because it furthers the business, and they therefore receive promotions and rewards, he believed that the first reason would not be a motivator for the men in the organisation. While recognising the limitations of his generalisation of this to all men in the organisation, it suggests that at least some men within the firm rejected the values as too feminine and playing along with the culture was an aspect of the job they just needed to do to get by. They would instrumentally use the corporate values if they got something out of it, which suggests that some employees may have cynical reservations about the values. This idea of the shallowness of the values was also prevalent in Magazine Inc. as will be discussed in the next section.

Magazine Inc.

At Magazine Inc., Tina was also critical of what she perceived to be a dumbing down of values. She expressed cynicism about the 'fun', especially in relation to the content of the magazine. The infantile 'fun' often contradicted her view of how the magazine could be inspirational.

> It was giving them one aspect of life, it could be [a] very airy-fairy-take. Kind of… happy, which I approved of, but just really quite [a] shallow view of life. It is very materialistic and very consumerist. It is definitely pushing the girls to buy a lot (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

This frustration with the content of the magazine was reflected in her frustration with the actual tasks that she undertook. Certain aspects of the work, such as being able to come up with good puns, were highly valued on the team, while Tina felt there ought to be space in the magazine for information that would improve the readers' lives and tackle issues they might be facing. Those who could demonstrate their funniness were rewarded, as Becca noted: "By trying to make it funny. Not too wordy or geeky... It's [humour] one of the things we always say they are looking for when they read the magazine" (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008). However, these puns which were not too 'wordy or geeky' often meant they were

funny but lacked substance. Tina was more cynical than Becca about the way puns were chosen for the magazine:

> Some of them [puns in the magazine] are really funny but um yeah. I guess they are appreciated by the editorial team here. I am not very good at puns and I wish I was. And I do appreciate that they can be really clever. But what I don't like is sacrificing meaning for puns (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

The way certain types of humour were rewarded, particularly those without substance, was frustrating to Tina who had a strong belief in the education of children. It also expressed her frustrations of working with her manager, who put what she felt were unreasonable demands on the staff. In the interview, Tina stated that the manager would create stress for the employees by changing the layout or content of the spread at the last minute. In general she was supportive of the fun at work, but also recognised that there was often bitching going on behind people's back, or that humour could be barbed criticism. Other employees at Magazine Inc. such as Becca saw this as mostly 'ribbing' that was harmless in nature, but for Tina it reflected cattiness in the group which she didn't enjoy. Perhaps not surprisingly, within a year of the research Tina left Magazine Inc. due to not being happy with the atmosphere.

Smiley

While I did not witness hostility towards the concept of having fun at Smiley, one of the more interesting comments about the culture came from Faye. I had the opportunity to interview Faye while she was answering the helpline for the clients, so our conversation lasted longer than most, with also more interruptions. However it was also more relaxed as a result, filling in the time between calls. When I asked her how the corporate ethos of 'having fun' came across in the organisation, she responded:

> I don't know. I was quite interested when you said that was what you were doing because I was kind of thinking, is that something that's more apparent here than

> elsewhere? And I'm not sure if it is or not. But there is definitely, I suppose what there is here is a real relaxed thing about 'You are who you are' (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

For Faye, the culture was not really about having fun, nor did it represent a place where more fun was actually had than other organisations. Instead, the corporate culture which was important to her focused on the ability to be yourself rather than having fun per se. She continued that "most offices I have ever worked in where you work with a team there is a lot of banter" (Faye, Smiley, June 2009). This link between fun and work for Faye was bounded in the team dynamics, not prescribed by the organisation's mission statement. The ability to enjoy banter, which seemed for Faye to be the meaningful way she interpreted my question on having fun, was found in all spaces including the "big multinationals" she had worked for. What she did feel was different about Smiley was the relaxed attitude, where people could be themselves (mirroring Fleming and Sturdy's 2009 work on authenticity). However for Faye having a designed fun culture did not result in the workplace being any more or less fun, with fun being perceived as outside of the control of management.

At Smiley, there were some more general criticism of the corporate culture regarding the way decisions were made. For some employees they desired a more direct line of authority, for while Harry was the founder, he took a back seat in the decisions of the organisation. Instead they were made through consensus within the groups, which could lead to a lengthy decision making process about all decisions rather than being able to quickly respond to changes. In relation to this there were some problems with the implementation of ideas as those who proposed ideas were expected to take charge of them. There was a certain level of stress associated with this aspect of taking responsibility for ideas, for example Beth noted:

> Your stress is really through like when you have something new. Like when I was doing [teaching] the apprenticeships... we did have an awful lot of little things we had to do then, and you are just expected to get on and do it, what is needed. So there are times you know when you and she was staying late, but people do that sometimes when you need to (Beth, Smiley, July 2009).

In addition to the stress felt with executing tasks, the trainers I interviewed (Beth, Faye and Lee) disliked the trainer evaluation forms and the related pressure the process created on the trainers. After each session, the clients reviewed the session in a trainer evaluation form on a number of characteristics ranging from how much they felt they had learnt to their overall experience and whether they would recommend Smiley to others. These reviews were correlated and employees were expected to get excellent (rather than good or satisfactory) reviews for the majority of the categories. While the trainers in general accepted that fun was important in providing training which clients enjoyed, at the same time they discussed that they would have bad days for a variety of reasons which would reflect on their reviews. They spoke of having slumps where reviews would be less than excellent for a period of time, and this would put extra stress on their ability to ensure the training was fun for clients. Since many of the senior trainers also mentored other trainers, there was a tension created by these scores. They recognised that a variety of reasons could affect the scorings, but still had to discuss a prolonged set of bad scores with their mentees on how to improve, and if ultimately that person did not improve, the trainer would have to consider recommending to the managing director that they should not continue in the position.

The ability to have fun did not negate the other organisational problems and tensions which existed in the three organisations. At times 'having fun' was perceived as problematic because of these tensions, which related to stress, the shallowness of the 'fun' discourses, the measuring of 'fun' as part of their work, and the types of fun which were expected. These contextual problems related to the space within which the humour was taking place: a space which was still a workplace, which was embedded in the expectations of the employees to perform in particular patterns and which assessed them on their ability to do so. These tensions arose out of the contradictions between the conception of this space as a 'fun' place and out of the expectations of work as 'professional'. The lived experiences of employees were an attempt to negotiate these meanings. This was particularly the case in these organisations as the companies conceived of the space as being 'fun' and attempted to reflect the values of the companies within these spaces. In order to develop how these contradictions occurred, the next section discusses the space in the organisation through the distinctions made by Lefebvre on the different layers of space. The expression of humour was bounded within the space of the organisations, as the next section will discuss.

The strategies of space

The 'feel' of the organisations was one of the first observations I made on entering into the buildings. This was especially the case as they did not look as I expected corporations to look. The space of the organisations was designed and experienced as communicating messages about the type of organisation and the values it held. As material entities, the organisations consisted of their *perceived, conceived and lived space*, which is concerned with "the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis together" (Lefebvre, 1991: 16). Perceived space, or spatial practice, refers to "the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation [production and reproduction]" (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). In other words, it is the way we have ideas about what certain spaces, such as the home, workplaces and public spaces, look like and the objects they contain. Conceived space on the other hand refers to the meaning embedded within space: how space can be designed to communicate particular values of those who devise it. It is concerned with the "dominant space in any society" conceived by planners, scientists and other social engineers through a "system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs" (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). Finally lived space refers to the way that space can be experienced as individuals move through it. This may include how the images, symbols and signs within those spaces are experienced as meaningful.

For Lefebvre this is "the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). For Lefebvre, the space is experienced in the manner in which dominant institutions conceive it, in this case through a form of 'fun' which is used for organisational gains. As 'fun' organisations, the space was designed to communicate particular messages about the organisation. The three organisations used a playful representation of space: through innovative, open, playful architecture (Magazine Inc.); the aesthetic feel of the bright colours (Marketing Inc., Figure 11: 'Social Area' on page 199); and the cozy, living room and school room feel (Smiley, Figure 9: Waiting Area at Smiley on page 196). Each of these levels of space was important to how employees experience the corporate culture. The following sections will explore these perceived, conceived and lived spaces of the organisations.

This idea of passivity in the space which Lefebvre proposes is questioned here through De Certeau's concept of tactics. This dominated space was experienced by employees as lived space, at the level of representational space. In doing so, Lefebvre's abstract layers of space are embodied into a practical everyday experience through applying his concepts to the use of humour. Humour appears to be a verbal symbolic use of space, an embodied action which draws on the symbolic cues from the conceived and perceived spaces of organisations. In particular it tactically draws on our symbolic understandings of space, and as a result often expresses our knowledge of the nature of work. This engages with the process of not only reacting to the conceived space, but also living in and actively forming space as individuals and groups. Jokes have to be shared with the other employees through space: spoken as a sound, enacted through the body and materialised through the physical surroundings or seen and heard through emails and virtual communities such as Facebook and YouTube.

The everyday experience of working in a 'fun' culture was spatially located: through the demarcation of groups within particular spaces, through the conception of managed spaces as 'fun' and the use of these spaces for managed 'fun' activities and through the individual lived experienced of the space as fun (or not) through interpreting the symbols and images around them. In particular, where employees choose to use humour demonstrated how they formed their own spaces for having fun, while the managed spaces were sometimes rejected. This builds on Gabriel's (1999: 197) concept of unmanaged spaces in organisations, located in: "struggles regarding size, location, and quality of physical premises, equipment, and furniture, the personalisation of individual and group workspaces (and the countertendency to re-appropriate this space from employees with hot deskings and teleworking), and the no-go areas for supervisors through a variety of subordinate strategies". Specifically this then concerns the use of the space. In this sense, unmanaged spaces refer to those spaces surrounding work that Gabriel describes as marginal terrains of the organisation. In these the employee is less visible to the management and as a result more resistant to the control gaze of the organisation. In the organisations studied here, the humour reflected some unmanaged spaces, including virtual spaces of the organisation, where the meaning was more ambiguous. Interestingly Gabriel (1999) did not discuss virtual space as unmanaged space, instead focusing on the symbolic values expressed in physical space. In the organisations studied, the physical was highly conceived space drawing on notions of fun and authenticity of employees. These often also required employees to take part in conceiving the space. As this inverts the struggle

over the personalisation of space, as employees are actively encouraged to personalise this becomes part of the management of space, it leaves few spaces unmanaged in the organisations. The concept of virtual space, a space where activities, conversations, and play activities could occur which were not visible and not managed appeared to be important for the employees.

Perceived space

Space consists of both physical and social characteristics which shape how it is seen and used within organisations. Perceived space, or the historical understanding of workspaces, influenced the separation of space into areas where fun occurred. For all companies the notion of work as a serious space still held for many employees, with outside spaces (pubs, lunches or events) seen as appropriate spaces and times to have fun. The employees would often discuss fun events which took place outside of work requirements, for example socialising and drinking after work. As can be seen in the following discussion, the spaces of the organisation remained on the whole 'managed', and the perception of fun within these spaces varied.

Magazine Inc.

While not able to take photographs in Magazine Inc, the artistically designed building displayed images of the media company's wide range of products. Within my field notes, I observed that the work area was minimalist but featured posters of celebrities, props used in photo-shoots and blow ups of the magazine's cover page. I described the general layout of the building as follows:

> *The office building is open plan and large – 3 floors plus a ground floor and opens up at the centre looking quite impressive. It looks like the areas are concentrated around functions. I am sitting in 'Magazines' which is next to the 'Toys' – an area which produces toys based on TV shows. There are TV screens in the TV unit nearby, and a coffee shop with space-age booths.*

> *The centre is not dissimilar to other centres of this company I have visited: lots of white big open spaces highlighted with bits of colour, and some accent walls with tree leaves pattern. Next to 'Magazines' there are a set of brightly coloured poufs to sit on as a meeting area, which is surrounded by display cabinets of toys* (Field notes, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

This space was segregated purposely by product group. However these were all placed within an open plan space containing the many units. There was some interaction with other units, for example some members of the girls magazines sat next to other magazines (for example a younger girls magazine which focused on animals was sat directly next to the pre-teen magazine unit). However being in the open plan office meant that employees sometimes felt exposed and 'watched' by management and colleagues. For example one employee told me how a few of the team had taken a longer lunch break to go shopping:

> We were really annoyed because they told us that we couldn't have our drinks trolley which we normally have. We were all really, because we had a really hard week and we were really looking forward to it. And then obviously someone found out that there was a bit of a deal going on [in the shops] and so we all went down there and were a bit naughty and had a bit of a long lunch break. Which we didn't really need to do. And we were like trying to sneak back into the office without anyone seeing us, seeing as we were late. And hide as we go 'clunk, clunk, clunk' coming in looking like nutters. So we were just being bad really (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

This feeling of 'being bad' related to the visibility of their actions. They were breaking company norms by going shopping, although there was no official policy about how long lunch breaks should be. It has already been noted how noticeably quiet Magazine Inc. was during work hours. As a result, one employee observed that they mostly had fun at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day, through socialising and telling jokes (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008). This did not mean that employees would not talk to each other, but it tended to be quiet conversations with a couple of individuals rather than including the whole group (Kerry, Magazine Inc., December 2008). Employees might joke while discussing work in small

groups, but would not want to appear to be having too much fun during the day. They perceived the space as distinctly still a work space and associated it with a supervisory gaze over their actions.

Marketing Inc.

In all of the companies, employees perceived some areas as being used for specific purposes: either for certain activities or for the movement of particular people. The teams in Marketing Inc. for instance were aware that their social networks were influenced by the layout of the building. Each of the top two floors represented a team, while on the bottom floor two separate teams shared the space. One employee noted that while there was not a purposely built divide between teams on the same floor, there was a perceived social division:

> Um yeah it's kind of separated. There are no strict lines, we have their desks right next to us, although we have got our backs to each other, there is no line. But I think because of the way it works with our side as being part of the edge of the team and the other people who are on the edge of it are the other team (Chris, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The teams rarely interacted beyond their perceived boundaries, with the exception of the training groups and departmental events twice a year. Interestingly this perception of separation was often aligned to the different purposes of the space. The most notable distinction of this was the space where clients visited and those where they did not. In Marketing Inc. some employees felt pride in working somewhere that clients would be impressed by:

> The visuals for me only really play a part for if I am inviting clients or friends to see where I work, where they can think 'that's quite impressive'. When necessarily working here I don't think it is so important (Doug, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The space was therefore underpinned by a performative element, as a space which was designed to impress outsiders as well as employees in the organisation. In practice clients entering the office area itself was rare; it was more likely they would only see the meeting rooms on the ground floor. As a result, the space was perceived as being for employees on the whole, centred on the grouping of teams. However it was important for the employees what the space said about them as an organisation, that outsiders would be impressed by how innovative and creative the office looked. As Doug's statement above suggests, this was far more important for him than any effect on everyday activities. The interaction of space and clients, and in particular the way that clients and guests experienced the space, was a theme also in Smiley where the focus was on training the clients using a fun approach.

Smiley

In Smiley there was a sharper divide between a public front space, and the back spaces of the Smoothie office and the trainers' social space. Clients generally never entered these spaces, instead only seeing the social area and the training rooms. As a result, the office staff and many of the trainers often would spend time within the back office rather than in the client area (Figure 7: Space for clients on left and Smoothie office on the right). They would use these areas usually when interacting with clients, such as during training or having lunch with clients. The trainers also had their own trainers' area where they could relax away from the clients.

Figure 7: Space for clients on left and Smoothie office on the right

The 'feel' of the client waiting area contrasted quite sharply with more spontaneously designed fun spaces for the employees. The aesthetics of the client area appeared to be cosy and friendly, looking more like a living room than a business. The back office was noticeably less organised, with several desks surrounding the printer in a circle, shelves with filing haphazardly organised and fun objects scattered around. The back office appeared much more spontaneously designed than the client area.

The difference was also notable from the activities which took place in these spaces. The employees would tend to socialise in back office space and stated that they rarely had fun in the client spaces. For example the client space had games such as Jenga (in the left picture), however these games quickly lost their appeal for employees. The perspective was that these fun objects were for the clients:

> Well it's for delegates for like, there is a difference between what we do for delegates and what we do for ourselves. A lot of it, there is a lot of overlap. Um we have giant Connect Four and Jenga just because it is in, that basically it is in

> the um area out there… We do [use them] every now and again, yeah not hugely now. It is one of those things when you see fifty times on your way to work *you stop seeing it properly*. But yeah we used to have space hoppers [laughs] we used to have space hoppers and bean bags (Andy, Smiley, May 2009, emphasis added).

There were perceived difference in what fun was appropriate for the clients and what fun was used by the employees. This distinction reinforced the idea that fun for the clients was designed and performed, while that of the employees was spontaneous. This was linked to the space, where the designed client space was no longer stimulating an aesthetic experience, a process of 'anaestheticisation' (Dale and Burrell, 2003). The exact purpose of these objects seemed to be unclear in Andy's description; however he was very clear that some of the objects were intended for the delegates' use.

These objects, despite being seen on a daily basis, become anaestheticised as part of a process of distancing themselves from the performative space. Employees rejected this materialisation of the 'fun' corporate culture into objects designed to impress the clients. Other objects such as space hoppers and bean bags gave more amusement because they were perceived as being intended for employees. The back office was perceived as the location where employees had fun in order to cope with their work:

> The back office, in terms of the Smoothie office which is where I am, um where I work… It works on a slightly different principle. We are really informal in that I have a huge glitter ball above my desk. But it comes from a slightly different principle in that we are really, really busy in there and we can get quite stressed and a lot of the time it will be a group of people who (pause) make each other laugh or support each other because we are in the same boat really. And there is a bit of a kind of camaraderie spirit in there between some of the full timers (Andy, Smiley, May 2009).

A significant amount of this stress described involved working with the clients on the telephone or dealing with problems which had occurred, as long-term relationships were an

emphasis of the work. As a result the non-visibility of the staff to clients was important, with joking about clients regularly noted in my field notes. For example, customers who were difficult would be joked about as they were put on hold, laughing about their accents or difficult surnames. I noted the person who answered the phone commenting: ‘What am I supposed to say, I can’t make you out because you’re a bit foreign and I’m a bit stupid?’ (Field notes, Smiley). Comments made within this space were often not for clients to hear, as Andy noted:

> Often it is like, we talk crap so that we can be professional. So you end up being really cool and collected when you are on with a delegate, and you are like thank you very much and thank you and then you put the phone down and go 'bluah' (Andy, Smiley, July 2009).

The separation of being professional on the phone and being able to use humour in the back office was facilitated by this being an employee-only space. While on the phone the employees needed to maintain a professional veneer, however because of the lack of visibility in those spaces they were then able to express emotions which were not prescribed as ‘professional’ behaviour. On the other hand the training rooms were seen as spaces where trainers were on show: where they interacted with them as part of the delivering of the service. An example of this space can be seen below (Figure 8: Training Room). The glass doors and windows to the room allowed anyone walking in the hall to view what was occurring in the space. The desks were also arranged to allow the trainer to stand at the front demonstrating how to do the task, and then to wander around checking progress.

Figure 8: Training Room

During my observation I sat in on a session on effective training. In this session, the trainers stood at the front and instructed the mock client (myself) through a set of actions on the computer. It trained them on how to answer questions, using rhetorical questions to encourage the client to find the answer themselves. However, the trainers I interviewed viewed these sessions as more than simply instruction, they were spaces where the trainers were very aware that they needed to engage their clients:

> I think you have got to be really careful standing in front of a group. Yeah you've got to be a bit. But umm I can't quite describe how it comes about but you often walk past a training room and everyone is laughing. But it's not necessarily because the trainer has cracked a joke, it is because there is um there is, it is because [of] the atmosphere we create in the classes (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

For Faye, one of the trainers who had been with the company the longest, training was a careful balance of ‘reading’ the group and giving the correct performance for them to learn. While the session I observed was a fairly serious ‘performance’ as the potential trainer was being assessed on their ability to train, trainers such as Faye described performing ‘fun’ in these spaces by using humour. The humour was subtle, but would help the class to relax through having a positive, joking attitude. During the interviews with trainers, these members of staff spoke about using humour strategically to engage the client during lessons, with stock jokes used to demonstrate particular points. As Faye claimed: ‘a few jokes at the beginning of a session are a good way to get things going’ (Field notes, Smiley, June 2009). Beth discussed using stock jokes when employees made common mistakes, for example entering an incorrect percentage for a pay increase in an excel spread sheet would lead her to joke ‘we should all go work there’ (Beth, Smiley, June 2009). Jokes such as these would be inoffensive, allowing the client to laugh about their mistake while discussing the mistake with the class and how it occurred. However, the jokes would have to be relatively safe as part of being ‘careful’ in front of the group. Again this need to be safe in front of the client was a form of bounded humour, in this case bounding the display of humour towards a performative element. Through these statements, employees recognised that humour was being used tactically to engage the client with the training, easing the client into the sessions and using it to recognise mistakes made. As such it was purposely being used to work on the client experience.

Conceived space

All three organisations conceived space (Lefebvre, 1991; Dale, 2005) in order to express the ‘fun’ corporate culture. In conceived space, meanings are embedded within the space which need to be decoded by those within in. It forms a dominant space which holds values of the governing group: here the organisation and the managers, planners and designers which it engages for its use. All three companies contained break-out areas, and the buildings were contemporary, artistic and brightly coloured. All were aesthetically designed to appear as ‘fun’ spaces, as the following sections will demonstrate, which held values about what a ‘fun’ organisation ought to look like and how those within it ought to behave.

Magazine Inc.

Unlike the other companies, the employees in Magazine Inc. were not expected to take an active role in conceptualising the space. Management conceived the space with particular objectives of transparency and utility in mind, for example with claims that the space should encourage people "to come and see what we do" as well as describing the space as 'inspirational', 'flexible', and 'energy-efficient' (Magazine Inc., Press Release, 2004). The building made use of open spaces, such as the open staircase up the four floors so that on the top floor a person could look down on the magazine and other units below. On the top floors were the executive offices, and on the floors below were more open plan workspace and meeting rooms. Throughout the building, artists had been commissioned to paint colourful installations 'into the fabric of the building', decorating walls with colourful pictures (Magazine Inc., Press Release, 2004). The emphasis of the building's architecture then was on appearing creative, innovative and inspirational, especially for impressing visitors and guests, as well as designed to increase interaction and creativity.

These meeting rooms were designed around the brands of the well-known products from the media company. One room had giant books on shelves, another had racing car seats for chairs and another was designed after a children's science-fiction television series. A meeting had been booked by the sub-editor of the magazine in the final room, and I joined the group as they moved from their normal workspace to the offices above. In my field notes I noted how excited the employees seemed to be using this space, it did not seem to be common that employees would have meetings in this room unless they were team meetings organised by the editor. In the room itself there were leather sofas, a retro wooden desk in the middle and a solid oak desk behind the sofas with quirky objects on the top from the show. The room appeared to be an accurate replica of one of the well-known sets of the show, meticulous in its detail. The conversation at the beginning of the meeting seemed to be excited about using this room, signifying this was a special and unusual event for the employees. During the meeting, one employee in particular seemed to be looking around the room with interest, and even got up towards the end of the meeting to look at one of the objects on the desk.

This conceived space certainly reflected the values of the organisation, to be creative and quirky. However, Kerry discussed how moving to an open plan office had changed her behaviour to be less jokey: "I think it keeps us a bit better behaved actually.... I know I am more conscious of the other teams" (Kerry, Magazine Inc., December 2008). Likewise Tina noted how "we can sit there for hours not talking to anyone... I think people are aware that if they are seen to be laughing and giggling together than they are obviously not working" (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008). Despite the designers of the building claiming that the open plan would increase staff interaction, it seemed to have the opposite effect where staff felt conscious of making noise. Even their Friday afternoon 'drinks' session at their desk was an issue of worry for staff, as they noted that they felt guilty that they were drinking while others in different groups were still working around them (Field notes on Friday drinks session, Magazine Inc., December 2008) The pressure for the employees to look as if they are working regulated their behaviour in the workplace, and ensured that they remained conscious of other teams.

Smiley

In Smiley, Harry, the founder of the company, also made a distinct effort to translate the fun corporate culture into the material aspects of the building, especially within the client space (Lee, Smiley, July 2009). The training centre was brightly decorated, with sofas, tables, company awards and games such as giant Jenga for employees and customers to play. Likewise the training rooms, the 'Smoothie' office and trainers' office contained 'fun' objects like toys and a glitter ball. The objects were designed to reflect the openness of the culture and the appeal of the space of being comfortable and relaxing. For example, Faye discussed how she would try to work in the Smoothie office when she was not training, stating "I've always enjoyed spending time in there and personally I seek that out" (Faye, Smiley, June 2009). On the other hand, the client space appeared to mirror a family room, using sofas and throws. One of the employees also referred to the space looking like a children's playroom: "when they [clients] first come in based on other organisations they think it is a crèche" (Andy, Smiley, May 2009). This childlike aesthetic reflects the playful values of the company, as not taking itself too seriously.

Figure 9: Waiting Area at Smiley

Marketing Inc

Alternatively in Marketing Inc. the team themes were extensively used to decorate the space of the organisation. For instance in the entryway corridor the mottos were written on the walls as well as displayed on a television (as seen in Figure 6: 'Have Fun' on page 157 and in Figure 10: Entryway, with close up of ‘Have Fun’ banner on page 197).

