

Journey to Irony II: Land of Gamma and Delta

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I leave the lands of Alpha and Beta with mixed emotions. Both Alpha and Beta offered stability (or at least predictability). Yet, I found both lands to be disturbing. They both challenged my sense of what life should be and how we should engage other members of our society. Perhaps I will find a bit more peace-of-mind in the land of Gamma.

Gamma: Land of Eternal-Rebels [Irony of Darkness]

As I enter this third land, I am immediately immersed in a third “P” – it is the “P” of protest. As with the land of Alpha, I find myself in a park. However, this park is filled with many demonstrators – and they don’t all agree with one another. Folks are shouting at each other. They are waving placards in the faces of those who hold quite different opinions.

Exploring Gamma

Many issues are represented in the park. There are even disagreements and protests about which issue should get the most attention. Who has the biggest placards and the loudest bull horns? How high are the soap boxes on which individual orators are standing and how big of a following has each orator attracted to their plot of land in the park? The one thing about which they all agree is that authority can’t be trusted and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. The problem is: they can’t agree on who is actually an authority and who has the “real” power.

I soon escape from the noise and mayhem of the Gamma park and find my way to a side street where several “art houses” are located. One of these small theaters is featuring a retrospective on American and European horror movies – beginning with the 1920 version of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Another of the theaters is offering a festival (yes, another festival) that surveys the Film Noir of the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. Sounds of a heavy metal band pierce the silence of the street on which I

am walking. These sounds seem to be coming from a warehouse located at the end of this street – quite a contrast to the boulevard, palace and grand pavilion theater of Beta. The harsh sounds of hard metal convey in words and sounds a profound sense of despair and alienation: everything is “fucked up” and “we don’t know where we are going!” .

There is a second sound coming from a nearby apartment window that opens out onto the street. From this window comes a song conveying a quite different sentiment. The song is “Black and White” from the Broadway (and originally French) musical, *Les Miserable*. This song is sung by the young, idealistic men (and women) who are preparing for battle. They are finding the courage to mount the hastily constructed barricades and fight an oppressive French regime during the 19th Century. Based on a novel by Victor Hugo, we know how the story ends: the rebellion is squashed (in the novel, play and real life). Hope is obliterated. Love prevails, but at a major cost. Maybe the heavy metalists are right.

Having heard both of these contrasting musical themes, I turn left onto a somewhat more spacious avenue. I discover a large movie theater. This seems to be a land that needs escape (through