Figure 10: Entryway, with close up of 'Have Fun' banner

Around a year before I began my research the office was redecorated to express the values of the organisation in the space, as Keith notes in his interview below. It was not just management who were involved in the decoration of this space. Management encouraged

employees to volunteer in their teams to help pick out the colours, paint the walls and choose games and playful items within their social space. Keith describes this decision referring to how management encouraged employees to decide how the space should look:

> They have only started to do that a year ago, they went from sort of a very dull office environment and they decided that it was going to be one of our core areas and we had to make an effort… the individual teams that say 'we have to make the office look cool, how do we do that?' and they get everyone involved and say 'we can have chairs there'... they have actually said, 'you guys are the ones who are working there so you come up with ideas for it'. Because everyone takes pride in what they suggest and then it's now, it's on the wall, and it looks really good (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Through this, employers encouraged employees to become active in conceiving the space around the values of Marketing Inc. Part of this process was the organisation solidifying its values from what had previously been a more informal, organic culture. It encouraged the employees to embody values of the organisation, such as 'Finding Meaning' and 'Participate' (as discussed on page 154). It gave the appearance that employees were making the decision on the meaning represented in the space; however these values were still linked to the strategies of the organisation. The design of the space was left up to the employees, such things as putting the chair in a particular place, while the overall message of the social space was conceived by those in dominant positions who authorised the space. There was still what I noted to be a unified feel to the organisation, suggesting none of the teams deviated from what Marketing Inc. expected of them (field notes, Marketing Inc., July 2008). Each floor was brightly decorated and included social areas for each team with sofas, televisions and games (see Figure 11: 'Social Area' and Figure 12: 'Workspace in Marketing Inc.'). The social areas were designed (conceived) by the employees, where they were encouraged to conceptualise a space to have fun in.

Figure 11: 'Social Area'

Figure 12: Workspace in Marketing Inc. with kite designed for 'Inspiration' motto

In Marketing Inc., the employees were encouraged to take ownership of the space, in decorating their own desks with pictures and fun items, and through team activities which designed the 'inspiration kite' seen above. Employees were expected to take the values of the organisation, such as inspiration, and translate this into their own interpretation. The physical space within the organisation was organised through these values by management around space which appealed to employees' beliefs and self-identities. For example the organisations inscribed the space with words, symbols and meanings directed at the employees. Bea described how the space 'appealed' to her, representing the workplace as fun and creative, and motivating her to come to work:

> And I think the colours they have used on the top floor is [sic] quite bright, bright and fun and they represent our team as being quite creative. It looks much better, I really like it. It motivates me to come to work because you know you are going to have fun... it makes me want to come into work and smile (Bea, Marketing Inc, July, 2008).

The space was designed for the employees to experience as pleasurable, exciting and stimulating. Employees experienced the space as innovative and exciting, setting up the expectation that work was fun. The space matched the 'positive' rhetoric in the organisation that employees should find work a constructive experience and want to come to work. For Bea, she associated this with wanting to 'smile' at work. The colours used within the space are symbolic of how work should be experienced, for example in her statement that the colours represent her team and their creativity. Employees 'read' the space and interpreted these symbols into meaning about the workplace. The lived space of the organisation refers to the way these symbols are interpreted and used within employees' everyday experiences of the organisations.

Lived space

The two sections above have discussed perceived and conceived space in all three organisations, in particular exploring how employees perceive spaces as separate based on

their use by clients or employees, and at how employers conceive spaces in the organisations as 'fun' for the use of both clients and employees. However the data has also raised some of the complexities of these spaces, which relate to how employees use space as part of their everyday experience of organisations. The spaces may be conceived for particular purposes, in this case for employees to 'have fun' and play with, however this does not mean that employees will interpret these space to be so. Even if they do, they may choose not to engage with the space in the way it is conceived by the organisation.

For example within Marketing Inc., employees would colonise the fun spaces for some activities such as their lunch break. One group on the second floor used this space every day at the same time to socialise over lunch, and would tell jokes and have fun in the space. However if other employees were in this space during this time, for perhaps a meeting, the employees discussed feeling upset that 'their' space was being used (Jen, Marketing Inc., August 2008). Other fun spaces in Marketing Inc. were ignored by employees. Each floor had 'fun' objects within their social space. On the ground floor, the dart board which had been provided by the management for play was on the whole ignored by employees. The only time I saw it being used during my time in the organisation was during a team meeting where the manager encouraged employees to play a game. One employee, who sat near-by this team, described this dart board as a symbol of management trying too hard:

> That team is a bit like it was trying too much, it wasn't just fun, it was like 'we are going to have fun if we die trying' and that's like *oh no*, the worst kind of fun because you are basically forced to endure it and some people just go *oh crap,* you know? It's darts, and how many people like darts and how many people actually play darts? I may have once, ever. For example we did play it once while waiting for something to render on my computer, while the dudes were waiting for a taxi to show up late at night (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Keith had previously worked on this team before moving to specialist services. He was cynical about the manager of this team, who he felt tried too hard to be accepted as fun and as a result never actually was. The darts board within the social area was symbolic for him as a fun space which was too imposing, too manufactured and where employees felt they had to

endure it for the sake of management. Ironically Keith was very supportive of having a social space, but one where he felt employees could own the space rather than it being used towards organisational goals. His team, specialist services, did not have a social space at that time and would borrow the space described above for their team activities.

In Magazine Inc., employees discussed how organisational policy insisted that employees kept a 'clear desk' as they were supposed to hot-desk. However in reality employees claimed their own desks, although they did not personalise their desks as occurred in the other two organisations. The desks were designed to have six seats on each side facing each other, and there were two sets of these desks. This layout of the desks had increased sociability of the team, as it allowed them to lean over and discuss matters with their colleagues. However as the editor also sat at one of the tables, the feeling of being watched was increased by many of the employees. Employees were strongly territorial about their workspace, which I discovered on the first day of my research. There was no 'obvious' place for me to sit, so with borrowing an unused chair I sat down in the middle of one of the tables in order to start observation. After an hour or so, I had an outraged employee from another magazine demanding that I returned their chair. I quickly learnt that despite the hot desk policy the space of each work desk and the objects within them were closely guarded as belonging to the individual.

These two examples demonstrate how the symbolic attributes of the space were important for how employees experienced the space. In many of the examples discussed throughout the section on space, employees appeared to associate with some of the organisational spaces, attributing them to the 'fun' values of the organisation. However, there are also many examples of how employees rejected these spaces or did not engage with these spaces in the manner intended by management. This taken into consideration, if employees wanted to have fun with their employees outside of the conceived space of the organisations, where did this take place? As well as considering the designed, managed space, there was a layer of unmanaged space where a significant amount of the humour took place. These unmanaged spaces, to which we now turn, were often not visible to management or management chose to overlook these spaces in the organisation.

Unmanaged spaces for fun

As described above, management in all three organisations made a concerted effort to encourage employees to have fun while at work through designing space for them to play in. However, employees created their own lived experience of these spaces, which sometimes coincided with the conceived organisational space and sometimes discarded it for an alternative use of the space. These alternative spaces had looser interpretations of their meanings and were unmanaged in the sense of visibility to management. Much of the humour occurred in spaces used during breaks, and while a lot of these were outside of the organisation, some remained within the organisation.

Figure 13: Outside area

Some of these spaces were simply just not as visible, such as the outside garden space from Marketing Inc. where employees could have their lunch in warm weather. In Smiley, the trainers would often have lunch together in the 'trainer's area' which was a minimally decorated space with a few chairs in the back of one of the offices. It was hidden from the clients they might be teaching and also from the other office staff and managers. This provided trainers with a 'chill out area' which according to Beth would get very active around lunch time as they 'blew off steam' (Beth, Smiley, July 2009). In Magazine Inc. and in Smiley, many employees would leave the organisation altogether for lunch. Within all three organisations, lunch time was an important time when employees would socialise with other employees and where humour would often occur. If they were busy, they might have lunch at their desks, but many employees preferred to escape the organisation. Andy from Smiley noted: "I often just need to have a walk around, and do stuff and that's why I go for lunch quite far away. Because I have to go and walk there. So I'm not relaxed in a little while and I have to go and move, I have to get up and do stuff" (Andy, Smiley, July 2009). This quote was made in relation to discussing a problem a co-worker was having with a client, in which he felt a sense of helplessness. As the other office workers were offering advice or offering to make the woman tea, Andy decided to do an interpretive dance in order to help. This restlessness in the office, which he then refers to in his description of walking as far as possible for lunch in order to relax, resulted in embodied actions such as his 'dance' or on other occasions singing, which relieved the tension and feelings of powerlessness in solving problems with clients.

The feeling of being watched by managers was stronger in Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc. than in Smiley. It appeared that as a result of the client-focused work in Smiley and the client's physical presence in the organisation, that employees focused on ways to escape the clients' gaze. It was also noticeable how little time the founder of Smiley actually spent in the office, which reduced the effect of direct control. I did observe that the times when he was in the office, the office appeared more focused and joked less than when he was not present. However the employees perceived that it was fine to joke while he was in the office, rejecting that his presence altered their behaviour. This related to the hands-off approach of the corporate culture. However in both Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc., employees spoke about feeling 'visible'. This was often put into context of trying not to disturb others who were working. As a result, the humour used often relied on other methods of communication than

those which were spoken, and as a result used alternative forms of space: specifically virtual space.

Virtual humour in Marketing Inc.

A method of stepping outside of 'professionalism' was to use humour in work in ways which were not 'visible' and not located within physical space. Much of the humour which was reported in the humour logs for these two companies occurred in virtual spaces, when it was not obvious that employees were even engaging in humour. It appeared that in all three organisations management did not control these spaces, allowing employees access to instant messaging programmes and networking sites such as Facebook. In Marketing Inc. there were rumours that emails were monitored by the managers (Chris, Marketing Inc., August 2008), however at the same time there was a view that allowing employees to have freedom in sending emails may be a way of relaxing rules around work. For instance Laura, a team manager, discussed how she did not worry about her team sending humorous emails as part of implementing the 'have fun' value:

> It's about not having rules for the sake of rules, you know I think you get a lot back from people for not having that. And people sending around joke emails, and you think well, email is company proxy and you shouldn't be using it, but actually does it really matter? But then again that is something we shouldn't actually be using but we do (Laura, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

As a result, much of the humour reported within Marketing Inc. was through email, regarding what they perceived as funny jokes, pictures or videos. Often humour in this format used *visual* humour as well as written jokes, for instance one employee described receiving a video specialist services had made relating to a voluntary team activity involving rebuilding a garden. The situation was inverted, showing the team shovelling in double time, set to the song 'Man of Constant Sorrow'. When asked why it was funny, Chris said: "Umm I don't know. It was, I think the idea was the suggestion that it was a slavery thing, we were all slaves rather than just volunteers." The video was seen as humorous because it parodied the concept of 'choice' in

voluntary team building activities. Analysed from a spatial perspective, it takes an embodied act of labour, which was altered through technology to exaggerate the struggle of the worker. It was a representation of work which purposely poked fun at the employment relationship with managers asking for volunteers to be involved in the community practice. The employees did volunteer, but the irony was not lost for them. For Chris, it was hard to describe why this was funny, but "it's sort of a social thing. The email went round at the same time and lots of people were kind of opening it." The virtual space of the email allowed for a video, a very particular medium of communication, which was then shared through the interaction with lived space. The video could then form a shared experience of humour which was expressed through laughter and discussion.

Virtual humour in Magazine Inc.

The use of email in Magazine Inc. also took on a slightly subversive character, in particular allowing employees to create an alternative to the values of the organisation. Like in Marketing Inc., this was accomplished through the use of virtual space where both visual and written humour allowed a representation of sexuality which was not allowed in the values of the organisation. Where the values of the organisation supported 'fun' in a sanitized, safe 'reality' such as using silly puns, it did not permit explicit sexuality to be in the magazine. Employees were expected to relate to this 'reality' reflecting many of the characteristics of the 'girlie' world they created. However, many of the jokes reported used email to create humour at the expense of men. The open plan offices made such explicit humour problematic, as there were men in the area who worked in other magazines or other units such as the toys, which neighboured the magazines. Becca discussed how sending humour by email was perceived as more socially appropriate than spoken humour in the office:

> Yea, it's just. I think it's alright if it is the sort of thing that takes just a second to drag a picture. And then we will all do stuff like that, and it's alright to do stuff like that. But then half an hour of joking and laughing, it definitely wasn't the day for that (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

In this sense sending emails allowed a faster, less visible method of communicating humour with other employees. Sometime the milder forms of sexual humour were spoken aloud, often referring back to visual images by looking at computer screens. These may include spoken joking, such as finding the male stars attractive, laughing about a picture of a staff member who appeared to be straddling a TV star's leg and mocking of the female stars such as "Just like if it was in the Tabloids 'Is she or isn't she pregnant?'" were described with amusement during interviews. These examples inverted the magazine discourses of asexuality through email images which challenged the 'reality' presented in the magazine. In a sense these were also combining the physical space with the virtual – having to look at the images in order to 'get' the humour. However some of the more explicitly sexual humour was sent by email, some examples of which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six in the section on sexuality.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the strategies of 'fun' used within three organisations and the tactic of humour within the everyday experience of 'fun' corporate culture. Corporate cultures acted as strategies to form 'proper' space (Lefebvre, 1991) for having fun, which was conceptualised through the discourses of play, childhood and positive thinking. In addition, these organisations used the concept of 'openness' and 'self-management' to encourage employees to internalise and display these values. The strategies were materialised through the objects of the organisations and through the aesthetic feel of the perceived, conceived and lived space. Through this analysis, it has demonstrated the manner in which three organisations drew upon the value of play among wider values of openness, passion and engagement. These organisations expected employees to demonstrate particular behaviours as a result.

This chapter has focused on strategies that the organisations were adopting to create a space where a particular form of fun-at-work was experienced: where fun is positive, self-managed and most important *productive*. However, in De Certeau's (1984) concept of the everyday practices, strategies are only one part of the process. Employees react to these dominated spaces in the form of lived experienced, and feeding into Lefebvre's (1991) 'lived space', is described as tactics by De Certeau. Employees can react to the fun-at-work cultures in a

variety of ways. Drawing on Hall (2001), this chapter has suggested that there is evidence of employees adopting the corporate culture, of pragmatically using the culture and of rejecting the culture. It also discussed how some employees within these organisations, who may have adopted a pragmatic 'reading', found contradictions within these values: through being shallow or kitsch or through contradicting their experience of work as stressful. It also suggested that employees do not exclusively use space which was highly conceived, but often sought out other space in the organisation which was not visible to clients or management. In particular it has been proposed that alternative, unmanaged space might be important in how employees viewed the organisation. Unmanaged spaces included those physical spaces which were out of the view of managers, such as the garden space, or from clients, such as the 'chill out' space for the trainers in Smiley. It also included those virtual spaces online, which could be made to look like work but were often used to play in a manner in which was not visible. These unmanaged spaces which employees sought out reinforces the perceived space of the organisation as still being rooted in traditional concepts of work, discipline and control. In Chapter Six I will develop these themes looking further at particular aspects of the strategies which are embedded within the space of the organisation, and how employees pragmatically coped with these strategies through the use of humour.

Humour became an important mechanism for employees expressing some of the difficulties of working within these organisations. Humour was important because it both was accepted within the desirable norms of behaviour but it was also ambiguous as to the exact meaning and intention behind it. Employees could be seen to be towing the line, while actually reinterpreting the values of having fun. In this sense it was still working 'within' the strategies, but finding spaces to manoeuvre within the managed and unmanaged space of the organisations. In other words they used humour as a tactic when faced with the dominant definitions of fun in the corporate cultures. The strategies of the organisations attempted to manage meaning, often quite subtly, in relation to employees' identity, emotions and sexuality within the space of the companies. It was clearly apparent in the analysis, especially when looking at the results of the humour log, that the humour often involved one or more of these aspects. Humour was used to relate to their sense of self as an employee and a person, was used to express emotions they felt about the organisation, and/or was used to establish themselves or others as a sexual beings. These took place sometimes within the managed 'fun' space, but often also within the unmanaged space within the organisation. The humour

allowed employees, if only temporarily, to provide an alternative to the dominant meanings within organisational space, a theme to which we turn in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Strategies and tactics in 'fun' organisations: identity, emotions and sexuality

Chapter Five has concluded with linking the strategies underpinning the production of meaning within fun corporate cultures to the tactics of humour in the everyday experiences within Smiley, Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc. In particular, it has suggested that space is key to understanding how organisations communicate their fun corporate culture and to how employees experience this culture. Using Lefebvre (1991) it is possible to distinguish between the perceived, conceived and lived space within organisations. Organisations control the dominant meanings embedded within these spaces: through the aesthetic of the space, the written and symbolic messages which they portray to employees and the allocation of space to particular concepts of ‘fun’ which the organisations advocate. Employees’ lived experience of the organisation is therefore formed through their engagement with these symbols of organisational culture. These spaces can be described as seductive, appealing to employees’ values and beliefs surrounding play and fun at work. The discourses suppose that to ‘have fun’ is common sense, natural and in the interest of both the employee who enjoys work more and for the employer who obtains greater levels of engagement and creativity from their workforce.

It would be possible to simply assume therefore that the organisations’ dominance of meaning is therefore absolute and total, and that there was no room for alternative meanings to develop. However, despite the ‘common sense’ appeal behind the idea of ‘fun’ at work, Chapter Five suggested that employees do engage with these cultural texts in a variety of ways: they may adopt them as unproblematic; they may engage with them pragmatically; or they may reject them outright as disingenuous and counter to their experience of work. Chapter Five proposed that humour may be a tactic which employees utilise in their engagement with ‘fun’ corporate cultures. This is both ‘within’ the dominant meaning that the organisations establish, that employees should ‘have fun’, but also outside of it in the potential uses of humour which can have ambiguous, transient and possibly subversive meaning.

This humour still occurs within the space of the organisation in both a physical and discursive sense. It occurs within the buildings, in the rooms designed by the organisation or in the email and virtual spaces accessed through the organisations' computers. It is also within the discourse provided by the organisation on what work 'should' be, on how employees should behave in the organisation and how they should perceive these activities in relation to their self. At the same time, however, the meaning of play is not fixed because of its unmanageable nature, and through the tactics of humour employees can carve out temporary space for alternative meanings or pragmatic interpretations of the organisation. This chapter turns to this dynamic of fun corporate culture and humour and how the tensions between the two are played out in space. In order to do so it pulls out the tensions within three areas particularly relevant to 'fun' corporate cultures: identity, emotions and sexuality. To various degrees these three elements are all expressed within the corporate cultures, where employees are expected to perceive themselves as fun people and to feel passionately about the organisation. Identity and emotions were prevalent themes within the discourses and in the manner in which employees engage with these discourses. Sexuality had a more subtle position, as none of the organisations directly encourage their employees to be sexual in the written discourses. However more subtly in the 'fun' events, certain activities and the openness of the culture, sexuality was noticeable and encouraged in the everyday life of the organisation. These three elements of the corporate culture will be discussed, drawing out the tensions between the idealist corporate strategies and the lived experiences of employees. In all three cases, humour can be seen as a mechanism for expressing these contradictions and proposing alternative meanings of what it means to be a 'fun' organisation.

Fun identity as a project of the self

The discourses within the organisations proposed that employees should see themselves as 'fun' people working in a 'fun' organisation. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) identified this as identity regulation, the organisational discourses which as social practices shape identity construction and reconstruction. As such, the values of the organisation suggest employees are supposed to engage with their work, with each other and most importantly with the client. One method in how this was accomplished was through positioning 'fun' as 'common-sense'. The corporate culture appeared to legitimise their fun values through appealing to the supposedly 'natural' appeal of fun, which every employee possesses and supposedly wants to

demonstrate. It demonstrated an ideology for the employees, where having fun was natural and that the organisation was 'allowing' the employees to be themselves in doing so (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). In addition, employees also undertook self-identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), which attempts to use identity construction to combat a precarious sense of self (Sennett, 1998). As a result, employees used the organisational discourses, as well as other discourses, to establish a sense of self as coherent and secure. However this self-identity work needed to be formed and reformed: a process of becoming a fun identity which needed to be consistently maintained.

'Fun' corporate people

In all three organisations the fit of employees to the organisation was carefully considered to ensure the culture would be successful. In Marketing Inc. employees were recruited specifically for their ability to fit into the organisational culture. It was perceived as important that employees should be engaged and involved within the corporate culture and Marketing Inc. used recruitment methods such as assessment days to assess individuals' personalities before selecting them (Gina, Marketing Inc., August 2008). As a result, the employees were selected for their willingness to be part of the team and had an idea before entering the organisation of what the values of the corporate culture were. This also reflected the norms of the industry: advertising can be characterised as attracting individuals who identify themselves as anti-bureaucratic, emancipated and sensitive, an artist who is able to be creative but also respond to the needs of industry (Alvesson, 1994). Nixon and Crewe (2004) have suggested that those working in advertising may experience a social splitting of their identity, as they attempt to both be creative and simultaneously workaholic and masculine. Hackley and Kover (2007) have developed this to discuss how identities in the advertising profession constantly need to be confirmed and reaffirmed in order to be perceived as credible. They can be taken then as identities which are in conflict between the creative and bureaucratic, fluid in needing to respond to different contexts and insecure in the constant need to assert the sense of professionalism.

In Marketing Inc., the culture to a certain extent had grown in an informal manner. However about two years before the research was undertaken, the management decided they ought to

confirm the culture and introduce the values of 'Have Fun', 'Brave and Resourceful', 'Client First' and 'Stronger Together'. This process occurred to solidify the culture and to encourage all employees to adopt the values of the corporate culture. It suggested an intensification and normalisation of the values from what had loosely been managed previously. For example the following quote from Marketing Inc. describes the reaction Keith had when the company decided to introduce the play culture:

> When I first heard it, I thought *oh no,* this is another corporate thing they are going to force on us; we are going to have to do this. But when you get into the nuts and bolts of it and read it and everything, *it actually makes a lot of sense.* And you can see that when you try to incorporate it into a day-to-day role, it can mean a lot of things. It can mean humour with your colleagues; it can mean actually enjoying the work you do... [still] do your work but have fun along the way (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Keith's comment suggests that he originally rejected the corporate initiatives, however it was the common sense appeal which won him over. The initiatives, when he read the 'nuts and bolts' of the idea, were positioned in his best interest, to make work more enjoyable. It did not change the nature of the work itself, but suggested the manner in which it was undertaken could be altered to make work pleasurable.

Marketing Inc.'s attempt to solidify the culture may have been met with some resistance as another management initiative. However, for employees such as Keith there was a common sense to the essential argument which was that having fun was *natural* in organisations. It drew upon images of what the organisation was not: a boring workplace where employees did not engage with their work. The common sense of the argument was that it fit with the natural desire for employees to enjoy work through having fun. As I will discuss, this natural desire was perceived as coming from the shared personality trait of the employees of being fun people.

Within all three organisations, employees wanted to perceive themselves as having a sense of humour, and being able to share this sense of humour with others. For many of the employees interviewed they felt this was a natural part of their personality, which they were able to extend into the workplace. For instance Chris commented he was 'a jovial person' and humour allowed him to relate to others (Chris, Marketing Inc., August 2008). Likewise Bea at Marketing Inc. noted:

> My personality is, I do smile a lot and laugh and a lot of people describe me as really bubbly, honest that word is so repetitive. But I don't, I never try…
>
> [You don't make an effort to...]
>
> No, or put like a fake smile on, because I am *just that sort of person* (Bea, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Bea's comment reflected how others viewed her as 'bubbly' and also how she viewed herself as being 'just that sort of person'. Smiling and laughing were seen as naturally part of how she viewed herself. However for Bea it was also important that there was the perception that this was a natural identity, that she never felt she had to make an effort or put on a fake smile. She identified herself as the sort of person who would work in Marketing Inc. through buying into the positive discourses of the organisation.

Frivolity and child's play

Many of the jokes discussed in Chapter Five established that the employees perceived the humour to be frivolity: joking for the sake of joking, rather than to achieve other ends. This sense of frivolity was not simply present in the jokes, but was a perception of the wider 'sort' of person who worked in the companies. There was a view that employees should associate themselves with light-hearted humour. This perception was most strongly played out in the representation of humour as child's play. I made the following note on a conversation with Andy at Smiley about the nature of humour he used:

> *We kind of tell jokes all the time... Well some of us do. [I asked if Andy meant the part of back office where he sat, to which he agreed.]*
>
> *Because we are like kids where they're all like adults. Like Suzy, she works here full time also, but she is an adult and actually does some work (Andy, Smiley, June 2009).*

In Andy's conceptualisation of telling jokes, he associated this as a playful characteristic of children's behaviour, rather than seeing humour as an adult behaviour. Part of this tension was created out of the perceived differences between having fun and doing work. Those he associated as being like kids consistently told jokes throughout their day; however some employees were seen as being like adults who took their work 'seriously'. Within this mindset the dualism between fun, play and childhood on the one hand and seriousness, work and adulthood on the other remained intact. Despite reverting back to this distinction, Andy saw being like kids as a positive attribute and an identity he took pleasure in. Within my field notes, I noted how Andy would often instigate conversations and jokes in the office and appeared to enjoy this role. His comment that he perceived himself to be like a kid was associated with the 'random' moments within his day which he felt lightened the mood and provided entertainment.

Andy was not the only participant who perceived the everyday practices in Smiley as resembling child's play. Dessa at Smiley made a similar observation when discussing who took part in conversations. The group dynamics marked 'others', individuals who also work in the back office, as being grown-ups while the members of this 'kid-like' group were not:

> I think it is because the others are grown-ups. I think that is genuinely the reason. Because the others are generally getting on with their work, and we kind of pepper our day with little tangents which may or may not be funny (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009).

Dessa also sat in the back office near to Andy, and often took part in the conversations he was referring to. The two quotes suggest that some employees saw child's play as integral to themselves, they were 'like kids' and the others 'are grown-ups'. Their interpretation of the corporate culture as child's play provided them with the opportunity to use humour which was frivolous and for their own amusement. It had the ability to be inclusive through forming groups of employees who associated themselves with child's play and those who associated themselves as being adults.

Being 'human'

Employees were encouraged to view themselves as 'fun' people through engaging in the fun activities and working within an 'open', self-disciplining culture. In particular, being able to *share* humour was seen as an essential part of one's authentic self and of being part of the team. One participant at Smiley described this openness to being 'human' that comes with displays of emotion and personality:

> So I think there has always been more tolerance for you to come *as a human* and you have all those other things. So if you laugh really loud or collapse on the floor when you are upset well, okay, they will try and support you through that. Having said that, when you are with clients you do need to try to be professional, but I [sic] there is a bit more, I think the main difference is that slightly relaxed feeling that you can, you can sort of be yourself (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

This view of 'being yourself' was linked to an embodied view of what it was to be human. The use of humour invoked embodied reactions such as laughing really loudly. Like in Fleming and Sturdy's (2009) study, employees were encouraged to be 'themselves' at work. However this version of being yourself was constrained to desirable versions of the self, where they found that employees were encouraged to be 'unique'. However, in the quote above by Faye, 'being yourself' is both emotional and embodied, displaying their 'true' feelings in embodied displays of emotion. However to be too emotional or too embodied (falling down for example) may be considered unprofessional. As a result, Faye states 'we will try to help you through it'

suggesting that emotional support between employees is occurring. This contrasted with the need to be professional, as seen in Faye's statement that employees could *sort of* be themselves. Professionalism symbolised structure and regulation over behaviour while being human was symbolised with flexibility in the employees' behaviours. Thus, 'being yourself' and being professional were often in tension, requiring employees to understand the boundaries to present appropriate behaviour.

Employees strongly felt that they should be 'themselves' at work through being 'open' (or open-minded) and authentic. Being seen as an authentic personality was also a key part of Marketing Inc.'s corporate culture. For instance, one manager at Marketing Inc. described how another manager's joking in a meeting altered how she viewed him as a person:

> I remember thinking that, like in the team meeting, when Daniel read out that quote, that made me feel like he was *an actual person*. And I thought actually he was quite funny and he liked to join in and he made people laugh (Mary, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Mary's perspective of him altered when he used humour, to recognise him as an 'actual' person. Having been someone who rarely shared humour before this point, his willingness to make a joke made her perceive him to be more authentic and genuine. In employees' perception of humour then, it was necessary to be seen as fun: there was a direct link between being human and using humour. Those who did not use humour were seen as not only being withdrawn from the culture but also somehow less than an actual person. The result was that employees found those people harder to relate to and that it was only through using humour they were willing to engage in the group behaviours expected of them.

The concept of being human related to the employees' ability to relate to each other through displaying an authentic self. This idea of 'relaxing' or feeling able to drop the formal regulation of behaviour was seen as important for building a sense of collegiality between employees. Humour was thus contextualised into being able to 'relax' to be 'yourself':

> I think the humour is important because it lets you bond with your teammates a lot. It gives you that extra bit of cohesiveness as a unit, because if you can joke around with someone, you know that they can take a joke. And it relaxes you a lot more, you know you can be yourself around them, and if you can be yourself, I think I work a lot easier when I am myself and not all tensed up (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

This quote from Keith in Marketing Inc. links the ability to relax to bonding with your team. It proposes that when employees can be themselves they will form a more cohesive group. Keith also suggested that for him it facilitates being able to work effectively, because he is not 'tense' from having to keep up appearances. This sense of 'relaxing' is not without irony however, because as the quote from Mary above stated, there were still expectations of 'fun' behaviours. Employees did need to be seen as funny in order to be accepted by other employees. For some employees such as Keith this may have meant being able to relax, but for others such as the manager in Mary's quote this may have meant displaying 'fun' behaviours regardless of how 'relaxed' they felt doing so. This idea of 'being human' and being relaxed suggests that being a 'fun' person was a process which needed to be accomplished and displayed to others. This 'becoming' of identity is explored in the next section, turning to the concept of performing identities.

Performing the 'fun' self

Those employees who were interviewed were aware of the corporate culture and particularly the expectations of being a 'fun' employee. As such employees felt they should work on their identities, and provided narratives of self which reflected their compatibility with the company culture:

> I think it took a while to get into it, to relax, but I would say that now, this is how I am outside of work so I think that's quite good. I like the fact that you can be the same person (Andrea, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

For employees such as Andrea, learning how to relax into 'fun' behaviours was a process that they had to undertake. At the beginning there was a disjuncture between her workplace identity and the identity she held outside of work, derived from her expectations that work should be 'serious'. However as she 'relaxed' into the culture, or learnt how to behave in the 'fun' ways the culture prescribed, Andrea perceived these differences to have decreased. In addition, it suggests that her outside-work identity may also have shifted in response to the expectations at work. Since both are socially constructed and as a result her outside identity is not a representation of a 'true' self but instead fluid and changing, these two identities within her quote appeared to have merged into 'the same person'. This is not to suggest that employees simply accepted and integrated the company discourses as their identities: some employees showed scepticism about some aspects of the company discourses. However in general, employees wanted to identify with others as being sociable and most importantly, funny.

For others, keeping up the identity of being a funny person was seen more in terms of a performance or becoming the person they wanted to be. Evan from Marketing Inc. (August 2008) described this need to perform as feeling he was 'always on show'. He felt that in order to 'get ahead of the game' or to succeed in the organisation, he had to negotiate the difficult territory of correct behaviour through the 'different shades of interpretation'. He felt that employees performed to give the best joke, to win the competitions and that this idea of performance was encouraged by the organisation.

As a result humour was viewed as very important for getting along with others as well as being effective at their jobs. It was also important for employees to feel others perceived them to be funny. One employee from Magazine Inc. describes how important an asset humour was to work relationships:

> We probably get one [a joke in an email] from someone every three weeks or something. A picture that is funny or a little YouTube video with a 'check this out guys it is so funny!' I think everyone shares; they want to be seen to be amusing.

> *Humour is well, currency isn't it?* (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008, emphasis added).

Tina's observation that 'humour is currency' is related to the social desirability of being seen as funny. Within the 'fun' discourses, employees should be themselves or display an identity which is authentic and 'relaxed'. However Tina's position adds another element to this identity: that it needs to be worked on and is reliant on others' perception of the employee as amusing. It suggests that this identity as a 'fun' person needs to be established and invested in over time through presenting oneself as a 'fun' person. It is only through doing so that the employee is accepted as part of the 'fun' culture. The use of humour becomes currency, an asset which can be capitalised on in the marketplace of impression management.

At the same time, it was perceived as important to be positive when on the receiving end of a joke. Performing a 'fun' identity also required the ability to laugh at yourself or giving 'permission' for jokes to be made. As one team manager at Marketing Inc. put it:

> Because you do get certain characters, like I've got a director who is by her own definition a bit hippy and a bit different. And doesn't try to fit in, umm that this is almost, you can take the mickey out of her because she has given you permission. Ummm another of the guys is very overweight and that is a kind of joke. But um everyone is quite relaxed and knows each other relatively personally, which I think gives you more license to joke about each other (Laura, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

However, this placed the employees within an interesting situation. Because the company valued 'openness', it provided space for the employees to joke about other employees' personal characteristics – that they were clumsy, silly, hippy, overweight etc. The boundaries of what was acceptable to joke about and what was professional had to be carefully negotiated, however, with the possibility that employees could take offence. One example of this came up in Smiley, when one employee 'took the mickey' out of another employee:

> Charlotte, she has come from places where there has been lots of bullying. So she found it really difficult when I first started and I'd make little digs at her, and she'd go 'oh' because she thought I was bullying her and that upset me because we have a really good relationship. Um so I didn't do it, but slowly, slowly over the years. In fact she is worse now, she is much worse [laughs] when it comes to mickey-taking. They all seem to take the mickey out of me (Andy, Smiley, July 2009).

This account presents how the boundaries between joking and bullying can be fluid. As Andy later stated, joking needed to be conducted in 'the context of a relationship' (Smiley, July 2009) where the meaning of the humour was understood between the two persons. In this account, when he discovered that Charlotte found the 'little digs' difficult, Andy stopped using them. However over time, he socialised her into the humour through building a relationship where the rules of joking were established. In this sense he negotiated the 'permission' to make fun of another person through giving the permission himself to be made fun of. It was noticeable in my observations that many of Andy's jokes made fun of himself, which presented it as acceptable for others to do the same. His presentation of himself as a 'fun' person who laughed at himself gave others permission to view him in the same way.

Forming an identity as a 'fun' person appeared to be a complex process, where discourses of 'fun' and 'professionalism' had to be negotiated and balanced in the identity work that employees undertook. The way employees expressed these identities was through embodied actions, their presentation of self and through embodying 'fun' values of the organisations, becoming 'organisational bodies' (Tyler and Abbott, 1998). The aesthetic of the body and the values of the organisations begin to reflect each other, creating an embodied 'fun' employee.

Embodying the play ethic

Forming an identity as a 'fun' person was an integral part to how employees I interviewed related to the 'fun' corporate culture. The play ethic, in the sense elaborated by Kane (2005)

where play overrides work as the central motivation for activity, provides rhetoric of play as a natural and creative force within individuals which they should embrace. The employees presented themselves embodying this play ethic by seeing play as ‘human’ and yet also explicitly recognising that they needed to perform the correct form of ‘fun’ identity to be accepted by their colleagues. One aspect of ‘becoming’ a ‘fun’ person was the presentation of themselves, through the appearance of their body in their dress, through encoding their body with meaning about the ‘sort’ of person who has fun, and through ‘fun’ behaviours in an embodied expression of play.

Casual attire and fashion parades

Employees within all three organisations dressed in casual attire, often wearing jeans and tee-shirts or fashionable attire. This idea of casual dress and the symbolic freedom it represented was present in Smiley, where the written dress code stated ‘no suits’. Although trainers and Smoothies would both have face-to-face interaction with the clients, the informal dress was seen as being important as a representation of the company’s values:

> The way we dress too is very informal. Umm which is the ethos of the company really, I remember going to train a company once and we were sharing the training with another company, so our trainers all showed up in their tee-shirts and jeans and they were all in their suits [laughs]! (Beth, Smiley, June 2009).

The casual attire was important for representing that the training was informal and friendly and that the trainers were approachable for their clients. Again the way employees constructed their bodies through dress was a representation of these values. This embodiment of the values of the company was especially apparent when being compared to the other training company of ‘suits’. This matches how the Smiley presented its corporate cultures in opposition to others which were ‘boring’, with suits representing stuffy, old fashioned and highly formalised organisations which were overly ‘serious’ (Smiley, Training Manual, 2009).

The general approach to the attire was laid-back and it was rare to see employees in suits or wearing ties. Many employees appeared to enjoy what they perceived as looking the same at work as they would outside of the workplace. This related to the overall cultures of the firms as 'open' through having few dress restrictions.

> I don't think there is really... well there are obviously the normal things that wouldn't be allowed outside, but it is not like the company has ever really said, don't do this. I think being casually dressed as well makes a big difference because you feel like you can be your own people [*sic*]. People come in wearing what they want to wear, rather than it, *it reiterates the point that you can be you and you don't have to perform to be anyone or for anyone* (Gina, Marketing Inc., August 2008, emphasis added).

Not having a dress code was perceived as being important as it allowed employees to be relaxed and to feel comfortable, encouraging them to be their own person. For Gina this related to *not* having to perform to be anyone, as performing for her meant pretending to formal. This ability to dress casually was still bounded by norms of acceptability, as she notes there are still 'the normal things that wouldn't be allowed outside' which were seen as inappropriate. The ability to present oneself at work in a manner which allowed employees to feel comfortable was seen as desirable. However it was the symbolic aspects of wearing casual dress which appealed to many of the employees. Hugh from Marketing Inc. describes this through using flip-flops as a metaphor for the relaxed culture:

> And I walked out the front door realising I am wearing flip-flops, how many places can you do that? It's all encouraged, not necessarily wearing flip-flops, but that relaxed attitude, anything goes. You get the job, that's fine. As long as you get the job done, anything goes (Hugh, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Flip-flops, or footwear usually worn on the beach, represented for Hugh the most casual of work attire. It represented the relaxed, 'anything goes' attitude which he felt described the

‘fun’ workplace. Interestingly it also demonstrated that he spent little time reflecting on his work dress, as he only realised he was wearing flip-flops when he walked out of the office. While employees perceived that ‘anything goes’, there was evidence that concepts of professionalism were sometimes at tension with this idea of anything goes. This idea was expressed by Laura, a team manager, who was discussing that one problem they have in the company was that new recruits sometimes equated this informal dress with life at college or university:

> One of the things you will notice when you walk onto our floors is that you will have people in jeans and flip-flops, you will have people messing around, you will find people having a laugh with a football at the worst moment and you will have the telly on. So that gives very relaxed signals to people... (Laura, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

In Marketing Inc. as described above the norm was ultra casual, the dress norms were very similar to a university campus. These symbols were important in how employees were expected to behave during their working day, with ‘people messing around’ as a normal occurrence. Employees interpreted the casual dress attire and other informal aspects of the culture as symbols indicating work was like college or university. For Laura, as a team manager, this was not a positive attribute of the culture, as she then continued to explain how these symbolic representations of play led employees to behave in a manner which was not acceptable in the workplace:

> The assistants often come from school at 18 and often are quite naïve about what offices can be like... the graduates tend to think it is an extension of student life... they think they can come in when they want, they can go to meetings and not really concentrate, they can come in hung over, and that is a big issue coming in hung over on a Friday. But actually when you step back and think, well I can understand why you think that is okay (Laura, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

This tension was inherent in the fun practices: work was designed to look like play, through the symbols it utilised such as clothing and games in the office; however the symbols were only a surface change. However, for Laura this resulted because of a degree of naïvety on the part of younger employees, who did not understand that the rules of work still existed. However, she does not blame them, because of the messages the casual attire and messing around in the office would give to them. In other words, they are interpreting the symbolism of play without recognising the context of work which is hidden underneath it. Employees still had to discipline themselves to be productive workers. According to Laura, that line between play and work was blurred in a way which meant it was difficult to enforce that certain behaviours were not acceptable. As a result, how to explain that line between fun and unprofessional was a significant concern for her, and one which she was "finding harder and harder to control" (Marketing Inc, August 2008). Her job, as a team manager, was to organise and ensure that play and professionalism did not conflict, that employees still took work seriously and demonstrate the behaviours indicating commitment in order to be productive. The play, in other words, needed to be controlled.

At Magazine Inc. employees also sought to express the company values through their appearance. However, while the other two organisations focused on casual attire, such as jeans and tee-shirts, in Magazine Inc. the employees tended to wear high street and high end fashion. The women appeared to be very conscious of what was in style and as a result spent careful attention to how they presented their bodies within the workplace. The employees seemed to relate to fashion as either a personal interest: "I am just obsessed with fashion, I buy everyone that comes out" (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008); or part of the social activity of the group: "If I had a date you would have five girls around my desk twittering with all curvy bits and hairspray and doing my makeup" (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008). It was noticeable that fashion was also a significant theme in the magazine, and that employees would need to have an idea of the current trends in fashion for their readership. As one employee commented:

> Magazine Inc. can look a little like a fashion parade sometimes, with the girls working there (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

The pressure to wear fashionable clothes was seen in this statement where the employees were expected to embody the ideals of the magazine. The idea of a fashion parade suggests an element of competition in women's dress, with the women demonstrating their fashion awareness through wearing the latest trends. In my observations I noted that many compliments were made on other employees' outfits, discussions about clothing store discounts and employees pulling out clothes from shopping bags to gain approval of the items from other employees. The 'fashion parade' mirrors findings from Fleming (2005) who emphasised the dress code of Sunray as an essential part of the 'fun' organisation. In his case study he noted that the dress code represented a party attitude, with employees often having brightly coloured hair, tattoos or piercings. The common link between these is that the 'fun' in each case created certain norms of dressing as 'fun' employees, where the presentation of self stated what type of employee the person claimed to be. Unlike Fleming's study, the employees within these three companies discussed a level of professionalism which was important to balance the fun, casual and fashion conscious appearance. The fun dress did often mirror university dress or in the case of Magazine Inc. a fashion parade. However it was more restrained than the 'unique' styles in the party attitude found in Sunray. Certainly management in these three companies were concerned that the symbolic use of clothing might lead employees to think work was *too* fun where it ceased to be productive.

Dress to a certain extent is an expression of how employees fit into the social groups within the organisation, to be 'seen' as one of the group as well as behave as one. It would be possible to dress in a particular manner but stay cynical about the culture, as some employees in Fleming's (2005) study do. Dress and appearance link the identity of the employees, the presentation of the body and the symbolic meaning which the body is given. This leads the discussion of identity to consider how fun practices were embodied. In other words, they are not simply symbols which are stamped onto a neutral body, but consider the body as experienced, at least partially, through the fun discourses it internalises through self-identity work.

Embodied 'fun'

Embodiment was important in terms of how employees expressed humour, which in turn presented them as the 'fun' employees they wanted to be perceived as. When analysing the jokes from the humour log, many of the jokes were embodied as demonstrated in Chapter Five. In a sense, all jokes are embodied as they were enacted through the body: speech, smiling and laughing are bodily reactions. They are expressions of the person's emotional state, whether true or faked, to be communicated to others. Participants would often speak of the 'fun' they had at work through discussing laughing, as laughing represented for them the playful emotions they were having. A fairly standard example of this came from Becca in Magazine Inc. who was discussing laughing at a picture she was looking at on her computer:

> I ended up laughing out loud at my desk and Katie was looking at them as well and she was laughing (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

This example was fairly typical of the way employees discussed humour in their workplace. Laughing was essential for many employees as this embodied reaction was the important trigger to what was humorous. This was backed up by what employees felt they should include in their humour log, as Kerry from Magazine Inc. stated "I just thought what I would do as soon as something *actually made me laugh* or when I am *having a laugh with someone* at work, I'd write it down." It was therefore not only perceived as an important bodily reaction in a 'fun' workplace, but also a symbolic representation that they were having fun.

Many of the jokes involved the employees' bodies as being humorous in themselves. These humorous moments occurred when the body did not behave in the way intended by the individual, or alternatively was seen as abnormal behaviour by others. For example, Doug described in his humour log how, as the result of kicking a table earlier in the day, he ended doing the 'Ministry of Silly Walks' (a famous sketch from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*). Because of the pain he experienced, his legs did not move in the way he intended, causing himself and others to laugh at his exaggerated walk across the room. He saw this as an in-joke between him and the colleague he was walking over to, especially funny because he did not

expect his body to behave as it did. The walk was therefore humorous because of this unexpected behaviour outside of his control. In another example, two of my participants described the same incident where Mary, a director, attempted to stick her hand in the moving fan in order to fix it. Keith, who told me about the event, took pleasure in pointing out to the group in a joke that Mary was 'special needs'. The humour was derived from the name of the team (specialist services), who provided technical and IT support for the wider group. As a director for the group, her forgetfulness and clumsiness in the action was a representation of a reputation the group had for lacking normal skills. The humour in this case was how the team were perceived by others as 'special' which was embodied through Mary's forgetful action.

These examples of humour drew on the unexpected actions of the bodies of employees and were comments about the nature of the identities of these employees. However, they were also concerned with the uncontrollable nature of the body. Control and the body were entwined into the unexpected and humorous results. The employees experienced the fun-at-work practices through the body, embodying the values of the organisation. Chapter Five discussed space in the three organisations, detailing how the perceived, conceived and lived space functioned. The embodiment of fun also entails the movement of the body through those spaces, through engaging with the social organisation of space and the body.

The body as 'fun'

As previously stated, the companies expected employees to express themselves as 'fun' through the organised fun activities. This could be seen in the humour used in team meetings or the competitiveness encouraged in group presentations. However at times it also took on an embodiment of 'fun' within the organised play. The managers encouraged employees to reflect upon how the corporate values reflected upon them as both a group and an individual. Specifically the use of team meetings was an opportunity to organise activities where employees used company values. For example when Bea was discussing team meetings she stated "So even though it's a team meeting, they add *a sense of fun*" (Bea, Marketing Inc., July 2008). 'A sense of fun' was one of the mottos underpinning Marketing Inc.'s approach to working. In other activities, the 'Have Fun team' would organise events for employees (Chris,

Marketing Inc., July 2008). The management integrated the values into the ‘fun’ activities which employees took part in.

One team in Marketing Inc. was encouraged to make posters in their pods around the motto PASSION. Many included pictures of the employees, for instance ‘Pride’ was the team presented as a lion pack; ‘Action’ was spelt out by the employees; ‘Success’ included the team’s faces transposed onto famous individuals like celebrities or athletes; and in ‘Sense of Fun’ the team members pulled silly faces (see Figure 14: 'Pod posters').

Figure 14: 'Pod posters'

The employees were encouraged to identify with the company mottos through placing images of themselves in the posters. In the pod posters, the employees chose in each of the four posters to portray themselves rather than abstract images or ideas. The employees, when given a choice in how to design them, superimposed their own faces and bodies onto posters. They portrayed themselves as embodying the corporate values in the posters, as well as in photographs around the office of fun events and on Facebook from after work socials. The jumping with joy in success, spelling out of action, pulling silly faces, recreating themselves as a pack of lions and imagining themselves as successful celebrities all form their 'organisational bodies'. Following Tyler and Abbott (1998: 441) this refers to "the mode of embodiment which must be presented, performed and maintained in order to become and remain an employee of a particular organisation or in a particular occupation". Tyler and Abbott demonstrate how this is a form of panoptic control, where employees internalise values and govern these through peer pressure and self-surveillance. In the case of Marketing Inc., group activities were organised through employees designing fun activities in which employees should express the corporate values. The employees were encouraged through the group activity to reflect on the meaning of the values and how these values related to their sense of self.

The integration of an authentic appearance reflected the larger trend to bring personal aspects of the self into work which was seen in all three companies. Two of the companies, Marketing Inc. and Smiley, encouraged employees to bring objects of their own private lives into work, and to use electronic means to express themselves such as screensavers and computer backgrounds. These were used to express a sense of self through images, for instance one employee described putting a chimpanzee on his screensaver representing him as being grumpy in the mornings, another employee put a background of her shoe wardrobe in her house as it expressed her interests, and other employees had toys and photos of themselves on their desks. Especially in Marketing Inc. Facebook was widely used at work, linking personal activities with work socials and activities. Photographs and representations of the body were widely visible as part of linking the self to the fun working environment.

The account so far has presented data where the employees have accepted the corporate culture, integrating it into their identity and managing their 'organisational bodies' to reflect the values of the 'fun' organisations. As this data has already hinted, this process needed to be

negotiated and there were boundaries set as to the degree to which employees were willing to be 'fun' people. The next section analyses these boundaries in more detail. While many employees did desire to be perceived as 'fun' employees, this was a bounded version of their identity as they maintained aspects of the self which were separate from the organisation. Boundaries in the context of fun were very important: how to have fun was rule bound, rather than unstructured, and acceptability was important to understanding this structure.

Maintaining a separate sense of self

The data presented up until this point have discussed how employees used the values prescribed in the organisations towards themselves as 'fun' people. The findings do need to be contextualised within the method of interviewee selection, as interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. This probably influenced the fact that employees were fairly positive about the organisational culture. However, this provides insights into how employees who did want to discuss the fun corporate culture used identity work. The participants used the organisational values to construct work identities for themselves and to find meaning in the activities they took part in. However participants would acknowledge that some people in the companies appeared not to enjoy the joking and humour. As indicated by the quote in the section on frivolity and child's play, some employees were perceived as 'adults' who preferred not to take part in the humour. However the participants who did not wish to take part in the humour were viewed as the exception, with the norm being that employees would enjoy and take part in the informal humour as well as the organised play. Not taking part was perceived as a choice by particular individuals, rather than questioning the wider cultural norms. When asked if employees felt they had to 'take a joke', one participant responded:

> I would think people can just say 'I'm not comfortable with it' and that people would respect that. I mean that kind of thing is going to be cropping up, so you have to be able to take it or to be able to assert that you are not comfortable with it. You can't be sensitive about it and be passive about being sensitive about it (Chris, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

Therefore to choose not to take part in the informal banter of the organisations had to be an active decision by the employees, rather than 'being passive and sensitive'. In order to be respected in that decision, the unwilling employee would have to assert that they are not comfortable with the humour therefore making a statement that they were not 'fun' people.

Bounded 'fun'

As has already been discussed, fun was encouraged as long as it was productive for the organisation. The discussion of dress and other symbols in the workplace suggested informality and a university or college feel did cause some issues with employees not taking work 'seriously'. There remained a link between the concept of taking work seriously and behaving professionally which was deeply entrenched in the three organisations. As a result, the feeling that play was a good feature was not shared by everyone in the organisations. There were people who maintained that being professional meant being serious, and as a result rejected that behaving in a joking manner as acceptable:

> I don't think it is a conscious thing, maybe having a laugh and taking a joke is at odds with them taking you seriously. But I mean it's not completely bothered me all the time, I know there are quite a lot of people here who think that being professional is not having a laugh and joke and not talking about what you did at the weekend or whatever" (Faye, Smiley, June 2009).

The tension between professionalism and play in the organisations, according to the corporate cultures, should have been overturned. Ideally, work should be playful *and* serious, however Faye's comments, as well as comments from other employees, suggested that the two, play and professionalism, were often viewed in opposition to each other. For example Mary at Marketing Inc. expressed similar sentiments, stressing that it was those employees who were senior and had been with the company for an extended period of time who were less likely to be cynical towards the corporate culture.

Despite this idea that taking part in the fun activities was the norm in the organisation, setting boundaries around the play was important. Following Huizinga's (1949) concept of play as ordered, rule bound activities, the rules of how and what play was appropriate was deemed as important. The rules of play needed to be established within the wider values of work and this idea that boundaries could and should be set was important to employees:

> There are certain boundaries you wouldn't cross just because um like I said there is that professional courtesy, and that professional barrier that takes you one step further and if you take it further people might start going, err it might be taking it too far, it might be crossing the line... You always worry while you're at work, you play it safe. You play it safe with a joke. You test, sometimes you test the water, and if people laugh then you sort of might push the boundary a little bit. But you wouldn't unless you knew the type of person it was (Keith, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

This distinction of professional and fun behaviour was important in setting the boundaries of what was funny and what was 'taking it too far'. The fun in the workplace was not a chaotic, disorderly 'anything goes' but instead bounded by other constructions of work identities. The concept of professionalism related to how other employees should be respected in order for the employee to remain effective within their job. In the rhetoric of the 'fun' workplace cultures, work should be fun as it contributes towards the bottom line through employee commitment. The fun, such as the informal humour in the workplace, was constrained by expectations of what creates a productive workplace environment, and social taboos such as joking about 'race' were restrained to mild versions in order not to offend other employees.

> [I was curious, we talked a little bit about un-politically correct humour, was there joking about gender or race?]
>
> Umm. (pause) Not really. (pause) No, I mean there are sparse incidents where someone has. I don't think there has been anything with race, ethnicity is a bit of a white topic at the moment (Chris, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

For Chris therefore some topics were unacceptable to joke about in the workplace, such as race. My interpretation of Chris's comment about ethnicity being a 'white topic' is that it some cases, what he later referred to as 'cultural banter', this humour could be acceptable. He was discussing a joke he had made about his Welsh boss liking the leeks on the canteen's lunch menu. These can be seen as 'soft' stereotypes about 'safe' ethnic groups such as British nationals. By tiptoeing around the humour which could be seen as offensive to other employees, it drew on cultural stereotypes which potentially crossed boundaries of acceptability. There were no reported jokes about other ethnic groups nor did I witness any in my field notes (the percentage of non-white employees was small which may have contributed to this being a taboo). Joking about gender stereotypes, despite Chris's statement, came up as more prevalent in my own observations and in the humour logs completed by participants. Even in context of the organisational policies about harassment and discrimination, jokes about gender were seen as acceptable while joking about race was taboo. This related to the concept of professionalism, but also to what employees perceived to be wider societal norms about acceptability of certain topics over others.

In Smiley the concept of boundaries was important for Dessa. For her, the concept of boundaries related to her personal life and seeing what was appropriate for work and what was not. Some employees such as Andy often joked about their personal lives, telling stories about their weekend or gossiping about friends who co-workers had never even met (Field notes, Smiley, July 2009). While Dessa stated they often joked about personal topics, there was an uncomfortable silence which developed in the following interview when I discussed this with Dessa:

> I suppose we have a laugh often about non-work things but with the trainers we often don't get an opportunity, or I don't often get an opportunity to have a laugh when I am working. So that was a good laugh.
>
> [And you enjoy having a laugh about non-work things?]
>
> I do yeah.

> [And you don't mind talking about personal things in the workplace? Is that something you are very comfortable with?]
>
> *(Long pause)* What do you mean by personal things?
>
> [Well I guess outside work interests and things that are going on in your personal life, things like that. Do you bring those into the workplace or find them quite separate still?]
>
> Um. I think, I think there are some personal things that I would bring into the workplace with certain people. But um there are still certain things which don't come into the workplace (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009).

Keeping parts of herself private was important for Dessa, and it was noticeable in my field notes that unlike Andy, she rarely joked about her personal life. For Dessa these parts of her life were private, and her manner within the interview suggested that she did not want to discuss private aspects of her life in a work context. Her tone became very reserved during this section and the long pause contained an uncomfortable silence which I understood to be invading her personal life. She did not want to elaborate on what these personal aspects were, maintaining the boundary of what she deemed relevant to work and what was not.

As was the case for Dessa, for many of the employees, even for those who felt a close tie to those they worked with, there remained boundaries between their personal and work lives. The safest way for employees to handle negotiating this boundary was to maintain a private self outside of the workplace and a professional self within it. As Chris stated:

> I think the boundaries are still rigidly defined, for me anyway like that. So we will joke about things about the workplace in the workplace, and out of the workplace out of the workplace (Chris, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

Therefore the boundaries between work and non-work were maintained and employees managed these boundaries to keep aspects of their non-work as private. This was framed as keeping a professional boundary and respect for other employees. In addition there was a boundary for private parts of the self, which employees did not want to be discussed at work. Even in an anything-goes fun culture, employees appeared to inherently understand private or sensitive topics they should not joke about. The humour thus remained a bounded expression of fun for many employees which was framed through expectations of workplaces. As all the companies' policies supported openness and fun in the values, the use of humour which was expected was very much bounded in safe topics. At Smiley for example the company culture and employees spoke about being supportive of other employees, and this was on the whole reflected in the humour. Maintaining a boundary around their sense of self was one of the tactics employees used in their experience of fun corporate cultures, as well as using the concept of 'fun' in alternative meanings than those intended. Maintaining boundaries also related to how they felt about their work, using emotional displays which used the feeling rules of the organisation (Hochschild, 1979). In order to maintain a self which was performing the correct type of 'fun', employees needed to express certain emotions and repress or manage others. This boundary setting around appropriate emotions allowed employees to set boundaries around the degree to which they allowed the play to impact upon their identity at work.

Emotional values and emotion work

The corporate cultures within Smiley and Marketing Inc. were perceived by employees as providing enjoyment in their everyday work. The discourses of the organisations encouraged employees to work on their inner emotional state, and employees were encouraged to internalise these discourses of positivity, pleasure, happiness, family and love. For instance when asked why it was important to have fun in the workplace, a common response was that it was an alternative to traditional workplaces which were 'boring' (Doug, Marketing Inc., July 2008), 'painful' (Andrea, Marketing Inc., July 2008), 'mundane' (Keith, Marketing Inc., July 2008), 'miserable' (Hugh, Marketing Inc., August 2008), 'horrible' (Andy, Smiley, May 2009) and 'shitty' (Beth, Smiley, June 2009). Paralleling this, the experience of working in these companies was expressed through emotions. For instance one employee commented they

‘loved’ the fun practices (Doug, Marketing Inc., July 2008), while others described the culture as ‘motivating’ (Bea, Marketing Inc., August 2008, ‘lifting your mood’ and taking ‘pride’ in their contributions (Keith, Marketing Inc., July 2008), ‘supportive’ (Faye, Smiley, June 2009), ‘valued’ (Beth, Smiley, June 2009) and ‘bonding and relaxing at work’ (Keith, Marketing Inc., July 2008).

Managing customers’ emotions through humour was also perceived as important. For instance Faye from Smiley discussed using humour during the training sessions: “I mean most trainers I know, no matter where they work, use humour. It’s a really quick way of, you know, getting delegates on your side.” Trainers discussed having stock jokes which they would use to illustrate a particular point, and also using self-deprecating humour. Humour in customer interactions was fairly safe humour, and the trainers would ensure it would not be offensive. One reason for this use of humour is that trainers were assessed at the end of the session by every client, with the scores correlated into averages visible to all employees. If the trainers did not achieve excellent scores they would have to discuss this with their mentor, and continual poor scores could mean probation and then dismissal. As one of the key questions is whether, overall, the client would recommend Smiley to someone else, the trainers wanted the clients to feel positive towards the company, for which employees used ‘safe jokes’: “you use the jokes which are aimed against yourself or kind of play on words around the software. You try and keep it… we do try to make it quite fun and light hearted” (Faye, Smiley, June 2009). Employees spoke of the pressure that they were put under to achieve excellent marks on client’s assessments, leading one trainer to claim “They are the bane of our lives. They are horrible.” The trainers as a result felt responsible for ensuring the overall experience was positive, even when many factors (such as the lunch provided) were out of their control (Beth, Smiley, June 2009).

Using stock jokes to manage clients’ emotions suggests a performative element to their use of humour around clients, putting a smiling, joking face on when meeting and interacting with clients. However the discourses of the organisation expected employees to do more than present emotions to their clients and to manage their clients’ emotions (as emotional labour). The discourses of the organisations expected employees to maintain a ‘positive’ perspective in their everyday work. This suggests a deeper, self management of the employees’ emotions to ensure they comply with the expectations of their managers and colleagues. In this section,

emotions of the participants and their colleagues are discussed in relation to how employees 'worked on' their own emotions and found mechanisms to express them in the sanctioned use of humour. This can be referred to as 'emotion work', or where an actor assesses her/his feelings through 'appropriateness' to the context and attempts to manage their feelings accordingly. It is not a surface acting, such as Goffman might have proposed, but involves working on and altering their inner state through managing their emotions towards social expectations, a 'deep acting' (Hochschild, 1979). This 'emotion work' presents how employees negotiate the meaning through managing their emotions.

Emotion work and the lived experience of work

As discussed in Chapter Five, many participants referred at some point to humour in their workplace as silly or stupid, attributing a lack of meaning to the humour as frivolous. One interpretation of this silliness may be that the employees were simply bored from completing what could considered to be mundane tasks of entering numbers in spreadsheets (Marketing Inc.), proofreading and editing (Magazine Inc.) or completing paperwork and timetabling (Smiley). However, for the participants within the study, they did not necessarily link the humour to the emotional state of boredom. For instance one participant at Marketing Inc. was asked if they used humour to relieve boredom.

> No it's not boredom… It wouldn't be boredom, because we can still sit there and do work. It's just being stupid, I don't really know why (Jen, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Humour had a role outside of the emotional state of boredom, that of 'being stupid' and frivolous. For some employees this appeared to be a cathartic emotion in expressing humour. Emotions which were considered extreme were channelled into alternative, organisationally sanctioned expressions such as humour.

Humour was sanctioned as appropriate behaviour and employees recounted humour in interviews in relation to their own emotions. A range of emotions were presented in the humour logs, where humour was used at tense moments. One employee described this as 'an emotional release', especially from stress (Laura, Marketing Inc., August 2008). Fineman (2000) discusses this concept of 'release' as an emotional tactic, or as a 'genuine' emotion which is used to counter the facade of emotions at work. On the other hand when these emotions are unexpected, they can cause distress (Fineman, 2003). It is not clear why Fineman suddenly reverts back to some feelings being 'genuine', as after all he has set emotions as socially constructed within feeling rules. The question of 'authenticity' aside, a release does offer the opportunity for moments where emotions are not what employees (and often the organisation) desire them to be. As well as humour playing a 'positive' role, it was also a medium for expressing and coping with other emotions such as frustration, nervousness, or embarrassment:

> And also the more tired and stressed we get the more scatty we get, so we end up making jokes about how scatty we are... We mess around with each other; I think it is our way of dealing with a lot of stress (Andy, Smiley, June 2009).

In this case, the emotive position of being tired and stressed alters how the employees interact with each other, dropping the facade of professionalism as their attention begins to wane. In order to cope with this, they used humour as a mechanism to deal with the expression of tiredness and stress. These emotions were not specified in the corporate values, which focused on smiling, being pleasant and most important, helpful to the client. Despite the corporate values of being yourself, the emotions such as stress and tiredness did not have a place in the organisation and as such disrupted the emotion work the employees were taking part in.

The 'darker' side of emotion work

These emotions represented the 'dark' side of the corporate culture, one that did not have a place in the written discourses but could be pulled out in the undertones of the messages they

portrayed. As discussed in Chapter Five the organisations had 'positive' discourses within the corporate mottos. For example in Marketing Inc. employees were encouraged to: 'Be positive: Choose your attitude' (Marketing Inc., July 2008). This frame of mind was positioned as a mental state within which employees *choose* to view situations and outcomes in a positive light. They also can *choose* to get rid of 'outside worries' (without stipulating how employees should achieve this). These discourses suggest to employees that they should manage their emotional state while at work, focusing on the positive and pushing out these negative emotions.

This emotion work which employees undertook meant managing negative emotions such as frustration and anger which occurred during the course of their day. Humour became an important mechanism for 'dealing' with these emotions, allowing in one sense the emotion to be expressed and in another to position it as simply humour and as such just a joke. For example, one participant noted how his joking often concerned frustrating aspects of the job:

> It's not really in any kind of personal way, but these are the stock frustrations and 'this is happening again'. I suppose [joking] it's complaining but packaging them differently (Chris, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

There was recognition within Chris's statement that humour was being used to express emotions which were perceived as undesirable in the workplace. Stating frustration directly would break the feeling rules of 'positive' expressions. However by 'packaging' those emotions in humour, they become a different emotional display. The employees are working at their emotions, allowing the expression of negative emotions such as frustration through this reframing of their expression. Humour was also used to cope with strained confrontations with other employees. Evan, a trainee account executive described how one of his colleagues suddenly yelled at him for causing too much noise in the office, by stating that she 'wanted to bang their heads together'. Evan's reaction at the time was to laugh, and while the colleague did not laugh at the time, later on she then managed to laugh about yelling at him. This event presented Evan with difficulty at the time with how to deal with being yelled at for 'having fun' in the office:

> It made me quite angry actually, I'm laughing about it now but at the time it was like if I didn't laugh about it, it probably would have caused an argument. So you kind of choose to laugh to push it under the carpet (Evan, Marketing Inc., 2008).

Laughing as a reaction to the emotion of anger demonstrated the way humour was used to cope with non-positive emotions. This disclosed 'feeling rules': the way individuals try to feel in relation to socially shared rules (Hochschild, 1979). The socially shared rules within the discourse of 'positive' corporate cultures establishes certain emotions as negative which need to be 'dealt' with for organisations to function. In this case emotions which are deemed negative cannot be directly expressed, and examples where these emotions are displayed present a moment of breaking these social rules. The anger Evan felt was perceived as an inappropriate response to having fun at work. The 'emotionologies' (Fineman, 2008) within these cultures prescribed how employees should feel about work experiences. The woman's shouting was outside organisational norms of emotional displays, and while Evan felt anger at her breaking the emotional rules, he did not express this anger. Laughing about it allowed him to 'push it under the carpet' or pretend that she had not broken the feeling rules. It presented his emotions within the feeling rules of positive emotions of laughter and having fun.

Humour and 'bitching'

In all three companies, humour was often directed at specific individuals in the company. This humour was often frivolous, however at times it also took on a more directed emotional expression described as 'bitching' by the participants. These persons were perceived in a negative light, and employees used humour in order to discuss their dislike for these individuals. As a result there were negative jokes described as 'bitching' about others which was aimed specifically at their undesirable characteristics. In this case, one participant discusses a person's 'poshness', effectively making her the outsider:

> She is quite posh, so we all rip the piss out of her behind her back for being posh. So that is all something we have in common because we know that she is posh. So there is quite a lot of banter that goes on there as well. Umm yeah, she also, there

> is this, we unite in taking the piss out of her, she doesn't pull her weight, so people don't take her seriously (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

The irony of this statement was, from my observations, there was not a significant class division within Marketing Inc.: it consisted of a largely middle and upper middle class, educated workforce. This is reflected within the statement when Keith reflects at the end that the real problem he has with this woman is that 'she doesn't pull her weight', not that she is 'posh'. However it was used as a mechanism to differentiate her from other employees, in order to reframe her behaviour as Other. As his statement demonstrates 'it is something we have in common because we know she is posh'. The group did not include this woman and the humour positioned her as different and difficult to work with. The humour becomes a way to express this dissatisfaction with her performance through making fun of her class.

In Magazine Inc., bitching humour was more prevalent within the results of the humour log than in the other two organisations. Within the girls magazine, the humour was mostly friendly but as already noted could occasionally take on more of a personal and sometimes 'bitchy' tone. The feeling rules in this case allowed humour which was intended to be malicious as a way of expressing emotions regarding other employees. As two employees independently noted:

> Umm yea there is definitely bitching humour going on. But that is about, that is about disguising your own bitchiness. If it is funny people don't think that it's bitchy, if it is funny in its own right, what you are saying, people will forgive what you are saying in a way for being so bitchy. So I think people use it that way (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

> I guess there is quite a lot of, not horrible, but sarcastic humour, where you take the mickey out of people a little bit... Not like 'Oh look at you, you look like shit' kind of thing, but no I really can't think of an example. I am going to have to have a think, but everyone is slightly sarcastic (Becca, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

Using humour allowed the employees to state that they did not like aspects of other employees' behaviours in a non-serious manner, which as Tina noted made the message more acceptable. This was a manner of 'disguising' the message while still communicating your intention. For Becca, this translated into being sarcastic humour which laughed at other people. While Tina was referring to humour which took place not in the presence of the subject, Becca was referring to humour where the subject was present. This suggested that the group norms were both to joke about others behind their back to their co-workers and also around them. Employees would then be expected to have sarcastic humour made about them, humour which had an edge of critique in its meaning. The group in Magazine Inc. had its own 'feeling rules' governing how employees were expected to manage their own emotions such as frustration. As Tina elaborated: 'Bitching is often done in a humorous way, to kind of disguise how pissed off people are with, behind people's back' (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008). Like in Marketing Inc. then, the use of humour allowed for employees to express emotions which were outside of the feeling rules while still conveying the meaning intended. The extent to which it was used in Magazine Inc. was more prevalent than in the other two firms, which coincided with Magazine Inc. having the least well defined 'positive' discourses regarding managing their emotions. 'Bitching' still occurred in the other two organisations, but in Magazine Inc. employees seemed willing to discuss it and admit to using it themselves. This suggests that the feeling rules in Magazine Inc. allowed for frustration and annoyance to be expressed through bitching, which avoided direct confrontation but communicated a clear message about how employees felt in an acceptable manner.

Humour in all three companies played a complex role of being an outlet for many emotions, varying from organisationally sanctioned 'fun' to emotions of frustration, stress and anger. This certainly was related to employees wanting to be perceived as funny people, which matched the identity regulation within Smiley, Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc. The feeling rules so far relate to the way employees engaged with each other through negotiating meaning within the positive discourses of the corporate culture. Employees associated the workspace with a complex understanding of meaning within these organisational spaces, including through the 'feeling rules'. As Hochschild (1979) stated, the idea of 'appropriateness' of emotions needs to remain contextualised. Employees presented themselves as 'fun' people through their embodied experiences of different spaces, for example where visible to clients and management, according to their lived experience of the workspace.

The next section of the data also relates to joking about a taboo subject: sexuality. Like the joking about employees' characteristics, joking about sexuality as a taboo needed to be negotiated into boundaries of appropriate behaviour. As the next section will explore, sexuality was perceived differently in all three organisations, with jokes about sexuality appearing in all three. Often these were embodied examples of humour, although they also represented virtual and spoken communication between the staff.

Tactics of sexual banter

In all three organisations, sexuality was a prevalent theme in the humour logs and in the joking observed. Reinforcing the infantile play, the sexual humour drew upon the bodies of the men and women in the workplace, as well as bodies of celebrities or other unknown persons. In Marketing Inc. for example one woman described stumbling across sexual jokes about James Bond in an online search for information, which she then shared with another employee in (quiet) joking. Another male employee described flirtatious joking with a female employee, which largely was self-deprecating towards his sexual performance. Finally there appeared to be numerous accounts of flirtatious phone voices, emails with sexual suggestion and laughter over photographs with sexual poses. Other emails included written sexual humour, such as the image of bad cropping below (Figure 15: Example of bad cropping). This email was sent around as a joke, but also related to their work with the presentation of information with the cropping of analysis to 'anal'.

Figure 15: Example of bad cropping

Interestingly, in Magazine Inc., the majority of joking that was described during interviews with female staff centred on men and male sexuality. This included sexualising the male stars of the magazine, as well as generic humour about men. The humour regarding men contrasted with the safe sanitised content of the magazine, often referring to the teen friendly stars as being sexual objects. As the team was exclusively female, with the exception of a previous male part-time staff member, the humour united the women into a group through othering men. The sexual humour focused on the bodies of men. Other jokes which were sent around by email also drew upon men as being objects for sexual ridicule. The email joke below about men's bicycle shorts was fairly typical, with the humour centring on sexualising and objectifying men:

> There was a really funny one about boys in cycle shorts, showing their… We probably wouldn't have sent that around so much if there had been boys in our team... We *are* laughing at boys' willies (Tina, Magazine Inc., December 2008).

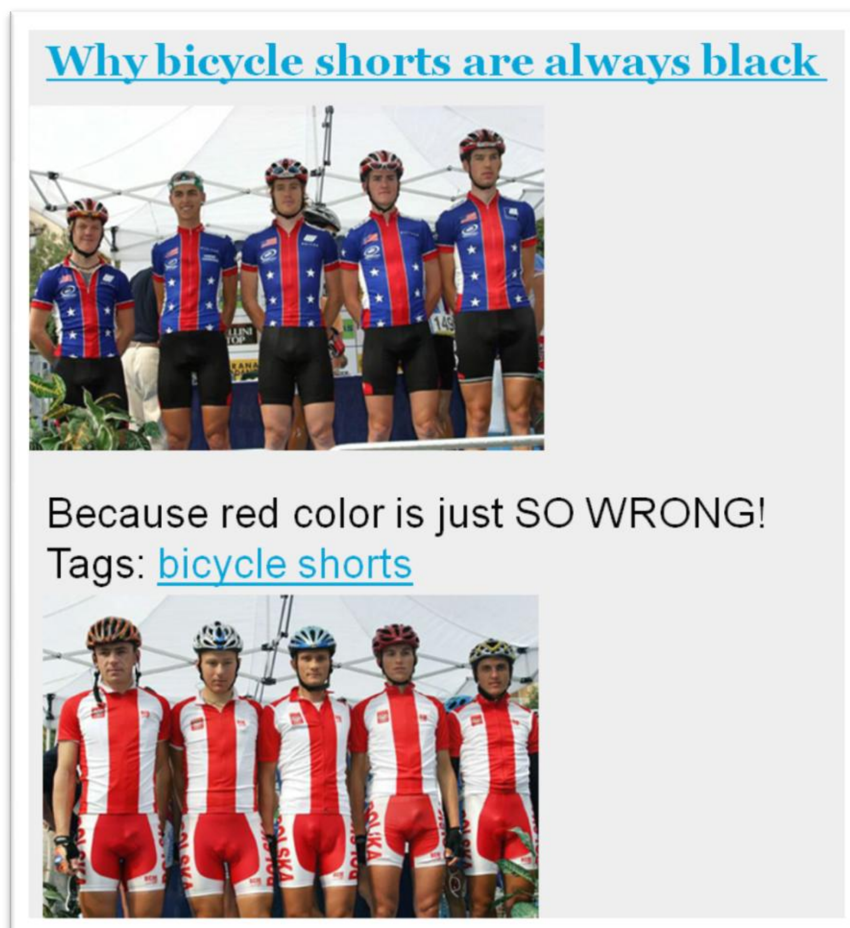

Figure 16: Men in cycling shorts (email humour)

The sexuality within the jokes such as the bicycle shorts in the picture above were material in their expression, sent through emails where employees could view them on their own screens. They were also visual in that the employees had to 'see' the object of the humour to understand them. This humour was that the 'red colour' was so wrong as it reflected the shadows falling on their body parts, while the black shorts hid the genital area. This email had little to do with work, it was sent between the women to laugh about men's genitalia. It is performative in the sense that it was a laugh designed to solidify the group, but it also positioned men as objects for the humour of women. The use of sexuality in humour was part of the identity work which the women in Magazine Inc. undertook. As a group identity, it positioned them as feminine, sexually liberated women who enjoyed 'feminine' activities such as fashion, drinking and socialising. The use of sexual humour also breaks the 'rules' constraining women's sexuality, as women are not supposed to know about sexual activities (Crawford, 2003). In this case, the humour positioned men as objects and more importantly as Other, overturning the typical scenario of men objectifying women. Humour around the bodies of stars, both male and female, also frequently took a sexualised direction. The joke cited in Chapter Five where Kerry was laughing at a male celebrity whose genital area was emphasised due to wearing a sports cup is an example of how the employees found humour in these scenarios. In addition, in another example of joking about female stars as being pregnant marked the women's bodies as being promiscuous and scandalous. Sexualising the stars directly opposed the values of the magazine, which formed a safe, sex-free environment for its readership. By sexualising the stars, or purposely sending around jokes which objectified and sexualised men, the women resisted this safe world of the magazine. The humour was found in overturning the world, in the reality that the preteen stars were mid-twenties adults and inevitably were sexual rather than the desexualised image they portrayed. However, in Magazine Inc. the analysis of men's bodies as sexual objects also reduced men and to a lesser extent female bodies to being objects which could be scrutinised, judged and laughed at.

In Smiley, sexuality was discussed the least out of the three organisations. Everyday frivolous examples included joking about what their children would look like if three of the employees bred and some jokes around having to use politically correct sexual humour in training. Another example of sexual humour came up around a joke about him acting 'gay enough' to be 'properly gay'. Andy was open about his sexual orientation and often discussed his sexuality in the office. When I observed the joke, he appeared to be happy to play along with the humour

using exaggerated poses with the handbag he was holding. I discussed this with Dessa, who brought up the humour in her log, and asked her if their jokes often referred to Andy's homosexuality:

> Oh what about him being gay? (pause) Yeah. Yeah, I think is. But I genuinely think he doesn't mind, that it is initiated by him. So it feels like it is quite an acceptable topic (Dessa, Smiley, July 2009).

This topic was seen as playful banter which made fun of Andy's sexuality, and lies on the border of acceptable play and unacceptably offensive humour. The important part for Dessa was that Andy himself had initiated this topic as being acceptable, giving permission for others to joke about it through his own jokes about his sexuality. I also noted several instances where Andy would joke about his sexuality in my field notes, as well as make reference to it in everyday conversation. Through joking about his sexuality, Andy was using a performative display of his sexuality, playing out expectations and entertaining his colleagues. The sexuality was presented in a positive way, however it also drew on stereotypes such as the joke mentioned above about his behaviour being 'not gay enough'. It was a playful approach to sexuality, playing on stereotypes of homosexual behaviours.

While recognising that there were cynical views of the infantile culture, generally employees appeared to enjoy the 'freedom' to have fun. This was especially the case when they were able to push the boundaries of what was considered 'acceptable' fun. In particular employees appeared to enjoy the opportunity to be infantile when it came to sexualised humour. Two further examples are discussed below where employees appear to take a pragmatic view of what it means to 'have fun'. They do seem to replicate the 'fun' expected, taking a pragmatic reading of the cultural texts, even if they are adjusting it with their experience of the working world.

*Marketing Inc. and the photocopying of T**s*

I was half-way through my research at Marketing Inc. when an incident occurred demonstrating the boundaries of fun in the organisation. Nicola, one of my participants, had emailed her pod warning a broken printer was hot and not to touch it. A male member of the team emailed back, joking 'You'd better tell Dani not to photocopy her T**s again'. This email, by mistake, went around the whole company, including management and the New York office. Every participant who I interviewed after this point mentioned this email and the effect that it had on their group. Nicola explained the incident to me while being interviewed about her humour log:

> And he sent a reply saying 'You should probably tell Dani not to keep photocopying her tits on it.' And the thing is it was just one email obviously, but then it went round everybody. But it was so funny. I just sat with my head on my desk thinking I am not going to get any work done for the rest of the day, it was hilarious. I felt so bad for him… But yeah that was hilarious. So umm, everybody responded by email… (Nicola, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Other respondents also told me about the reaction on their floor when they received the email, for example Jen noted how the joke had continued with responses 'Toes?' as an interpretation of the T***. It might be assumed that it was the reference to tits that made it scandalous but another participant Keith explained it was not the language but the fact that it was directed at one individual and went round the whole company which was seen as breaking a taboo:

> It's not the use of language just who it is directed at generally. If he had been 'well then people better stop photocopying their bits' then it would be like what do you say to that, I know what you are saying but it's not directed at anyone. So it might have been inappropriate to send it to all those higher people... (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

In the end, the man who sent the email was quietly told off, although no formal discipline was given. The buzz created by the event and the feedback from interviews suggested that this was an unusual example and had broken the norms of the organisation. However, many employees reported sexual humour in their logs and it was the mistake of sending it to the entire company that broke the norms of professional behaviour. The use of fun was bounded to 'appropriate' displays in the organisation. Employees were allowed to be childish, but had to be careful on how far to take it and who to express it to. This was supported by comments by employees about not wasting others' time and understanding who would appreciate the humour.

Magazine Inc. and joking about the characters

Another example occurred in Magazine Inc., when four team members sat down to discuss a comic strip 'Friends 4 Ever' in the magazine. The comic strip focused on the everyday lives of several friends, with the focus of the meeting to give the characters more depth and background. The following excerpt comes from my observations of the meeting:

> *The women present are generally outspoken and quickly start debating about the female characters in the plot line. Tina is chairing the meeting, and most of the debate takes place between her and Becca, with the other two women Cheri and Rebecca taking a quieter role.*
>
> *They discuss the six characters: Tiff, Suz, Shelley, Amy, Louisa and Chloe. First they discuss Tiff, which they discuss as being currently a bit 'ditzy'. They decide her personality is a 'supergeek who is a bit of a cheeky rebel'. This is followed by the discussion of how Suz must be an only child 'from a council estate', which gets a few giggles from the group. The group then decide Shelley is 'streetwise and also off the estate'. But because Shelley needs to be different they decide the character should be into music, which led one person to note 'she is probably an Emo' which created a lot of laughter in the group.*

At this point in the meeting the group appeared to go off track. They go into a discussion about writing the script and the characters. Becca is the writer for the group, while Tina is the sub-editor (a more junior position). Becca jokes "If Tina ever wants to she can write 'Friends 4 Ever', I fucking hate it."

They then continue joking about the female characters. First they joke that one of them is going to turn into a teenage mom. After a bit more discussion about some of the characters, Becca then jokes that Shelley would be a bit unfocussed and doesn't concentrate at school "She's a bit rubbish at school. She might not be thick but… actually she is stupid, okay she is stupid." One woman joking suggests a plot line about how one girl could have "caught my dad with his secretary, oh wait that was just my weekend" to which there is laughter.

Suddenly Becca remembers that I am there (I am taking notes about the meeting) and jokes 'Oh no what are you writing about?" The group then seem a little more self-conscious. They start talking about being hung over from their weekends, and needing a 'die' button by the bed…

The meeting in many ways was fairly representative of events observed in the organisation, with a few exceptions. In general the women in the team supported the rhetoric of 'play as progress' (Sutton-Smith, 1997), for example those interviewed claimed to have a strong passion for working in the children's industry. Also, the behaviours of the women would be reflective of those in the magazine, cooing over pictures of cute animals, using words reflecting the vocabulary of teenage girls or spending a significant amount of their time at work 'grooming' and discussing fashion. Much of the joking was observed or reported to me, for instance email humour appeared to be widespread. However much of this humour actually subverted the norms of the childhood 'safe' world, in particular by questioning the sexually neutral stance. The majority of reported humour concerned 'canned' sexual humour about men and women or humour more specific about the employees or the characters and stars of the magazine as sexual. Also the comment made by Becca in the middle about hating writing the comic portrayed the tensions this world created. The frivolity reflected the perspective

that fun was simply 'silly', but also meaningful in that it directly contradicted the safe world of the magazine.

Conclusions

The data presented within this chapter examines the everyday practices to see how employees related to the 'fun' corporate cultures they worked within. Each of the areas discussed are sites where the meaning of fun within these cultures is played out, constructed and reconstructed by the participants in the study. The strategies attempt to manage each of the areas discussed: most explicitly seen in identity, the body and emotions and less explicitly managed in sexuality. However employees are not 'passive' in corporate cultures, they engage with organisational discourses, interpret them and use or not use them in their everyday practices. This chapter has investigated the effect of the corporate culture on employees and the manner in which employees have utilised humour within spaces where the 'proper' use of fun focuses on the productivity of employees.

First, the chapter considered fun identities, examining how the organisations specifically recruited and encouraged identity regulation with the organisations. Specifically it reflected on the fragmented and insecure nature of employment within the creative industries, which may have added an extra incentive for the employees to adopt the organisational values. The use of having fun provided a common sense appeal to employees, drawing on wider societal expectations that humour and having fun more widely was natural. Through the organisations giving permission for employees to have fun, the employees could be seen as liberated from oppressive organisational practices. Within the self-identity work, the employees identified their personalities as fun and in doing so presented themselves as the correct form of employee to be working in this type of organisation. Another aspect of the self-identity work was the identification with childhood play, with employees referring to themselves as being 'like kids' within the workplace. In doing so they re-established the dualism of work as being serious, and thus adult, and play being unserious and child behaviour. This positive identification with childhood was also matched by the claim that displaying humour made employees human. It became central to their subjectivity, by being able to display humour

employees were seen as 'proper' rather than incomplete. At the same time however, many employees recognised that this subjectivity needed to be worked on, and employees discussed a performative element to their humour. Employees accepted they needed to demonstrate the 'correct' behaviours, that in doing so they would have a 'currency' at their disposal to get things done.

Building on identity is the embodiment of play and the bodily display of the self as a fun person. The dress of the employees was considered symbolically to represent the informal aspects of the corporate culture, representing a freedom to 'be yourself' within the workplace. The informal dress of the fun-at-work cultures was compared to the 'suit' cultures of traditional hierarchical organisations and presented the workers as playful rather than serious. However, the casual attire was also symbolic in representing the problems with fun organisations, in that it gave mixed signals to new employees about the nature of work. The relaxed signals meant that some employees did not take work seriously, ironically as the corporate cultures stated they should not be serious. However, employees were still expected to be *productive*. In addition to the attire of the workforce, the employees were also expected to embody the playful values of the corporate culture. Humour as a process is inherently embodied, with laughter being both an embodied expression of amusement and also of symbolic importance in the narrative of joking episodes. Additionally the humour also discussed the body, with humorous interactions arising from a lack of control over the body and its movement. The embodiment of humour also related to materialisation of the organisational discourses, positioning the body within them as employees represented the values. Through the organised activities, the employees were encouraged to translate the values into posters and other artefacts where they embodied the fun.

In the discussion of identity and embodiment, the data focused mainly on employees who viewed the organisational discourses as positive. However, even in these cases there was often a 'bounding' of what constituted fun. Some employees, especially those referred to as 'adults', tended to not take part in everyday banter to the same degree. Those employees were respected; however the onus was on the employee to assert they did not want to take part without being 'passive' about it. In addition, even those employees who viewed the culture as fun were often taking a pragmatic approach, adapting overall to the local practice to overcome

the inconsistencies produced (Hall, 2001). The position of a fun identity against a professional identity was important for employees, and most of the participants interviewed referred at some point to having to balance these two conflicting positions. This also related to a precarious sense of self, holding multiple identities at the same time. As a result, employees bound their use of humour to those expressions which were perceived as inoffensive to others. Other employees bounded their expression of their 'outside' work self, maintaining a distance from the culture.

The corporate cultures did not just manage employees' identities: they also required employees to undertake emotional management towards both the customers and to other employees. In the first case, all three organisations produced creative products which drew on the notion of fun in either their content or in their delivery. Understanding humour and being able to demonstrate it within their work was important to performing well. Clients expected a fun experience and producing this experience was part of the employees' emotional labour, especially where face to face interaction was part of the product. In addition to the emotional labour, employees were undertaking emotion work on themselves in order to match the emotion rules of the organisation. The emotion rules of the organisation were rooted in the discourse of 'positive thinking' where displaying emotions such as anger and frustration were not acceptable. Instead, humour became an acceptable outlet for these emotions, reframing them into 'just a joke'. 'Taking the piss' and 'bitching' became methods of expressing these emotions which did not have a place within the official cultures.

Finally the use of sexual banter was seen within all three of the organisations, indicating jokes about sexuality were at least sometimes acceptable within the bounded fun. None of the corporate cultures explicitly encouraged sexual expression, however in all three sexual comments and humour were reported by the participants. In the case of Marketing Inc. this generally took the form of flirting or joking with other employees using images on the internet. In Smiley, the most prevalent displays of sexual joking surrounded the homosexuality of one of the employees, who took part and played up his sexuality during these moments. Finally, in Magazine Inc. the all female group joked about men and their bodies in a manner that inverts masculine 'dirty jokes' (Mulkay, 1988). The objectification of men and women, joking about their bodies and positioning them as sexual objects countered the official corporate culture

which focused on childhood education in a safe, asexual environment. In addition, two examples of sexual humour were discussed in detail. The first one demonstrated the difficulty in bounding humour in Marketing Inc. where a sexually explicit email was mistakenly sent around the whole company. Employees enjoyed the humour and the scandal, but also felt bad for the guy who had sent it around (although ironically not for the woman it was about). In the second example, a meeting in Magazine Inc. begins discussing the characters of the magazine as sexualised, lower class and stupid, contradicting the values of the organisation. It expressed some of the tensions and frustrations with writing the story and relating to the fake reality that they were creating.

These five areas represent sites where the tension of corporate cultures with the 'realities' of work are felt at the everyday level. While many of the employees interviewed were positive about the concept of play-at-work, in practice they often took a pragmatic approach to the cultures. They adopted the cultures within their identities, but not without bounding off certain aspects of their selves. They embodied the practices through displaying themselves as fun people, but also recognised the tensions this had with other identities such as professionalism. They used the humour, which was approved of in the corporate cultures, to express emotions outside of 'positivity' desired. Finally, they used sexual humour which pushed the boundaries of acceptable fun within the workplace.

These findings which suggest that employees were pragmatic towards the corporate cultures demonstrate that humour was being used tactically within these sites of tension. As De Certeau (1984) notes, tactics are a way of 'making do' with the strategies which are implemented upon the users. Users employ these in following trajectories which bring into play the language and mechanisms of the systems but are not defined by them. Humour was important in the experience of everyday life in the organisations. The meaning of humour was not always predefined, but was fluid, contextual and ambiguous. As the nature of humour could not be strategically controlled, employees could use it as a tactic within everyday life in these organisations (De Certeau, 1984).

In Chapter Seven I turn to the implications of these findings and place them within the wider discussion of the everyday experiences of employees within fun corporate cultures. Through using De Certeau's model of strategies and tactics, the discussion will build on the contributions made on space in organisations (Lefebvre, 1991; Dale and Burrell, 2008). The chapter analyses how the everyday lived experience of space through the tactic of humour can be important towards understanding how employees 'get on', 'get by', 'get away' and resist fun in organisations. Each of these areas represents a manner by which employees tactically used humour to open up space for alternative meanings of fun. It suggests a pragmatic interpretation of these actions, one which recognises the performative nature of humour. Humour was used instrumentally to be performative in the sense of being productive at work. It was also used to be performative in the sense of working on employees' subjectivity. Chapter Seven draws together these discussions to set out how employees were instrumentally performative as a tactic in organisations where fun was being promoted as a means of increasing profit.

Chapter Seven: Instrumental performativity and fun space

This chapter links together the emerging themes within the data as presented in the previous chapters. One theme which has become apparent is that fun is presented in organisations in a variety of discourses. Within corporate cultures it is conceptually managed by the organisation, creating a notion of 'managed fun'. In this case fun is tightly defined within corporate discourses as fun behaviours from employees which create profit for the organisation. This fun was required by the organisation through institutionalised practices and was advocated as pleasurable and enjoyable for employees *while making them more productive.* This concept will be developed throughout the chapter, but for the time being this form of fun will be referred to as 'compelled fun'. On the other hand *employee led* concepts of fun still occurred where fun was *not intended* to make the employee productive. It did however have other aims, such as creating bonds with other employees, forming social interactions and expressing emotions within work. This fun was acknowledged and encouraged by the organisations, but not directly managed, and as such I will refer to this form of fun as 'sanctioned fun'. As the chapter will demonstrate, fun also occurred which did not follow the organisations' idea of productivity. Drawing on the data and the literature, this chapter notes two forms of fun which contradict the productive fun. 'Bounded fun' consisted of a re-appropriation of fun, while 'subversive fun' was used as a mode of resistance to the fun discourses. Bounded fun presented moments where the employee could use the concept of having fun into humour which questioned the dominance of the organisational control. Alternatively, subversive fun was enacted through escaping the discourse of having fun, through refusing to be fun. Each of these four represent a different way employees reacted to the corporate culture. However, employees did not exclusively utilise one of the discourses, but moved between them depending on the context in which the humour occurred.

In order to explore this typology, this chapter elaborates how managed fun (i.e. compelled fun) and employee led fun (i.e. sanctioned fun) were materialised within the corporate cultures. It also explores how bounded fun and subversive fun find space in the organisation for alternative interpretations of fun. The aim of the chapter is to return to the questions emerging within the literature review: firstly, to explore the nature of control within the creative industries; secondly, to analyse if fun in itself is a form of control and how it might operate; and

finally, to examine the nature of play within fun organisations to consider the infantilising effect and how this affects employees' sense of self. In order to address these questions, the chapter firstly looks at how compelled fun, sanctioned fun, bounded fun and subversive fun shape the subjectivity of employees within the corporate cultures of Smiley, Marketing Inc. and Magazine Inc. These forms of fun interact with the dominant strategy of corporate culture, and as such looks at how play is both a way of complying with and resisting managed fun.

Advocating fun

The corporate cultures within these three organisations can be seen as attempts to control employees in two main ways. Firstly, through defining the manner in which they ought to behave (as fun) and secondly, through limiting the scope of the concept of fun to one which was productive. The organisations, through their fun initiatives, aimed to instil particular behaviours and principles in order to ensure employees were engaged and committed to their work (Willmott, 1993). Employees, however, were also *active* in this process: as discussed, employees volunteered to take part in decorating the social areas, organising compelled fun in social committees and initiating banter with their co-workers. In order to explore this tension between the fun initiatives and employees' engagement with them, this section explores how employees reacted to the meaning embedded within the corporate culture. As Linstead and Grafton-Small point out, organisational cultures are embedded in power relations:

> ...against which symbolic determinations are played out, at particular historical moments in particular economic contexts, and which shape the coding possibilities and evocational fields which enable, constrains and prefer particular meanings without limiting them (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992: 339).

Within cultures, power relations are enacted through symbolic attributes, which present certain interpretations of those symbols. These dominant readings present these interpretations as truths and constrain alternative meanings which might be read from the symbols. Fun within these organisations was presented as natural and as positive behaviour

which the employee should desire to take part in. In order to consider the symbolic nature of corporate culture, this thesis refers to use of space through De Certeau's theory of strategy and tactics as the enactment of lived space (Dale and Burrell, 2008). This recognises how the fun initiatives using compelled fun, what De Certeau would call strategies, are spatially enacted through power dynamics in organisations, while other interpretations such as sanctioned fun also take place within space. Additionally, humour can be a tactic to re-appropriate the meaning of being fun through the use of bounded and subversive fun.

De Certeau (1984: 94) discussed this process of strategies being embedded within space in his analysis of the city. He theorised that it was defined discursively through a threefold operational practice: firstly that it produced its own, proper space based on rationalisation and repression or exclusion of non-rational 'pollutants'; secondly that visibility of space is rationalised through scientific strategies; and finally the creation of the city as a subject in itself with finite and interconnected properties. Dale and Burrell (2008) also use De Certeau's concept of the city, and in particular the 'walking rhetorics' he invokes of the pedestrian moving through it, in order to describe the DEGW architectural use of designed workspaces and their aesthetic affect. However, the authors note their problem with De Certeau's 'walking rhetorics' in that it ascribes the notion of 'free choice to the users of the space'. They state:

> Thus the performance of 'walking rhetorics' is much more like Butler's 'forced reiterations'. But the interesting thing about identities – including employee identities – constructed around a predominant ideology of autonomy, pleasure and self-fulfilment is that these rhetorics hide the way that the routes are repetitious and predesigned. Literally then we are 'incorporated', even whilst we 'choose' our spatial narratives of self (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 132).

Whilst I agree with their proposition that De Certeau's theory and Butler's 'forced reiterations' (repeated acts which compel the body to reproduce norms through subjectivity) do complement each other, the data from my study suggests that it may be more complex than simply the appeal of the rhetorics embedded within the space. Dale and Burrell's critique of De Certeau is that he reverts back to the appeal of modernist concepts of autonomy and free

choice. However the data presented here, while acknowledging their critique, presents a different perspective of why De Certeau may be valuable. In particular it became evident that employees were indeed aware of the spatial practices they were operating within: the discourses produced by the organisation made it apparent it was to increase their performance at work, with employees stating this in a matter-of-fact manner in interviews. They did not however simply repeat the 'routes' prescribed by the organisations, many of the instances of the humour presented in Chapter Five demonstrated employees using the space towards their own ends. They reiterated 'routes' such as subjectivity described in compelled fun as fun employees, but they also formed their subjectivity around sanctioned fun, bounded fun through using other concepts of fun and subversive fun through refusing to be fun. The following section lays out how employees tactically used humour within each of these discourses of fun. In particular it then links each discourse to a form of subjectivity utilised by the employees in their 'routes' of lived space. These identities were not 'fixed', but fragmented, and employees drew upon different concepts of subjectivities depending on the discourse of fun they were utilising.

Strategies and tactics

In this chapter, De Certeau's (1984) concept of strategies and tactics develops how employees were performative (both in the sense of Lyotard's instrumental performativity and Butler's subjectivity) in regard to the fun corporate cultures. For De Certeau, strategies are used within space by institutions in order to rationalise meaning for those operating within it. He notes this in relation to work as one of these institutions, whereby the strategy aims to formulate a space where:

> Cultural techniques that camouflage economic reproduction with fictions of surprise ("the event"), of truth ("information") or communication ("promotion") spread through the workplace. Reciprocally, cultural production offers an area of expansion for rational operations that permit work to be managed by dividing it (analysis), tabulating it (synthesis) and aggregating it (generalization) (De Certeau, 1984: 29).

These cultural techniques position work in relation to economic production, repositioning the workplace as a camouflaged space while at the same time rationalising the social interactions which occur within it. It sees space as essentially strategic in its conception, dominated by institutions which hide the true purpose underneath the rationalised appearance of work. In this case there is a compelling argument for seeing the conceived 'fun' spaces as a form of camouflage: at the end of the day, no matter how fun they appear to be they are still workplaces. They are still sites where the power dynamics between employees and employers are played out, and employees still have the imperative of economic performativity in order to continue their employment. They are rationalised spaces (Weber, 1930) where the ends are still instrumentally to gain profit for the organisation and to earn a wage for the employee. Compelled fun as a strategy is an attempt to institutionalise meanings into the space of organizations, expressed through the playful aesthetic and expectations of what appropriate behaviour should take place within that space. Fun 'events' can be seen as choreographed exercises, designed to communicate 'information', and as a result reflecting Foucault's concept of *labour as dressage* (Jackson and Carter, 1998). It also reflects Dale and Burrell's (2008) concept of enactment, through the power relations played out through the movement of bodies through the designated space. These 'events' acted as a method of communicating the culture, demonstrating the values of playfulness and promoting these as not only good but desirable, especially in comparison with other organisations. Employees needed to enact the discourses through their movements: producing texts which reflected the fun, positive and pleasurable rhetorics of the organisation. As an example, competitions were conducted in teams, with the members decorating their spaces with flags and other 'fun' activities. The performative requirement to go through the motions of having fun was reinforced by power dynamics such as deadlines for completing the flags, or in other cases group 'punishments' of the losing team having to bake a cake for the winning team.

Typology of 'fun'

The findings within this chapter have discussed the relationship between humour and 'fun' corporate cultures. It is concerned with how employees utilise humour as a tactic when faced with a dominant strategy in the organisation on 'having fun'. De Certeau's (1984) tactics, as will be explored in detail later, are concerned with how employees appropriate the space of the

organisations where they can redefine the meaning of that space. In the case of these three organisations, the corporate culture defines these workspaces and those within them as 'fun'. However, this is a fun which is concerned with the productivity of the employees. This chapter maps out the manner in which employees respond to these strategies of productive fun with different humorous tactics. As the chart below sets out, this varies from those instances of employees using humour in the manner desired by the organisation, to those situations where humour was used in a manner non-compliant with the strategy of the organisations.

	Strategically compliant		**Strategically non-compliant**	
Typology of fun	*Compelled fun*	*Sanctioned fun*	*Bounded fun*	*Subversive fun*
Tactic	Humour as Getting on	Humour as Getting by	Humour as Getting away	Resistance to Humour
Subjectivity	Fun employee	Fun people	The wig	Saboteur
Example	Humour in presentations and team activities (p.228)	In group joking (p.173)	Escapism in the video of the chain gang (p.205)	Refusing to play through 'being' adults (p.215)

In this typology, fun can be seen as either being amenable to the strategy through demonstrating the desired forms of fun or as non-compliant by displaying alternative concepts of being fun. The manner in which the discourse of fun was utilised varies within each of these. Naturally lived experience is complicated, and although the typology helps to make sense of the interactions, the classification of the humour into one or another risks simplifying these experiences. However, this typology does not suggest that employees used only one form of fun and instead proposes that employees shifted between multiple subjectivities rather than holding one 'self' constant. Within the strategically compliant uses of humour, fun varied to the degree to which it matched the expectations of the organisation. Those instances where employees took part in the fun practices which the organisation championed, under the banner of productivity, can be conceptualised under compelled fun. Alternatively, those informal joking behaviours which were supported but not managed explicitly can be seen as sanctioned

fun. However, employees also discussed fun in a manner where the aim was *not* to be productive. Like sanctioned fun, much of this was played out in the informal banter of the organisation; however in the case of bounded fun, play operated outside of the 'proper' space and time of the organisation. This does not necessarily mean that it was physically 'outside', although it could be, but that there was a temporary use of the space which was set to alternative rules. Finally a fourth type can be seen which views humour as resistance to the strategy of organisation. In the case of these three organisations, this resistance took the form of a refusal to play, as a manner by which employees could rebuff the desired behaviours expected of them.

Each of these four positions will be explored in detail in later sections. However, to contextualise the discourses of fun, the chapter first sets out two concepts of performativity which inform this typology. Both of these two types of performativity are important: firstly, in the sense already mentioned that the strategies rely on a notion of productive fun, and secondly, that these strategies also work on employees' sense of identity within these spaces. As such, four different forms of subjectivity were being worked on which correspond to the four different discourses of fun: fun employees, fun people, the wig (De Certeau, 1984) and the saboteur (Jermier et al, 1994). These subjectivities were embodied and displayed through their engagement with the managed space of the organisation.

Performativity: subjectivity and efficiency

This discussion of 'performative fun' refers to two different but related concepts. Firstly in the sense of subjectivity it refers to Butler's (1990) theory of performativity as the formation of desired subjectivity, through the internalisation of social norms. In *Gender Trouble*, she enquires "To what extent is "identity" a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?" (Butler, 1990: 23). Identity for Butler is not reflective of an inner self, but a social construction which is formulated through restrictive norms shaping an individual's subjectivity. Concerned with sexuality, she follows De Beauvoir's position that identity, and in particular gendered identity, is a process of becoming. In Butler's account, 'intelligible' accounts are those which form coherence and continuity through regulatory practices, or the "cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality" (Butler, 1990: 24). Subjectivity,

for Butler, is established through the repetition of the cultural laws, creating the appearance of a solid, cohesive self in line with those norms and expectations.

In these three studies, Butler's theory of performativity is demonstrated in the development of employees' subjectivity through the discourses of fun. Employees positioned their sense of self in relation to the discourses of what a fun person ought to be. Employees were encouraged to think of themselves in relation to the organisations and alter their behaviour to the fun identity which was deemed desirable. In compelled and sanctioned fun the internalisation and repetition of organisational values states that to be a good employee is to be a fun and productive employee. Performativity, derived from Butler, establishes the social construction of identity through the repetition of acts to create a constituted 'social temporality'. More specifically subjectivity:

> ...is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, *a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment* which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (Butler, 1988: 520)

In Butler's case, subjectivity is formed through acts, which do not necessarily have an internal coherence as natural or inherent, but through their repetition take on the appearance of solidity. Importantly she also notes the importance of the audience, but unlike Goffman, considers the actor themselves to be part of this audience (i.e. the individual undertakes performativity as much to convince themselves as much as others). Extending Butler's concept of performativity to these three organisations, it is possible to conceptualise a *fun performativity*. The employees themselves, in the case of these three companies, 'come to believe' that they are fun *in the manner ascribed by the organisation* through compelled and sanctioned fun. The identity taken on has the appearance of solidity through repeated acts of being fun. These repeated acts were social in nature through sharing humour and participating in fun activities, sometimes organised by the managers and sometimes organised by

employees. The subject's identity, their subjectivity, is formed through the acts which are reiterated over time to give the appearance of solidity, permanency and fact.

One example from the data which particularly demonstrated the concept of fun as performative was Bea's reflection on her identity:

> My personality is, I do smile a lot and laugh and a lot of people describe me as really bubbly, honest that word is so repetitive. But I don't, I never try…
>
> [You don't make an effort to...]
>
> No, or put like a fake smile on, because I am *just that sort of person* (Bea, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

This quote from Bea demonstrates how the behaviours of being a 'fun person' were reiterated to form the employee's subjectivity. Bea describes her personality through acts, in particular smiling and laughing, which serves as a public display of being fun. Fun for Bea was embodied: it was the expression of this fun personality through her acts which solidified how she viewed herself. She then states that she assesses her personality through the audience perception, as being bubbly. Not only does she evaluate her personality through the audience but it is the repetition of the audience's evaluation which reinforces to her that it is just the sort of person which she is. This subjectivity is taken as whole and complete, despite the indication in her words that it is constructed: if the audience had for example used a different set of values to describe her personality, it is doubtful she would have felt so strongly the 'fact' that she is a 'fun person'.

The second manner in which the term performative is used refers to a Lyotardian construct of efficiency-focused behaviour. For Lyotard (1984), performativity refers to the legitimating of a postmodern narrative which defined notions of justice in terms of the calculations of efficiency. This focus on efficiency overpowers other methods of knowing, with the needs of those

affected becoming a secondary consideration. Within the postmodern[1], performativity becomes the dominant narrative, as one which emphasises that "the legitimating of that power is based on its optimizing the system's performance-efficiency" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). The purpose of the narrative is therefore to define terms in relation to their efficiency, focusing on the 'performance' of the system as the primary method to which it justifies its legitimacy. Jones (2003) notes parallels between Lyotard's performativity and Weber's concept of instrumental rationality. For Weber (1930: 53) the 'spirit of capitalism' could be defined by its focused objective of earning money, where "it is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of happiness of, or utility to, the single it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational." The narrowed focus on the end product, as instrumental rationality, overcomes a rationality based on value of the return. Likewise, Jackson and Carter (1998) discuss the similarity between Lyotard's concept of performativity and Foucault's perception of labour as dressage. Within Foucault's (1977) work on discipline, labour had three functions: as productive, symbolic and dressage. In the third function, labour is performed for the sake of control, rather than an economic imperative, in a "non-productive, non-utilitarian and unnatural behaviour for the satisfaction of the controller and as a public display of compliance and obedience to discipline" (Jackson and Carter, 1986: 54). It is the performance of compliance and the internalisation of norms as demanded by those in authority. By drawing together these theories, performativity can be conceptualised as an instrumental, ends-focused narrative which operates by ensuring obedience to authority under the guise of productive labour.

The values of Smiley represent this concept of performativity, where the fun is conducted for instrumental ends *of which the employees were aware*. As Harry, the owner of Smiley stated:

> The fun, positive approach of the company is one of its key advantages. It attracts new people, motivates those who work here, is seen as vitally important by

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[1] Lyotard describes the postmodern as the 'crisis of narratives' where modern narratives have been transformed by the 'condition of knowledge'.

clients and, most important, makes it easier to learn about computers [our core job] (Harry, 'Be Different', Training Manual, 2009).

'Fun' therefore is a competitive advantage, with 'real' results in employee management. It is specifically designed to be appealing and attract new employees. Whether or not having fun at work *actually* increased productivity is debatable (Cederström and Grassman, 2008), but the appearance of it encourages employees to perceive their work positively and forms compliance. This seemed to be successful, as at Smiley many employees told me about enquiries from outsiders about working there as a trainer because of the company's reputation. Additionally, it is concerned with how employees are visibly seen by the clients, as the presentation of the company as fun is embodied within the employees' interactions. Finally it simply allows employees' productivity on the job to be increased. Statements such as this were very transparent that the *purpose* of having fun at work was to allow employees to perform better: fun was a new 'input' which could increase the 'output' of client satisfaction, leading ultimately to increased profits. Fun was not an aim itself, the rationale for having fun had to be linked to increasing profit in the organisations. Employees were made aware of this performative purpose and comments about how fun allowed them to be better employees arose in the interviews. They felt that they should be seen to be having fun for their own success within the organisation. Humour was seen as an important mechanism in order to be better at their jobs, through bonding with other employees as well as in the performative sense in front of clients.

Performative fun is a combination of the two forms of performativity: the instrumental and the subjective. It is both an instrumental application of certain behaviours in order to achieve particular ends, while also shaping the employees' sense into particular concepts of what it means to be a fun person. It encapsulates how employees were expected to work on their identities, and *over time* and through *repeating desirable behaviours* construct themselves as appropriately 'fun'. Both compelled fun and sanctioned fun provided frameworks within which employees' subjectivity was formed. In one sense, identity was compelled around displaying a self which is joyful, happy but also productive. This employee is engaged with the objectives of the organisation, seeing them as their own responsibility as being a 'company man' (Casey, 1996). On the other hand, group norms also influence how employees behave, to be perceived

positively by their colleagues. This distinction can be developed through distinguishing between 'fun employees' as the performativity of compelled fun and 'fun people' as the performativity of sanctioned fun.

'Fun employees' and 'fun people'

One theme which emerged from the data was that employees were subjectively positioning themselves as 'fun', in both their display of compelled and sanctioned fun. The use of humour itself was integral to the performative self, even as it was perceived as frivolous by employees. In order to be 'seen' as being the correct type of employee, employees needed to demonstrate compliance. As Jackson and Carter (1998) noted in their examination of labour as dressage, dressage is a 'spectator sport', with employees needing to be 'seen' to be performing the steps that demonstrate their obedience. Jackson and Carter note a variety of audiences who act as spectators, such as the governors (the authority) and the public who see a restricted view of the performance. This was certainly the case in the three companies researched in this thesis: employees were required to go through the steps of 'being' fun employees in spaces where management could view them, such as 'fun' activities in meetings and taking part in away days and after work activities. In the case of Marketing Inc. and Smiley the public also acted as spectators, as clients entered the workspaces and had fun presentations made to them (Marketing Inc.) and attended the fun training sessions (Smiley). The performative fun in these situations reflected compelled fun: those activities where employees were required as part of their job to display appropriate 'fun' behaviours. The corporate culture compelled employees to be fun through this display: forming a subjectivity which I call 'fun employees'. Through the use of compelled fun, employees were encouraged to display a personality which specifically made them more productive *through* having fun. Assessments formalised fun behaviours into the measurements of employees' performance, as in Smiley's 360° feedback and trainers' assessments. These reports measured how the public and co-workers viewed employees' behaviours and made this visible to authority in senior management and owners of the companies.

In sanctioned fun, the emphasis of fun was in the interactions between employees. Humour in particular was discussed as being utilised to create an inclusive feeling within groups and within

the interviews employees stated that humour was predominantly used to help them to bond with other employees. All the companies organised teams into groups to a varying extent, and employees within these used humour to build the group bonds, for example in the form of made-up shared languages in the pods (Marketing Inc.) and humour around dressing up in moustaches and singing karaoke (Magazine Inc.).

One example from Chris in Marketing was particularly interesting for demonstrating how humour was linked to both the subjectivity and space of the organisations:

> When you go on Facebook, someone can tag you and it sends you a notification. So essentially they tagged people in the photograph no matter what they were doing. So my back was tagged.
>
> [So did you then talk about it in the office?]
>
> Yea it was sort of staged. So we would mention it as we were passing by the person (Chris, Marketing Inc., August 2008).

In this example, Chris is explaining how Facebook enabled humour between his group members on an event they had taken part in. The photographs were made humorous through tagging the individuals in awkward positions (for example Mary, one of the directors of the group, told me how her bum was tagged in the photographs). They were then shared through Facebook, and as such could virtually be seen at the discretion of the employee. However the spread of discussion was 'staged', in other words there was a spatial communication about the humour which was spread as persons moved around the office. This example uses both compelled fun (fun employees) and sanctioned fun (fun people). The original event as compelled fun was organised by the 'social committee', an initiative by the management to encourage employees to self-organise their activities. However, there was also sanctioned fun as the humour used transformed the fun into a group activity which inverted aspects of 'work' such as the hierarchy of the organisation through tagging the director's bum. As such employees saw themselves and the other employees as fun people: people who could laugh at themselves and others within their shared group norms.

In-jokes also helped to establish those 'within' the groups as well as those 'outside' of the groups. In-jokes such as Gina's bursting into song unconsciously were then reinforced into humour which not only made her aware of the singing but also had the result that she then sang lyrics which made other employees laugh. Humour about herself and her actions reinforced this as part of her subjectivity as she repeated these desirable activities to 'get a laugh'. Humour was therefore important for employees to display themselves as a fun person as part of the corporate culture. The audience within sanctioned fun is other employees, rather than the 'governors' or the public. It was the group expectation of compliance, which was supported through the compelled fun activities. Therefore sanctioned fun operated in parallel to compelled fun, it had its own rules and expectations which complemented rather than conflicted with the compelled fun. It is group based play which is organised by the participants, who set the rules from group expectations.

Compliance was reinforced through group norms and in particular monitored through assessing other employees. Much of this 'assessment' was more informal, such as Tina's noticing that all of the employees in Magazine Inc. wanted to be perceived as fun by others, and as such using humour 'as currency' to gain others' acceptance. The perception of fun also related to the concept of 'being human', or the idea that it was natural to use humour and share it with others. This is why in particular it develops a subjectivity of a fun *person*, as the use of humour was seen as integral to being an acceptable, complete individual. As Faye in Smiley described: "I think there has always been more tolerance for you to come *as a human*." Being a human required employees to demonstrate a range of emotions within humour, although as she also points out this needs to be restrained in order to be 'professional' in front of clients. Those who told jokes were perceived by others as being whole, complete and meeting their expectation of what it meant to be a 'person', while those who did not were seen as breaking the organisational norms of behaviour. As Mary put it:

> When Daniel read out that quote, that made me feel like he was an *actual person*. And I thought actually he was quite funny and he liked to join in and he made people laugh (Mary; Marketing Inc., August 2008).

Before this point, Daniel had not been perceived as a team player by Mary, who had engaged with him on a limited basis. By sharing a humorous quote in a meeting, Mary considered him in a different *subjective* light, as a social person who liked to join in. In other words, the use of humour constituted their subjectivity, shaping the perception of them as having an identity within the group dynamics.

The 'fun employee' is distinctive from the subjectivity which was formed in relation to sanctioned fun, where employees could be said to identify as 'fun people'. The fun workplace identity was a fragmented identity which drew at times on different discourses of fun, not to mention other identities the employees may have (as mothers, fathers, friends etc). These two workplace identities were encouraged by the two forms of fun, compelled and sanctioned, which affected how they were constructed. In addition, other fun discourses influenced employees' subjectivity: those of the 'the wig' and of the saboteur. In this case, alternative concepts of work identities were established, especially those related to professionalism. These subjectivities represented a break from the strategies of the organisation, either through the re-appropriation of fun into activities which benefited the self or through a rejection of the organisationally defined performative fun altogether.

Bounded and subversive fun

A different theme which emerged was that of employees maintaining a degree of distance in their humour from the compelled and sanctioned fun. One feature of the interview data was that employees would present several views of the fun corporate culture often even within the same interview. Some employees, despite espousing its virtues during the interviews, would also present alternative views that having fun had some negative effects and that at times employees found other identities to be more desirable. At times this emerged from the contradictions within the culture. Some employees had reservations about the infantilising nature of the compelled fun. While other employees embraced child's play as one of the elements of compelled fun, others found it to be demeaning and condescending. It is not that they actively opposed the idea that work should be fun or that play could be productive, but they disagreed with the simplistic, infantilising form which it took. Even those employees who

identified themselves as fun employees would reserve aspects of their identity which did not meet the organisational expectations of ‘being fun’.

The concept of ‘bounded fun’ can be compared to ‘bounded emotionality’ where employees should constrain their emotions within the inter-subjective relations with other employees (Putman and Mumby, 1993, Martin et al. 2000). Bounded emotionality also could lead to a level of ambiguity, where employees could hold contradictory feelings, positions and demands. However, in the case of bounded fun we do not view an expression of a ‘true’ play, but a temporary interlude from the reality of work demands. It is not the emancipated, carefree employee who partakes in play, but one who is constantly negotiating the boundaries of the acceptability of infantile behaviours. Through bounded fun adults can act like children, play at work in a frivolous manner, and still recognise the ‘reality’ of employment. Reality of work can be suspended temporarily, but even as employees engage in infantile fun, the consequences of play still needed to be contained.

In particular the idea of professionalism was often enacted, establishing boundaries of appropriate and non-appropriate humour which could be used in work. Professionalism set the borders around sanctioned fun in particular, ensuring that the humour shared between employees was still conducive towards the instrumental performativity of forming profits for the organisation. Fun which conflicted with ‘professional’ behaviours could upset other employees through potentially offending them and disrupting ‘productive’ behaviours. The subjectivity of sanctioned fun was framed around the idea of professionalism, setting the boundaries around acceptable expressions of identity. It could even be that professionalism, as a well-defined identity which employees were comfortable with, became a ‘default’ identity (Carroll and Levy, 2008) as a more established discourse on identity than the concept of the ‘fun employee’. When employees felt uncomfortable with the notion of being either a fun employee or a fun person, they reverted back to an identity which for them is well defined around the adult and proficient notion of being a professional.

Bounded fun was influenced by emotion rules in both the sanctioned humour used by employees and the compelled fun within the corporate culture. On the latter, the ‘positive’

words were used to reflect the culture, such as 'happiness' and 'love' in Marketing Inc., the 'fun, positive approach' and 'positive thinking' in Smiley and the fun, positive language used by the employees in Magazine Inc. This view of the organisational culture as being positive and 'open' was positioned against 'negative' descriptions of other organisations which were described as boring, 'suits' (i.e. stuffy and formal), mundane and miserable. Humour was also used to manage the customers' emotions to ensure they felt positive towards the products and the organisations. The use of humour ensured appropriate emotional displays in the workplace, demonstrating the importance of emotion rules through "the social and cultural contexts that provide the rules and vocabularies of emotion" (Fineman, 2000: 2). It was also used as a mechanism to 'release' other emotions which did not fit with the 'positive' approach such as anger in the case of Keith being yelled at by his co-worker in Marketing Inc. and 'bitching' as widely discussed in Magazine Inc. These represented moments where employees refused to play, refused to become the fun employee who willingly took part in the fun activities. Finally, humour was also used to express sexuality within the organisations, as sexual jokes were very prevalent within the findings. However, the nature of these jokes can be reflected on in relation to the 'positive' and infantile nature of the compelled fun discourses. The expression of sexuality could be seen as subversive when countering 'safe' images of the organisations, however in other cases it appeared to be accepted, if not encouraged, as a fun way to pass the time. The ambiguity of sexual joking gave it an equally ambivalent position in subverting the infantile cultures: on the one hand supporting a simplified and adolescent version of sexuality while also playing with the idea of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in the workplace.

Humour provides an opportunity to critically assess the way concepts of rationality and infantilisation are intertwined at the level of culture management in organisations. In particular with the rise of identity work and managerial tools encouraging a normative internal gaze for continuous improvement (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), culture management pushes employees to form identities where employees are easier to control and form. Anderson has noted how HRM encourages employees towards an infantile pedagogical gaze:

> Not only are employees seen as children. They must also see themselves as children. They must see themselves as incomplete, as people who need

> continuously to be made compatible with the norm of adaptability (Anderson 2007: 348)

Infantilising in work practices thus also entails a moulding of employees: conceptualised as children they can constantly be corrected and taught. This idea of pleasure found in a hedonistic, infantile mind-set can be linked to the practices of culture management which encourage employees to work on the project of self (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Positioning employees into an infantile mentality means that this process of the project of self is ongoing: employees can become pupils constantly learning how to experience work as pleasurable.

It is a one-dimensional form of subjectivity (Marcuse, 1972), shaped towards a simplistic concept of fun. Marcuse's (1972) view of rationality exposes the systematically infantile behaviours encouraged by society. Rather than suggesting that the infantile may be located in the individual's psyche demonstrating a lack of 'normal' behaviour (Freud, 1955), Marcuse explores the development of society and control embedded within it, referring to the ontogenetic as the growth of the individual into a 'conscious societal existence' and the phylogenetic as the growth of civilisation as a repressive force as the state (Marcuse, 1987). In his analysis, Marcuse notes how rationality has come to dominate society to the point whereby refusal to comply appears to be 'neurotic and impotent' (Marcuse, 1972: 22). The use of reason through critique is replaced by a dominant, conforming logic of positivism that produces a 'one-dimensional thought and behaviour'. This creates a society which does not attempt to critique the status quo, but instead remains one-dimensional, flat and dominated. Marcuse's exploration of these forces sets out a society which is infantile, where humanity's potential to critique is regressed into a placid, accepting mind-set driven by the desire to satisfy false needs (those needs which are imposed on the individual for society's interest). Thus he notes:

> Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs (Marcuse, 1972: 19).

Marcuse's analysis draws on the idea that 'to have fun' can be constructed as a false need, rather than constituting an innate human requirement. Marcuse introduces the performance principle where "under its rule society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members" (1987: 44), which suppress the pleasure principle or gratification. With the increased rationalisation of the performance principle being absorbed into the individual, it "works on his own desire, morality and fulfilment" (1987: 46). However he notes that there is a revolt by the pleasure principle against the performance principle in the form of phantasy, the unconscious expression of desires in imagination. Although sceptical about Marcuse's contribution as 'prefer[ring] criticism and condemnation to investigation and explanation" (Campbell 1989: 8), Campbell's work on romantic consumerism builds on this phantasy in the pleasure principle. This pleasure can create a distraction from the power relations embedded within consumerism, as Campbell (1989: 11) describes the 'spirit' of modern consumption as being "autonomous, self-illusory hedonism". Hedonistic consumption within modern society operates through the power of imagination, conjuring pleasurable emotions which are limitless through their separation from externally generated sensations. In other words, a modern hedonist creates their own pleasure, where there is "little reliance upon the presence of 'real' stimuli" (Campbell, 1989: 77). For Campbell, modern consumption is based on phantasising: with consumption becoming increasingly instrumental, the pleasure is derived from the phantasy which holds little relation to reality. Relating consumption to corporate cultures, the employee engages in the fun activities with the knowledge that these activities are regulated and constrained, reflecting on particular versions of fun. Instead the use of phantasy as a way of responding to the 'reality' of the culture is a manner in which employees can deal with the instrumental, infantilised nature of play in these organisations.

Some employees responded to this pressure of an infantile, instant gratification and pleasure seeking fun identity through constructing alternative identities. Through bounding the influence of the fun discourses, such employees appeared to use humour in a manner which questioned the boundaries of acceptable fun that was supported by the organisations. In this case, employees invoked a subjectivity mirroring what De Certeau (1984) refers to as 'the wig', a subjectivity which uses corporate resources towards their own ends, one of which is phantasy. Alternatively some employees refused to engage with the fun identities of being a fun employee or a fun person, instead using an identity of the saboteur who resisted the corporate culture.

The wig

There were numerous examples of online humour such as photographs and videos of groups, joke emails and sharing humour through 'silently' looking at images on a screen. These examples were moments where employees were using the concept of fun to reflect themselves, but in a manner where they were using humour which was not aimed at improving their productivity. For De Certeau (1984), one tactic for coping with the dominance of work institutions in particular was *la perruque* or 'the wig', which is:

> The worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen... it actually diverts time (not goods, since he [sic] uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. Employees use company time towards their own ends as a form of resistance. It is a mechanism of the worker doing his own work rather than work for the employer, and as such it is work which is creative and not aimed at profit (De Certeau, 1984: 24).

This concept of *la perruque* is fairly concrete; it refers to moments throughout the day where workers use the company's time towards their own end. Employees engaging with this discourse of play gave the appearance of complying with the playful rhetoric, but used these moments in order to establish their fun selves outside of the workplace. The wig as a fun self was a contradiction to the safe, productive fun desired by the organisation. Several employees discussed enjoying sharing jokes which contradicted the organisational values, which focused on positive inclusivity of other employees. They 'borrowed' the values of fun and re-appropriated these into humour which presented themselves as sexualised, especially in the case of Magazine Inc., or which belittled other employees. The three organisations based their discourses on child's play which presented it as innocent and positive. However several employees discussed using humour and phantasy which presented themselves and other employees as sexual, which was controversial for the organisations. An example is the email

regarding photocopying a woman's breasts sent by her male colleague. It formed group norms where employees were expected to laugh at being sexualised, despite the unintentional embarrassment this caused. It also appropriated the organisation's resources by using the email system and the company's time to send the email.

The distinction between bounded fun and sanctioned fun was that bounded fun purposely played with the acceptable boundaries of what was appropriate within the culture. It opposed or questioned the dominant discourses that play should be productive by pushing these boundaries. For example, in Chapter Five the example of the video depicting the phantasy of the team volunteering event as a chain gang depicted the employees as 'slaves' instead of volunteers. Sent around the team, this video was found to be highly amusing for questioning the fun discourses. Again, the producer of the video used company resources and the company's time to produce the video, as well as the company email system to send it around the team.

Subjectively, employees were presenting themselves as fun in ways which contradicted the organisations' values. For De Certeau (1984) the process of la perruque is one of dis-alienation from work. Through using the company's resources and time, the workers use their capacity to be creative for their own benefit, rather than that of the organisation. It therefore reclaims creativity as the workers' own, rather than selling their creative, fun capacity to the organisation. Rather than being a fun employee as seen in compelled fun, the wig uses the concept of being fun outside of the organisation to build subjectivity. The wig continues to give the appearance of being a fun employee, while their use of humour is subtly questioning the control that is placed over them in these organisations.

Employees seemed to then be re-appropriating the discourses of fun into a subjectivity which resisted being dominated by the organisation through phantasy. One manner in which this was accomplished was through questioning the emotion rules embedded in the values. All three of the organisations embedded their values of having fun within a positive framework and encouraged employees to work on their own emotions through overturning negative emotions into positive, productive emotions. There were employees in all three organisations who

discussed using humour which was purposely cynical and critical of others. One example was in Marketing Inc. where humour was used by Doug to express frustration with another department. Additionally the bitching which was used in Magazine Inc., offered an opportunity to present their frustrations in a humorous manner.

The saboteur

The final form of subjectivity which emerged from the data was that of 'the saboteur'. Traditional studies often argue that humour acts as one mode of resistance in organisations, among other forms such as sabotage (Jermier et al, 1994). However, the use of compelled fun inverts this relationship, appropriating fun as a competitive advantage nurtured by organisations. While the wig uses the compelled fun by re-appropriating it into humour which is non-productive for the organisation, the wig to a certain extent remains within the discourse of fun. It resists the discourse of fun by using it, but it does so by pushing the boundaries of what is fun from those behaviours which are deemed desirable. In the final form of the saboteur, the employee resists the fun-at-work discourses through the only mechanism which escapes them: *through refusing to be fun*. Through a lack of engagement with the notion of being a fun employee or a fun person, the employee subverts the corporate culture.

As already stated most of the employees interviewed seemed at least at a surface level happy to engage with the corporate culture. This was more than likely was a result of the voluntary nature of the research and the research aims, which probably inadvertently reinforced the idea that fun employees were worthy of being researched. I had no participants who were overtly negative about the culture; however there were participants who discussed how at times they would reject the culture and also who knew of other employees who did not present themselves as fun people. The observational data also highlighted those employees who appeared reserved in displaying the compelled and sanctioned fun. These employees were observed being quiet and not engaging in the play at work, in particular sanctioned fun. Also planned events, such as the team meeting discussed below, presented collective moments of refusing to play. These moments of resistance arose out of frustrations with the corporate culture, rejecting the infantile, superficial or belittling effects of taking part in fun at work.

In the first case, some of the participants of the study would discuss problems which they faced with maintaining the fun self, especially moments when emotionally they did not feel like being happy or positive. During moments of stress for example, employees discussed not getting involved in the fun activities. Some employees told me about not taking part in the organised time outs in Marketing Inc. when they felt they had too much work to do. Another employee discussed having the occasional bad day where he would not want to engage with the group and then would return to being sociable the next day. In addition, cynicism towards the corporate culture was also observed. One example when this was most visible was in the team meeting in Marketing Inc. where the director handed out play balls into the audience, asking them to throw them if they disagreed with the figures he presented. However, no one in the team threw a ball and most looked disengaged during the presentation. Despite efforts to make the presentation fun through the effort of the director, the team as a whole rejected the use of this managed play (mirroring scenes parodying management in 'The Office' in Tyler and Cohen 2008 and problems facing real managers in DIY Co. in Redman and Mathews, 2002). This reflected the view that this manager simply tried too hard to be fun and employees as a result rejected engaging in the compelled and sanctioned fun.

Other participants spoke more specifically about colleagues who did not engage with the fun corporate cultures. In Marketing Inc. these employees tended to be managers or more senior employees, who felt that having fun and professionalism were at odds. In Smiley, several employees were presented as 'adults' in comparison to those who embraced the child play as part of their identities. These employees tended to re-establish the distinction between play and seriousness which the corporate cultures had supposedly broken down. By rejecting these, the employees placed themselves outside of the discourses of fun which suggest the fun employee is desirable maintaining a management/employee hierarchy in terms of those who are most subject to the discourse of managed fun.

These four subjectivities presented employees with different tactics in dealing with the fun corporate cultures. Each of these subjectivities represent a manner in which employees used performative fun, in the case of compelled and sanctioned fun or rejected performative fun to

engage in alternative discourses on what it meant to be fun (or not) in the organisation. As the fun corporate cultures compelled employees to identify as fun employees, in all three of the organisations employees were encouraged through identity regulation to think of themselves as particular types of people. However while the employees interviewed did see themselves in relation to the identities of fun employees and fun people, they also at times used other identities that questioned and resisted the dominant meaning of 'being fun'. Through using the identity of the wig to re-appropriate fun and the saboteur to question having to have fun at work, employees drew on multiple subjectivities at different times. These identities, especially those of fun employees and fun people, needed to be displayed in the organisation as part of the performative fun. Performative fun was also embodied through the use of humour. The next section links the embodied nature of performative fun to the lived space of the organisation, theorising space in this study as performative. In other words, the lived space of the organisation provided employees the platform to enact the identities they performatively were drawing upon.

Performative space

This section links this discussion of performative fun to organisational space, as both space which is managed and space which is experienced on the everyday basis by employees. The data suggested that fun corporate cultures needed to be enacted within and through space: within the perceived, conceived and lived space of organisations (Lefebvre, 1991; Dale and Burrell, 2007) and within the 'unmanaged space' (Gabriel and Lang, 1995) where the meaning of fun was less defined. Dale and Burrell's (2007) account of space notes its *organised* nature, discussing both the space within organisations and the space organised outside of organisations. Through drawing on organisational theorists, architecture and philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Lefebvre, Dale and Burrell are interested in how space is shaped and how space shapes the subjectivity of those operating within it. The analysis within this chapter, drawing on the three organisations, develops their theory to consider the performative elements of space.

Lefebvre (1991: 17) argued that social space is produced, and as such could be 'read', implying "a process of signification". Space contains meaning, which in the case of these three

organisations communicated that work ought to be fun, pleasurable and rewarding. Space contains both “the social relations of reproduction”, i.e. the organisation of sexuality and the family, and “the relations of production”, i.e. the organisation of labour into useful social functions (Lefebvre, 1991: 32). Space within organisations directly implies a link to production, in that the space is conceived to encourage workers to produce, but also involves the social relations of society. This tension between the two results in the different ways in which fun was thought about: it is a space where people can use both compelled fun for being productive and sanctioned fun for building social relations. The spatial practice develops these capacities through the layers of space (the representations of space and representational spaces) in the complex coded symbolisms embedded within it. The space, with its layers of meaning, is embodied by employees: “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols... overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). He discusses the ‘bodily *lived* experience’ as distinctive from the body being experienced as thought or perceived. For Lefebvre, a discussion of space “presupposes the use of the body” (40), highlighting how the experience of space is essentially through our senses and feel of space. In this research, the predominant discussion of space by employees was of how the space felt, how they moved through the space and how they expressed themselves within it. The embodied experience of the space was essential for humour, and indeed the negotiation of ‘having fun’ as being appropriate in the space was in a tension about when the employees ought to be *seen* and be *heard* having fun.

For Lefebvre, abstract space (the space of capitalism) suggests a “space which is also instrumental (i.e. manipulated by all kinds of ‘authorities’ of which is the locus and milieu)” (Lefebvre, 1991: 51). Influenced by the work of Foucault, he was interested in how the discursive effects of domination would influence people to act only in ways which were efficient. In both the production and the social relations in space, Lefebvre argued that space was becoming increasingly functional. He also argues abstract space silences other thoughts which do not match this instrumental manipulation, creating a worrying stifling of those users within the space. It leaves him to question “Why do they allow themselves to be manipulated in ways so damaging to their spaces and their daily life without embarking on massive revolts?’ (51) Indeed within this data open resistance did seem to be suppressed, where opposition to the dominant pressure to have fun had to draw on other identities at work such as professionalism. For an employee to reject the impetus to have fun in a workplace designed

around this idea required them not to just ignore the practices, but to reject an identity of themselves that was fun. With fun being presented as a *natural* behaviour, it became a disciplining force. For Lefebvre, only through a new 'differential space', a spatial heterogeneity, does the possibility of ungagging these voices arise.

Lefebvre's (1991) distinctions of the three layers of space, perceived, conceived and lived space, structured the employees' subjectivity in relation to space and the fun practices within them. As the data presents, employees viewed space as being important in their everyday lives in the organisation, with employees' behaviour interwoven within the layers of space. In the case of the data within these three organisations, there remained historical notions of spaces of production (perceived space) which sometimes conflicted with the compelled fun space designed by management (conceived space). These notions saw workplaces as serious and fun spaces as non-serious. The idea that being serious was an adult characteristic of work, and that fun was an infantile characteristic of play still held for many employees. For example, Andy in Smiley, discussed how he was 'just like a kid', but how other employees took work more seriously. In Magazine Inc., the separation between the perceived space and the conceived space was most prominent, which saw workspaces and work time as serious time and outside of work and work time as more appropriate for play. However this was the case for all three of the organisations, when in everyday practice employees often looked to spaces 'outside' of the organisation for having fun.

Chapter Five also discussed how space was conceived in the organisations through both management initiatives and through employees decorating their own space. While the idea of conceived spaces by architects and management has been discussed by Dale and Burrell (2008) in particular and Lefebvre (1991) more abstractly, in these organisations the space was conceived through employee initiatives. Magazine Inc. was the exception to this where the space was conceived by management and then usurped by employees through claiming the hot-desking space as their own. However, in Marketing Inc. the teams were encouraged to decorate the space with employees choosing the colours and furnishing. In Smiley the employees decorated the office space with stuffed animals and disco balls. The conception of the space as fun was an interpretation of the corporate culture, drawing on bright colours, fun objects, stuffed toys, games, sofas and coffee tables. The ownership from the employees over

the designing of the space compelled them to identify with the space while fitting it into the corporate image.

The space in these organisations can be separated into front spaces and back spaces. In Magazine Inc., the space was conceptually planned for their audience, and rooms such as the designed meeting rooms around the product themes reinforced that these spaces were there to impress the users. However, the lack of use of this space by the employees previous to the meeting I attended suggested that they were intended to impress outsiders (indeed it did occur to me that they may have booked the room specifically as I was doing research as an outsider). In Marketing Inc. the management designed the 'feel' of the downstairs, meeting rooms and other spaces where clients were likely to go. Employees felt proud of their social areas as spaces which would say something to outsiders who might come to their floors. Likewise in Smiley the social space which the clients used and the training rooms were decorated by management in an informal friendly manner with games, sofas and signs with a playschool feel to them, but felt more structured and ordered than the fun space in the office.

The separation of these spaces can therefore be seen as a 'front-stage'/'back-stage' division where different performative acts occurs (Goffman, 1959). In the front-stage areas compelled fun would occur, especially those forms of compelled fun which were designed to be visible to clients. Back-stage performative acts tended to relate to sanctioned fun, bounded fun and subversive fun, focusing on joking and banter between employees and demonstrating they are fun people to other staff. This distinction was not fixed, with for example some compelled fun acts in Marketing Inc. occurring in employee-designed social areas and bounded fun occurring in team meetings. The same could be said in the front-stage areas where sanctioned fun is used, where for example Laura, one of the managers in Marketing Inc., described sharing the funny photocopying t*ts email during a managers' meeting which was found to be hilarious by those present. The conceived space therefore encouraged either compelled or sanctioned fun through its aesthetic design, but did not exclude the other two from taking place. This suggests the importance of lived space, or the manner in which the space is interpreted and moved through on an everyday level. It is on this theme which this chapter will focus.

Dale and Burrell's (2008) commentary builds on Lefebvre by noting the relationship between power and space has three components. The first enchantment blends the material and the symbolic which expresses power through symbolic materiality. This relies on the disciplinary effects of these spaces upon the body. However these are also 'imaginary spaces' where the phantasmagorical experience is created through the aesthetic appeal. Drawing on their earlier work (2003), Dale and Burrell argue that it is exactly this experience which leads to an anaestheticisation of space: a desensitisation as a result of the constant stimulation. Secondly, Dale and Burrell note emplacement, or the designation of particular spaces to certain activities (and with the exclusion of other activities). In order to do so, they draw on Foucault's discussion of the organisation of factory space and power through enclosures, partitioning, classification and ranking of the space. Finally they then discuss enactment, the lived experience which resembles the movement through space: however this 'movement' works within the structured grids of emplacement. This occurs through in particular the *habitus "*everyday bodily ways of engaging with the world" (66). This includes the coordinated movements which the body is trained into, as part of the self-disciplining effects of space. Drawing on Foucault, they go a step further to discuss how different spaces develop narratives which shape the embodied and emotional experience. In particular they argue that space is experienced through a spatialised narrative of self. As people move through the space, they work on their identity in relation to the embedded within the power relations in the space. This discussion is particularly useful for this thesis in that it considers an embodied movement through space which requires employees to work on their identity as part of the encounter with particular spaces. This thesis develops this identity construction to the instrumental use of fun space, requiring employees to develop particular narratives of their identity as fun employees, fun people, the wig and the saboteur.

The three organisations' rhetoric of play was expressed through the space, and in particular held a strong relationship to the corporate texts. In this case, texts can be considered as phenomena which allow different interpretations of their meaning (which can be referred to as the text-as-produced perspective). As Johnson (1986: 58) states "there is, for instance, a sense in which (rather carefully) we can speak of texts as 'productive'": that they are not neutral but shape us and are shaped by our understanding. However texts in lived experience can take on different meanings than those intended by the strategy: "In everyday life, textual materials are complex, multiple, overlapping, co-existent, juxta-posed, in a word, 'inter-textual'" (Johnson,

1986: 67). Inter-textuality, borrowed from Bennett and Woollacott (1988), refers to the relationship of meaning between texts and society, the movement in analysis between the texts and social conditions of the discourses surrounding them (Turner, 2003). The everyday provides an opportunity to study the process of production and consumption of texts, the interpretation of their meaning and the contradictions which arise. As Johnson (1986: 62) states the text is "a raw material from which certain forms (e.g. of narrative, ideological problematic, mode of address, subject position, etc.) may be abstracted." Texts are in this case embedded within space and form spatialised narratives through a process of understanding and interpretation.

The discursive formation of the texts influenced employees' subjectivity as the corporate texts constructed, as a strategy, what it meant to be a fun employee. The companies' promoted particular narratives of fun, for instance in the descriptions of how the organisations were founded, their history and personal narratives of individuals (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). However the texts were also constructed *by* employees' subjectivity, as employees became involved in their production: in essence through the social materiality of the texts into the space of the organisation (Dale, 2005). Social materiality refers to how "social processes and structures *and* material processes and structures are seen as mutually enacting" (Dale: 2005: 651). Social and material are far from separate: here the social humorous interactions are formed within the conceived fun space. They also shape the materiality through their willingness, or not, to ascribe to the idea of compelled fun, for example decorating their desk with personal items or painting the social area. For Dale social materiality can be considered through three components: the way subjectivities are built through materials and social interactions; the role of particular space in constituting the materiality; and embodiment where the social, the material and the body are intertwined in a system which is not static but active and dynamic. The materiality of the corporate texts such as the posters on the team's mottos in Marketing Inc. reflected not only what the organisations considered to be meaningful values their employees should have, but also was discussed by the employees and utilised compelled fun. The performative compelled fun was enacted within the space, giving relevance to employees' subjectivity as fun employees. Each of the posters referred to the PASSION values of the fun culture: Pride, Action, Success, Sense of fun, Inspiration and Nurturing Happy People. When employees as a group created posters for these, they did not use abstract concepts, but instead embedded them into their everyday understandings. This

included the materialisation of their subjectivity as seen in the four posters presented in the data section (p229). The employees related the values of the organisation in relation to themselves, transposing their faces or their bodies onto the posters. As a group they were stating that they embodied the values of the organisation. However they were also materialising it into the space of the group, forming artefacts of their fun culture.

In a similar way, employees at Magazine Inc. embodied the fun, fashion centred culture of their group. They decorated their space with pictures from the magazine. They also took pictures of themselves reflecting the fun cultures which were sent around the group. Through their embodiment of the values, they expressed the fun carefree values of the magazine. However it also reflected their sanctioned fun in Magazine Inc., with pictures such as the employee straddling a celebrity's leg during an interview for the magazine, being humorous for the sexualised connotations it enacted. The body was also reconceptualised as both 'fun' in expressing the employees' identities and also 'fun' in itself: the body featured as the central topic in much of the humour observed. Humorous moments occurred when the body unexpectedly behaved in ways considered outside of 'normality'. For example, several of the jokes featured body 'parts' which in isolation appeared in contradiction to the idea of 'professionalism'. Take for example Mary almost putting her hand into the moving fan, which provided the joke about her being 'special needs'. These provided opportunities for employees to laugh at themselves, with humour being an outlet of other emotions such as embarrassment which might have arisen.

Humour as a tactic

Drawing on Lefebvre, it is possible to see how the layers of space (perceived, conceived and lived) are organised in order to encourage employees to have fun at work. However it still leaves a question of how employees react when interacting with a space which is highly conceived around being fun. Matching Lefebvre's work to De Certeau's, which focuses on the negotiation of the use of the space, especially the embodied lived space, this section discusses out how space can be conceived and lived at the same time. In particular using these two theorists together, this chapter examines how space was important in *how* and *when* subjectivities of the employees were shaped into different *instrumental ends*. Lefebvre states

that the embodied experience of space is experienced through representational space, engaging with the ideological use of space (Lefebvre, 1991). While rejecting the idea that users of the space are passive, Lefebvre discusses lived space more abstractly than at the level of everyday practices. Instead Lefebvre focuses on the structures of capitalism in transforming space from absolute to abstract, where the representations of space lose their connection from the natural features of space. Drawing on De Certeau (1986) in order to examine the everyday and combining this with Lefebvre's distinction between spaces allows for an analysis of the practices within space which inform how lived space functions.

The following section of the chapter discusses these themes in relation to the manner in which employees used the tactic of humour towards achieving particular aims. It develops De Certeau's (1986) concept of tactics through the example of humour: analysing the use of fun in everyday practices in these organisations. In order to do so, it links these to argue that the employees were *instrumental* in their tactical use of humour: that they were performative in their concern for making an impression upon others and space, as a result, was largely performative in these organisations. However, employees also re-appropriated managed and unmanaged space with the organisations in using humour which did not match the expectations of the organisations.

Despite the organisations' attempts to form compelled fun as strategies which were enacted in the spaces of the organisation (i.e. the lived space), employees still need to engage with the strategies in order to interpret them. From an analysis of the everyday life within organisations, it is possible to see how *humour is a tactic* for understanding these corporate attempts to control meaning. Humour was part of the strategy (in the sense that employees were encouraged to find fun and pleasure in their work). However it was also important in employees' interpretation or use of the strategies. Tactics are a 'mode of consumption' of the produced strategy, in other words they are a way of using the strategy. However De Certeau (1984) does not see production and consumption as opposites, instead he views consumption as a form of production but one where the user does not have power to use the space to designate the meaning (De Certeau, 1986). Tactics therefore offer a form of consumption which (re)interprets the dominant strategy. It cannot redefine it, as it does not 'own' the space

in order to produce a new meaning, but it can temporarily usurp it to play with the meaning provided.

Humour was embedded within the corporate strategies: it was encouraged and controlled towards particular activities and for particular results. On the other hand, because humour is unmanageable (Collinson, 2002), with its meaning ambiguous and its intent vague, the use of humour created space for alternative meanings to develop. As Collinson (2002) noted within his analysis of the management of humour, the playful ambiguity of humour is what allows for an exploration of the boundaries of 'reality'. Here it can be seen how it alters the way physical space is used within the organisations, through redefining particular spaces within its use. Gabriel and Lang's (1995) concept of unmanaged space is one manner in which this might occur, where the meaning of the space is not shaped through the dominant strategies. In the data, unmanaged spaces which emerged were online virtual space, outside space of the organisation and in non-visible space within the organisations. However the use of humour was not limited to those spaces, indeed it occurred within both the 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' spaces already discussed.

These findings are, of course, my own 'reading' of these texts, and are presented as one possible interpretation. My reading as a researcher is informed by my own background and the perspective gained from being in the organisations and interviewing employees, and should be taken as an interpretation of their 'reality'. However, employees maintained discretion in how to interpret the cultural texts from the institutions' strategies (such as the corporate mission statements, the core values and the meaning constructed through the design of organisational space). In Hall's (2001) model, there are three possible interpretations for those reading cultural texts: to accept it as unproblematic; to pragmatically fit it to their own expectations and views; or to reject outright the meaning within the text in favour of another frame of reference. The perspective used by employees is likely to be shaped by their expectations and experiences of work places, such as their experience with management and the organisation, their expectations of what work should be like and the meanings presented by other cultural texts or experiences. The organisations attempted to control meaning within the organisation around how employees should feel and think about their work: that work should not be serious. Instead work should be enjoyed through play, indeed as Kane (2005) comments

through a play ethic. The intended aims of these cultural texts need to be 'read' and interpreted by the employees, which in practice allowed for the different readings to develop (Hall, 2001). For some employees, the texts were read in a positive manner which resulted in the employee constructing their subjectivity around the compelled fun. This may be because they felt these discourses of fun matched who they already were or who they desired themselves to be. It also resulted because of the manner by which the texts were presented as natural, unquestioned 'reality' that work was fun. In other words the concepts of compelled fun which were advocated by the organisations often corresponded to the employees' expectations of what working in the company would entail.

Alternatively this can also be seen as a pragmatic interpretation by employees of the compelled fun in the organisation, seeing these as desirable but needing to be altered to match the reality of their work. Lefebvre (1991) discusses the idea of seduction in what he terms the 'logic of metaphor', where:

> Living bodies, the bodies of 'users' – are caught up not only in the toils of parcellized space, but also in the web of what philosophers call 'analogons': images, signs and symbols. These bodies are transported out of themselves, transferred and emptied out, as it were, via the eye: every kind of appeal, incitement and seduction is mobilized to tempt them with doubles of themselves in prettified, smiling and happy poses (Lefebvre, 1991: 98).

Lefebvre's quote suggests that embodiment of the abstract spaces of capitalism entails a process of seduction, which had the metaphorical implications of 'emptying out' the body. There were seductive aspects to the compelled fun and sanctioned fun in the culture which appeared to appeal to employees. Baudrillard (1981) noted how seduction played on imagination but is also limited in replacing the 'real' because of the distance between the sign and the real is too far removed. *Work can be conceived as fun but it requires a jump in the imagination which can only temporarily occur.* In these studies, control over employees is being exerted and, unlike in Bauman's (2007) thesis where free will disguises seduction, those who engaged in it were aware of the 'spectacle' and the seduction. Employees were knowingly

seduced, rather than being hoodwinked into believing work had been transformed into a playground with pleasurable activities all day long. At the end of the day, the workplaces were still spaces where traditional activities of 'serious' work were enacted. Baudrillard discussed this distance from the sign and the signified in relation to sexuality, noting seduction as the signs expressed through the body as influenced by popular fashion which becomes distant from actual sexual engagement. The use of sexual humour within the organisation demonstrates this seduction: it became the playful expression of desire. In other words, it was a playful imagination of sexuality, but one that was never intended to relate to the actual engagement of sexual activities. The actions such as flirting and sexual humour are so detached from the 'real' act of sex that they become simply signs of sexuality.

In this sense the contradiction of work being both play and 'serious' is 'glossed over' or made to fit with the dominant frame of meaning of being a fun employee. As this suggests, the construction of identity as a fun employee therefore held some contradictions. Most notably employees also discussed at length that they were professional, an idea underpinned by the idea of being rational adults. De Certeau (1984) uses the concept of 'bricolage' or making do through the use of tactics of getting by in everyday life. In order to 'make do' employees needed to find a pragmatic interpretation of the strategies, which results in their use of instrumental performativity. The next section sets out this concept of performative tactics of 'making do' to explore how employees lived within a space embedded with the contradiction of being both work and play.

Performative tactics or 'making do'

The previous section has set out the use of corporate texts as strategies to form 'positive', pleasurable discourses on what it means to be a fun person. It established how seduction within these texts made it possible for employees to gloss over inconsistencies with 'having fun' and 'serious work' which remained in the organisations. This section considers employees' reactions to the compelled fun discourses by examining the everyday practice of humour in the organisations. For De Certeau (1986: 117) 'space is a *practiced* place' or in other words place has distinct, 'proper' characteristics while space is the act which transforms that place into the

intersections of movements. In this study space is argued to be performative in how it makes the fun practices become embodied and spatially present by expressing to other employees that those movements within it are intended as fun. Humour is one of these movements, a tactic for negotiating the fun space in both the physical and symbolic sense, presenting the self as compliant by having fun while also reinterpreting the space into instrumental ends. The corporate culture may have prescribed that particular forms of fun were desirable. However employees used fun towards their own objectives: in a pragmatic interpretation as an instrumental use of performative fun. The humour was embedded within the context of the workplace referring to their experiences of work. While functioning within the sanctioned fun discourses, the humour often referred to the work or the workplaces in alternative ways than those prescribed by the corporate culture.

I term the playful boundaries and separation of self as 'bounded fun', where employees needed to establish how and what topics of humour were appropriate within these contexts. This is an example of the pragmatic approach which employees took towards play and humour in the organisations. In addition it was a negotiation of how much of their subjectivity would be influenced by the workplace interactions. The concept of bounded fun related to employees not allowing the strategies of the organisation to influence their subjectivity, either by using humour which did not match these strategies or by refusing to engage parts of themselves with the strategies. As such this provides bounded fun' for employees, a concept of fun which draws on the corporate culture but negotiated with their experiences of work, their knowledge of responsibilities at work and their ultimate end to provide profit for the organisation.

The following section sets up in detail how employees 'made do' in the organisations through four tactics: 'getting on', 'getting by', 'getting away' and resisting humour. Humour was important as it was supported in the strategies of the organisation, but also as it allowed employees to use the strategies in the manner in which they chose. In the use of compelled and sanctioned fun, it was a form of embodying the idea of fun in a performative act which constituted who they were, how they were influenced by the compelled and sanctioned fun and how this instrumental performativity was enacted in space. In the case of bounded fun and subversive fun, it provided an opportunity to play with what it meant to be fun within these

cultures. The use of humour allowed a temporary re-appropriation of the space, especially with the utilisation of non-managed space in the organisations.

Humour as getting on

In the first form of fun, employees discussed the way that humour and fun could be used to further themselves in the eyes of other employees and the organisations. By identifying as fun employees, they utilised the compelled fun to create positive impression management of themselves. Employees presented humour in a transactional manner: as a form of invested social capital which allowed employees to be fun in order to receive positive rewards such as social recognition and to be seen as being good at their jobs. As such it expressed compelled fun and the subjectivity of being a fun employee. Tina's comment in Magazine Inc. that 'humour is well a currency isn't it?' encapsulates the instrumental, performativity of humour being used to 'get on'. Humour as *getting on* positioned humour as a mechanism to present themselves in a favourable light within their work. Those who were seen as possessing the capacity to use humour effectively were perceived as getting on in the organisation, being rewarded informally with social networks and formally in performance appraisals and promotions in the organisations.

In all three companies the idea of being 'seen' to do certain activities was perceived as essential to compelled fun, where employees desired both management and colleagues to visibly notice their use of humour. As De Certeau (1984: 36) notes one of the key methods of dominating a place is through sight: "a *panoptic practice* proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and "include" them within the scope of vision." It was important to be 'seen' participating in team humour and in the compelled fun: those who were not 'seen' would be noticed. However, this related to times when fun was appropriate and times when it was not. In Magazine Inc. employees were expected to be 'seen' to be working, while sending emails around the group, including the editor, was not visible and therefore acceptable. In Marketing Inc. it was more important to be 'seen' as taking part in fun events, and also to be seen to be

working long hours. In Smiley, employees needed to be ‘seen’ as fun by other employees and clients who completed their performance reviews. It was the perception and visibility of the fun which needed to be ‘seen’ as appropriate.

Linked to this desire to be seen to be humorous, certain spaces were ‘seen’ as being for suitable for the organised fun activities. These fun spaces were often placed in visible locations, such as the entryway and the social space in Marketing Inc., the waiting room and entryway in Smiley and the colourful pouffes in the centre of the large floor of Magazine Inc. These spaces were *performative*: designed for the instrumental purpose of presenting the firm as a ‘fun’ place to be. They were partially designed for being seen by those clients who entered the building, and this perspective was acknowledged in employees’ comments about feeling proud about the space they worked in.

It was not insignificant that the organisations also produced products which in themselves were positioned as fun. The most visible example of this was the girls’ magazine in Magazine Inc., which was aimed at producing a trouble-free fun reality for its readership. This reality was infantilised, reflecting simplified child’s play full of catchy slogans, buzz words and puns. It was designed to be ‘conflict-free’, instead focusing on small, resolvable tensions within childhood. Although Magazine Inc. was the least explicit in advocating its employees’ should have fun within the corporate culture, it certainly expected that employees would understand and produce this alternative infantile reality within its product. For example, employees were recruited who would buy-in to this version of childhood in order to produce it, with the themes presented on the ad being clearly stated as “friendship, belonging, having fun, growing up and being happy” (Job advertisement for Magazine Inc., 2008). The labour in itself was therefore responsive to this mentality, with pressure on them to scrutinise content to ensure they met the standards.

This reinforces the point made by Korczynski et al. (2000) and Korczynski (2003) that employees within service positions are often recruited for their positive attitude towards customers, which makes the contradictions of dealing with negative aspects of customer service more stressful. Employees who demonstrated the positive behaviours towards the

product were recruited, which reinforced the corporate cultures. For example Gena in Marketing Inc. described the recruitment process where it was noticeable that all those selected appeared to demonstrate the fun, confident behaviours the organisation was looking for. Similarly in Smiley, those trainers who were selected 'naturally' taught with engaging, playful and understanding behaviours. In Magazine Inc. all the interviewees stated they felt positively towards children's education and this had been one of the deciding factors in choosing to work for the magazine. It is perhaps understandable that the employees interviewed displayed at least some positive feelings towards the corporate culture, although this did not exclude the possibility of other negative feelings emerging.

Smiley was also fairly explicit about forming a product which was designed around the concept of fun. One of its key mottos was clients should 'Have Fun', and this was for example posted on signs in the training rooms as a visible reminder. The focus of their product, the training experience, needed to be delivered by trainers who understood this mentality and could 'naturally' produce it. Finally in Marketing Inc. the link between fun and the product was the least explicit. However compelled fun activities such as competitions with playful presentations were a form of engaging employees with how they should give presentations to clients. In addition, sending around advertisements was a method of both having fun and becoming knowledgeable about their clients' products. It has been proposed that within the creative industries, the labour of the workers is tied more closely to the product where the creative product is more dependent on the subjectivity of the producer (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). The organisations need to ensure the individual's creativity behind the product is channelled towards the aims of the organisation rather than for the aims of the individual, it therefore needs to seduce the employee into applying their creativity in this way.

Humour as getting by

When discussing fun as getting by, it is a pragmatic position which aims to comply with the corporate culture, ignoring possible discrepancies which might occur. Many of the interviewees discussed using humour to be the right sort of employee for the organisation. The organisational rhetoric on fun aligned it to the organisational goals, and positioned it as a 'positive' approach which employees should take. Reflecting the 'positiveness' literature, it

reflected a mindset which focuses on the positive subjective states through emotions, constructive thoughts and energy; positive individual traits; and positive institutions (Fineman, 2006; Roberts, 2006). It thus narrowed the possible meanings of fun to those which were 'positive' especially about the organisation, clients, other employees and the self. The positive rhetoric suggested employees should work on their own emotions and feelings to reframe them into a constructive light. This is partially for their own benefit, in order to be happy within their work, but also for the benefit of the organisation and its clients. Certainly within the positive literature, fun corporate cultures should work on employees' *subjective* feelings of well-being (Fineman, 2006). The subjective identity of the employee should be reframed through positive feelings towards the organisation and towards their work. What's more, the employees read within these organisational discourses that having fun is part of a natural, human subjectivity. Employees should work on their subjectivity through positioning themselves within the discourses of 'positive' and 'fun'. However it presents only one interpretation of fun for employees, one which is 'positive' and instrumentally used towards the objectives of the organisation.

Fun in the manner described in the 'positive' literature advocates how employees should feel about their work, their employer and also their colleagues. Developing a positive working relationship with colleagues is seen as essential to a well functioning organisation, and thus fits with the optimal possible set up of social interactions, and fits with the goals positive literature seeks to accomplish (Roberts, 2006). Fun in this sense is fundamental to work, as an important element to the social fabric of the organisation. Fun was seen by employees as being part of the everyday interactions which were fundamental to just *getting by* on a daily basis. For example Keith's comment on the culture that it 'made sense' because it was about integrating fun into the everyday: "It can mean humour with your colleagues; it can mean actually enjoying the work you do" (Keith, Marketing Inc., August 2008) encapsulates how the positive mentality of the compelled fun practices were used. However, as Faye noted, many of her previous work experiences had also been fun, regardless of whether the organisation actively promoted fun or not.

De Certeau (1986: 115) describes stories as 'spatial trajectories' as they organise place, linking meaning together within them:

> In this sense, they [narratives] shed light on the formation of myths, since they also have the function of founding and articulating spaces... the oral narration that interminably labour to compose spaces, to verify, collate, and displace their frontiers (De Certeau, 1984: 123).

Humour as a tactic forms a story of this space, organising the movement within it. As an example, the narrative in which Doug described doing 'The Ministry of Silly Walks' as he broke his toe was a narrative of moving through the place of work in a humorous manner, confirming that space as a sanctioned fun space. In lived space embodied actions can be reinterpreted as humorous instead of embarrassing, awkward or a variety of other narratives of the space.

Through play, employees could use play at not being adults for a temporary time while at work. As such, the employees were utilising a suspension of reality which allowed the contradictory positions. For example, many employees in Marketing Inc. generally did not see it as problematic to have an allocated team 'Time Out' during the week, while working long hours and under intense pressure. Employees at Magazine Inc. were worried about being 'seen' not to be working, yet consistently sent around humorous emails, including to their boss. Employees at Smiley were happy to take a fun away-day yet many expressed concerns about not receiving bonuses because of the economic recession. Play allowed for a suspension of reality where these contradictions could exist simultaneously with the reality of working in profit-oriented organisations. Play therefore could allow them to not be workers with 'serious' commitments, if only temporarily.

The humour used in this focused on getting by, on building bonds with other employees in order to make work more enjoyable. The perception was that humour used in this way was so natural that it was absorbed into everyday life and employees spent little time reflecting on it. An example would be the employee falling over the wire in Marketing Inc. and making light of it; positive, playful jokes about each others' work in Magazine Inc.; and the office being in a funny mood late on a Friday in Smiley. These examples were told openly in the office, were

meant to be shared between employees and often reflected the mood and emotions of the employees involved. This differs from humour in the next section, which was used as a form of escape, where the purpose of the humour was not to be productive. In the case of humour as getting by, the purpose roughly aligned with the organisational objectives of getting along with other employees, taking a mental break in order to work longer, and to more generally bond with other employees in informal banter to building working relationships. In contrast, the next section discusses informal humour which was tactically used to 'get away' from the organisation. Associated with the wig, this humour re-appropriates the use of humour into moments which were not productive for the organisation.

Humour as getting away

While employees were performing the correct subjectivity, they also used humour in order to *get away* from the designed corporate subject which they were supposed to embody (Casey, 1996). It formed an escape from the 'reality' of work. Noon and Blyton (2007) establish humour as a coping survival strategy from work, demonstrating how employees used it to form group cohesion and reduce the alienating effects of work. For these authors it acts as a pressure valve, allows the tensions to be diffused and hence be downplayed in the organisation. On the other hand, Knights and McCabe (1998) discuss how certain spaces can be used for 'escape' within BPR work practices at a call centre. They defined these 'spaces' for escape from the IT technology as the discretion employees had for how they performed their work, pretending to do their work, cutting calls off early and manipulating productivity statistics. In the case of the three organisations in this study, the employees also found spaces through IT to escape, using online spaces of Facebook, MSN messenger and emails to form conversations which would not be applicable in the workplace.

The wig can be a useful way of thinking of humour as getting away: it is using the company's time to joke in a manner which is only productive for the employees, instrumentally towards the employees' ends rather than the organisation's. Employees would engage in humour but often not in the manner to which the organisations would have liked. They may for example send emails with inappropriate content, such as the email on photocopying a woman's 't*ts' or images with innuendo about penises and pregnancies. The forms of 'getting away' often

referred to explicitly sexual humour which bordered on the line of acceptability 'professionalism'. Using explicitly racial humour was seen as over this line, but explicit sexual flirting and humour was in the grey space of being acceptable by other employees.

While in Magazine Inc. the product reflected a safe, trouble free reality, the joking within the organisation often questioned this reality through making fun of the values underpinning it. It thus focused on sexualising the supposedly neutral material of the magazine. Additionally, it sexualised the employees' subjectivity. The women were positioned as explicitly sexualised as opposed to asexual and active rather than passive in construction of their sexualised identity. Instead of the organisation's expectations of the work identity, the women chose to position themselves within a role as empowered, sexual women. Many of these women held passionate views about the importance of childhood education, some had children themselves and most seemed to accept that a certain, safe image of childhood should be presented. However frustrations such as Tina's about the superficiality of the magazine content were the result of a conflict with these passionate views being infantilised into simple, easy and meaningless messages about what it meant to be a girl. This resulted in humour which questioned the values of the magazine and the creative element of their work which needed to match the corporate ideals.

Resisting humour

However, within Butler's (1990) concept of performativity, subversiveness comes from the opportunities to create a different form of repetition within the rhetoric already provided. Butler argues that in relation to power, there is no 'before', 'during' or 'after' normative regulations, subversion needs to emerge from within the power relation: "forms of repetition which do not constitute a simple imitation, reproduction and, hence, a consolidation of the law" (Butler, 1990: 42). Fun presents an interesting dilemma in the case of resistance. While humour was previously a form of resistance, can employees still use humour to be fun? While using humour to get away in the last section did present a playful resistance through questioning the boundaries of fun, it still remains within the discourse of being fun. It therefore had a limited capacity to be subversive. Instead, this thesis argues, that employees were subversive through a refusal to play and to present their identity as a fun employee. This

included both moments which employees discussed not wanting to play (even if on the whole they supported the fun corporate culture) and also others who did not match the expected behaviours of being fun employees or fun people.

Many other studies have noted an active playful resistance towards the corporate cultures which encourage play. For example Warren and Fineman's (2007) study discussed the use of the life-size Russian dolls in a subversive manner which challenged the infantile play the management expected employees to accept. The punching of the dolls, putting them in the female toilets and arranging them in the lifts when clients arrived in the organisation were examples of active resistance to the management of fun. However in these three organisations, the employees I interviewed were generally positive about having fun at work, seeing it as a way to get through the day and find some enjoyment in their work. There were, however, employees who did *at times* reject the corporate cultures. As such, this study focuses on resistance through a refusal to engage with the fun corporate cultures, which was the most prominent form of active resistance to emerge within the research.

Employees were subversive through an attempt to limit the way which the corporately defined fun entered into their subjectivity. To maintain a separate idea of fun at work and in private was one manner in which this was accomplished, and employees often discussed keeping certain forms of humour for their private life instead of bringing it to work, as a form of dis-identification (Costas and Fleming, 2009). Dis-identification often assumes that there is an 'authentic self' which the employee falls back upon in resisting the designer corporate cultures which explicitly work on employees' subjectivity (Casey, 1996). However as Costas and Fleming (2009) point out, these supposedly 'authentic' identities are also constructed identities as an alien corporate self and that falling back upon them is an instrumental behaviour. "This performative feature of back-stage selves highlights how dis-identification is *instrumental in creating alternative narratives of personhood* which are considered 'better' and 'above' the ones encouraged in the labour process" (Costas and Fleming 2009: 356, my emphasis added).

While recognising that the 'alternative', supposedly authentic, outside work identity is also constructed, employees within this study appeared to use them to explain behaviours which

did not match the companies' expectations, adding to the fragmentation of self as 'fun people' and 'fun employees'. Employees would discuss times where they did not want to play, such as when they had a bad day. Other examples included those who would not take part in the organised play or would not laugh at the joke. These individuals did tend to be excluded from sanctioned play and sometimes ridiculed by other employees. In other situations, they were simply referred to as different subjective people by being 'adults' as compared to children. The next section will consider how these four tactics of humour can be linked to an instrumental performative view on play in organisations. In particular it stresses that it is the employees' own interests which are being expressed through these tactics, in a pragmatic interpretation of infantile corporate cultures. While these cultures do encourage employees to go through particular movements to get by, the four tactics represent different responses employees have to the pressure to be fun.

Instrumental performativity

The four uses of humour (getting by, getting on, getting away and refusing to use humour) demonstrate how employees utilised different concepts of the fun practices in their everyday lives. Not only did they 'live' with the practices as part of their culture, producing and reproducing the compelled fun, they also used sanctioned fun, bounded fun and subversive fun pragmatically to achieve humour towards different ends. The cultural texts in themselves were instrumental, in that they aimed to engage employees into play as an efficient process for the benefit of the organisations'. They shaped employees' behaviour to receive positive feedback from customers and to increase employees' dedication to the companies. They also provided a mechanism in some cases to increase employees' time within the organisation and to co-opt employees' time outside of the organisations. However, employees were also instrumental in their adoption of the compelled fun practices. Within their identity, embodiment and emotions associated with the fun practices, they allocated elements of themselves to the fun practices when they served particular ends, whether that is for social interaction through forming groups, for achieving the 'correct' behaviour to be seen as a fun person or for getting away and resisting the organisational corporate culture. This section develops these themes in relation to the concept of instrumental performativity: the performative fun rationalised into particular ends of the organisation. However employees could also negotiate with the concept of

performative fun when using a discourse which served the employees' interest. The concept of instrumental performativity is separated into the concepts of fun benefiting the organisational culture which support each other, weaving in and out of the performative self in fun organisations. The first, *sanctioned fun*, occurred within organisations between employees in a transactional manner. It could be argued that this form of tactical fun occurs in all organisations, at the informal level. However in fun organisations a second layer of performative fun occurs: of *compelled fun* which mirrors the strategies of the fun corporate texts. However it also remains performative in nature as a self-managed, staged self. On the other hand, employees also used bounded fun to limit the influence of the corporate culture upon their subjectivity and re-appropriating the meaning of being fun into their own definitions. They also, at times, resisted play in organisations, through using alternative identities and rejecting the fun identity. The refusal to use fun to think about who they were, instead drawing on other notions of identity, did not necessarily escape performative ends of course. In drawing on notions of professionalism they were of course repositioning themselves into a different idea of what a good employee ought to be. This section explores the relationship between these forms of fun within instrumental performativity.

Instrumental performativity can be considered as the Fordist application of rationality to the social interaction of play in organisations. Play, as conceptualised by Huizinga (1949) and demonstrated in key works in organisational studies such as Roy (1959) and Collinson (1988; 1992; 2002), has always been socially organised. Huizinga's notion of play demonstrates how it is formulated in social rules which need to be established in the specific temporal moment and space. Tactically these rules benefit or have the possibility of benefiting the players in some way, as an enticement for agreeing to the rules which they partake in. Through analysing the three organisations and the accounts of fun by the employees within them, these informal rules of play in the fun organisations can be seen to be rationalised (Weber, 1930): designed for the optimal means - ends of the employees who engage with them. Through the formalisation of activities into set rules, the play becomes more rigid and defined along with the expectations of the organisation. The more rationalised the process of fun becomes, the more standardised the practices are towards obtaining only particular ends (profits for the company, individual achievement, bonding with other employees) while ignoring other ends.

In compelled fun, the employees' use of fun is a practical application of the messages within the strategies of fun: in particular the adoption of the identity as fun employees in order to *get on* in the organisation. The seductive elements of these cultures, which has already been referred to, compels the employee to behave as desired by the organisation. In addition this fun takes on an infantile nature: it lacks any critique of the organisation and its culture. Instead it accepts a simplified, surface level play which leaves unexplored the contradictions and complexities of work play dynamics. It is a way however to present the self as fun as required by the organisation, even at a shallow level this was seen as necessary in order to get good performance assessments. Especially with the adoption of 360 degree performance reviews and customer feedback, fun was used in order to present oneself as the right type of fun employee.

This can be compared to sanctioned fun, the informal fun which employers 'allowed' their employees to have during the workday and often complements the compelled fun. Employees would refer to employers giving 'permission' to have this informal fun through the corporate mottos of 'have fun' in the cultural texts. Some employees were more critical of needing this 'permission', such as Faye in Smiley who stated that she had always had fun at work through joking and humour. However for many employees the explicit acceptance by management that employees wanted to have fun was important in allowing them to use sanctioned fun.

The performative fun was guided by the need to be 'seen' as having fun. The visibility of being a fun person was essential in its construction, shaping the behaviours that were articulated. For example, in Marketing Inc. competitions were used to both encourage fun behaviours and to 'visibly' reward staff who did take part. The materialisation of the fun identity was established through the visibility of the behaviours, and was enacted through the display of the self as fun in the posters of the company mottos and the rewards given out to teams for winning. Similarly, in Smiley employees were expected to embody the fun identity when training, using humour as a mechanism for translating the learning style. They were then assessed by the clients, where their performative fun was assessed and measured into a number and percentage of 'excellence' on their performance.

It is however a self-disciplined control to demonstrate these behaviours rather than an overt surveillance of behaviour (Foucault, 1977). Similar to the ‘doublethink’ from *Nineteen Eight Four* which Willmott (1993) compares with corporate culture, this control closes off other possibilities through encouraging employees to self-discipline. Much of the surveillance was felt from other employees, rather than management themselves. Understanding ‘when’ and ‘how’ to have fun was controlled through the internalisation of the appropriateness of having fun. In Magazine Inc. for example to be ‘seen’ to be having too much fun was frowned upon, but sending emails which could be read at the discretion of the recipient was considered acceptable. In Marketing Inc., employees spoke about restraining fun to ensure that they did not disturb other employees, and instances where this did occur caused emotional friction. In Smiley, employees’ use of sanctioned fun occurred out of sight of the customer, in the back office rather than in the training rooms where employees were ‘on-stage’. In addition, being ‘seen’ to be having bounded fun or subversive fun could be problematic if it was not seen as being productive. This fun tended to be shared with a smaller group of employees who would not judge the employee for not working. Events such as sneaking in late from lunch, as described by Becca from Magazine Inc., consisted of a small group of employees who were annoyed at management for not providing their Friday afternoon work trolley. They knew that shopping on their lunch break would not be considered using fun to be productive, and as such found enjoyment through being the wig and using corporate time for their own benefit.

This thesis has discussed how space is performative in itself: instrumentally organised to encourage the efficient use of fun for the output of increased profit. In the sense of Lefebvre’s (1991) conceptualisation of the three layers of space: perceived in the ways space is perceived around historical ideas of work, that it is economic space created around the modes of production; conceived in that it is designed to advocate work as a playful, fun space for the employees to find pleasure within; and that finally it is lived space in how employees actually experience the space on an everyday basis. Noting how this space is organised instrumentally in all three layers: in the division of space for having compelled and sanctioned fun for different groups, in the engagement of employees in designing of these spaces drawing on compelled fun and in the experience of these spaces as compelled, sanctioned, bounded and subversive fun. By drawing on De Certeau’s (1984) concept of strategies and tactics, the thesis develops the different ways in which lived space, the experience of space, is realized (Lefebvre, 1991). In

this case lived space is enacted through the way actors within the space tactically engaged with the strategies materialised by the institutions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

This thesis has explored how employees experience humour within corporate cultures that claim employees ought to have fun at work. The empirical contribution of this thesis has been a four-way typology of fun, which has elaborated on the different discourses of fun, the tactics employees use within these and the subjectivity which employees worked on when engaging with them. The methodological contribution was formed from the use of a diary system for humorous events, which served to both capture data and to encourage reflection by employees. The theoretical contribution emerged from the application of De Certeau (1984) and Lefebvre (1991) in the discussion of performative fun, discussing the instrumental and pragmatic use of humour in everyday life in organisations. Each of these will be explored in turn, before considering the limitations of this research.

Framing corporate culture as a *strategy* used by management, employees used humour as a *tactic* to interpret and utilise different discourses on fun (De Certeau, 1984). The four discourses on fun can be seen as compelled fun, sanctioned fun, bounded fun and subversive fun. Tactically, employees used humour in relation to these discourses in order to get by, get on, get away and resist being fun in the organisations. These can be seen as embodied actions taking place within the lived space of the organisations (Lefebvre, 1991). By creating a typology of fun, it is possible to explore its discursive and embodied nature, the role of humour in comparison and the influence of space and materiality upon the actions of employees.

Fun, within this thesis, is argued to be performative. This relates firstly to the imperative that fun is seen as instrumental and used to gain efficient results (Lyotard, 1984), and also subjectively performative in shaping employees' sense of self in relation to work (Butler, 1990). The strategies of the organisation compelled employees to think of themselves as fun employees, in other words to be fun in a positive and productive manner which benefited the organisation. On the other hand employees also spoke about their sense of self in relation to other employees and of the importance of being *seen* as a fun person. Thirdly, employees also bounded the manner by which the corporate fun influenced them, drawing on phantasy to position themselves outside of the infantile play. As a result they also thought of themselves in

relation to a subjectivity referred to here as the wig (De Certeau, 1984), using humour for their own benefit rather than in an organisationally productive sense. Finally, it argues that a refusal to be fun was also seen suggesting a subversive reaction to the instrumental play and engaging a subjectivity of the saboteur to critique and question. In particular the refusal to play was accomplished through enacting other identities which employees could legitimately relate to, such as being professional at work. Through looking at fun through these four perspectives, organisation studies can form a more nuanced understanding of how play is used in fun corporate cultures. In particular it suggests that employees do not simply have one use of humour and one subjectivity they relate to at work, but shift between the different typologies at different times and in different contexts. Employees who were interviewed and observed would at times demonstrate the compelled fun, especially when wanting to appear as the appropriate fun employee; at others would use sanctioned fun to relate to other employees; while in other situations would bound the expression of fun to separate it from other subjectivities such as professionalism. This negotiation of boundaries encouraged employees to fragment subjectivity into multiple types which were shifted between using different tactics of humour.

Linking the subjectivity of employees to the space of the organisations, it is possible to see the space in terms of performativity. In other words, when the space was conceived it compelled employees to behave in particular ways which were influenced by the discourses on fun in the organisation. Historical, symbolic understandings of work as a productive space continued to influence how employees interpreted the perceived space. In addition, the lived space, the utilisation of the space in everyday practices, was influenced by these symbolic readings of the space as fun but also productive. Employees' use of humour shaped the lived space, interpreting the symbols and sometimes re-appropriating the space into alternative uses. As such, it contributes towards a theory of space in organisational studies which reflects the manner in which space is not only conceived to express organisations' ideas of what it meant to be fun, but also was used by employees in how they viewed the different typologies of fun. It suggests that the strategies which employers used to conceive the space were instrumental in nature: encouraging employees to demonstrate compelled fun in particular spaces (such as break out areas) at particular times of the day (during designated team break-outs). It suggests as a result of fun being an expression of labour as dressage, a going through the intended motions within space (Jackson and Carter, 1998). It also exposed the limitations of space being

conceived by organisations in the lived experience of space in two ways. As employees tactically engaging with the space, they re-appropriated it into different interpretations of what it meant to be fun. Secondly, employees also found 'un-managed' space which was not visible where they could have fun, drawing on subversive and bounded fun in particular. A key space which was unmanaged in all three organisations was through virtual spaces in the internet, Facebook and instant communications. As a result, this thesis proposes that more attention should be paid to these unmanaged spaces in organisations to understand the different uses of humour.

As a practical contribution, this thesis has also explored innovative methods of studying humour in organisations. As detailed in the literature review, humour is a tricky subject to research. This is because it relies upon insider knowledge and group acceptance when using ethnographic research. It is also at the level of the common-place, everyday life: with employees on the whole remaining unreflective about their use of humour. Additionally, it is context specific requiring the listener to 'get' the joke based on their knowledge of the culture. Finally, the significance of the joke can easily be misunderstood by the researcher. As a result, this research made use of a humour log when conducting interviews with employees' about their use of humour. While this method was not without problems, it did provide a useful research tool for participants to document events and to instigate conversations about the humour, the corporate culture and the everyday practices of the organisations. The use of innovative methods for studying humour can create a reflective dialogue about the use of humour, which would not be achieved by using observation or interviews along.

Despite the interesting and rich data which emerged from the research, the project was not without its problems. The first problem was an unexpected restriction of access to Magazine Inc. as a result of hostile external pressures on the firm. It quickly became evident that the research was not welcomed by the management despite the prior arrangements to conduct it. Despite the limited access that resulted, the data which was collected was worthwhile and in many ways highlighted some of the tensions of having fun in a working environment. However, future research on the topic of fun-at-work may see these tensions becoming more prominent with pressure from the current competitive global economic climate. The second dilemma which emerged from the research was the voluntary nature of the participants, which had the

result of interviewing participants who were on the whole very positive about the fun corporate culture. This led, again, to rich data which explored how these employees experienced this corporate culture at the everyday level. However, it also possibly diminished the exposure to critical responses to the corporate culture. Although I did not witness any, there may have been more active resistance to the corporate culture as has been documented by the likes of Warren and Fineman (2007). As a result, the resistance which was witnessed evolved around *not* being fun. It could be that this finding is not representative of all employees within the organisation, and other forms of resistance were taking place. However, despite the overall positive response to the culture, many of those interviewed presented complex positions which demonstrated the shifting engagement with the fun corporate cultures.

These limitations notwithstanding, this thesis proposes that through a theoretical framework of strategies and tactics, it is possible to explore the everyday practices involved in employees' understanding and interpretation of fun corporate cultures. It argues that corporate cultures can be seen as strategies, or attempts to control the meaning of being fun while at work. It does so by defining the organisational space as 'proper' space where dominant definitions control the interpretation and use of the space. In addition it argues that humour can be seen as a tactic, as being a temporary use of the space to open up alternative meanings about what 'being' fun signifies for employees. To do so, it has explored the use of humour within fun corporate cultures within three organisations in the creative industries to explore how employees use joking on an everyday basis. This thesis has explored how employees use humour, through the use of observation, and in addition the significance they place on it through a humour log and interview.

Despite management texts suggesting that humour can be important in organisations, these texts present a one-sided, positive view about the use of humour. In particular they presuppose that humour is productive *for the organisation* in its use, that it is easily controlled and managed *by the organisation* and that the use of humour will cure many problems *for the organisation*. This thesis turns this assumption around to discuss how humour is performative: in other words how employees utilise humour to manage others' impressions of them as well as manage their own subjectivity *for their own benefit*. It is critical of the presupposition that

humour is always productive, although there was evidence that at times employees did use it in ways which were beneficial for the organisation in compelled and sanctioned fun. In these situations, this thesis recognises how corporate cultures can be a mechanism for control through the concept of dressage in the prescribed movement of fun employees in fun space (Foucault, 1977; Jackson and Carter, 1998). However it also proposes that as employees engaged in compelled and sanctioned fun, they did so knowingly and also instrumentally. Finally it also discusses how employees maintained parts of their identity as separate, in the concept of bounded fun, and at times refused to play at all through subversive fun. This counters the assumption that fun corporate cultures always gain by encouraging employees to have fun. Certainly as the 'bitching' in Magazine Inc. and Marketing Inc. demonstrated, employees used humour as a socially acceptable way of expressing their frustration and agitation with other employees, the work they conducted and the organisation as a whole.

Humour, in these organisations, was being used tactically and pragmatically by employees. This positions play not as simply autotelic as in the work of Sørensen and Spoelstra (2011), but as being very much embedded as part of working in a highly managed workplace. It forms the workplace relations but is also formed by and in reaction to them. In particular, the more that management seem to manage play, the more likely it seems that play is used in an instrumental manner. As Tina from Magazine Inc. (2008) aptly commented: '*Humour is well, currency isn't it?*' Employees were encouraged to see play as instrumental in the corporate culture which viewed certain playful behaviours as positive and worth rewarding. However, play was also purposely used to counter the corporate culture and to re-appropriate what it means to be a playful person. Instrumentally, as a currency to barter for approval, employees tactically used compelled fun, subversive fun, bounded fun and subversive fun, shifting between multiple subjectivities and instrumentally engaging with other employees for their own gain, rather than for the organisations'.

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Appendix One: Humour log

Humour Log

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research on 'Humour in the Workplace'. The goal of the humour log is to assist participants in reflecting on humour in their workplace. I am interested in the every-day social practices at work, and how humour is understood and perceived as important by the participants.

The research will be anonymous and the results will be discussed in the final interview. The log is designed to capture humorous moments in order to gain real examples of the types of humour used at work.

Please feel free to include anything you felt was funny or intended to be funny in relation to working: this could include, for example, conversations, emails from colleagues, meetings you participate in or interactions with clients/individuals outside the company. It might also include objects around the office which you use to create humour at work, for example cartoons or decorations around your work station. If you would rather take a visual picture of these objects I can provide you with a disposable camera.

I am asking you to complete the brief daily for a five day period (one working week). You may find that it is easier to complete it as humorous interactions occur, or at the end of the day reflecting back over the day's activities, and either approach is fine.

Please find five humour logs to complete on the following page. If you have any questions or concerns while completing the humour log please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Carolyn Hunter
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<u>Humour Log</u> ***Date:***	**Smiling**	**Laughing**	**Telling a joke**	**Finding something funny but not telling others**	**Knowing something was intended to be funny but not finding it to be**
Did you experience humour at work today?	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
Was the topic about work?	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐	**Please explain**		
How many people were involved?	**Number**				
How was the humour expressed?	**Spoken** ☐	**Written** ☐	**Non-verbal / body language** ☐		

Please give a brief account of the humour/joke: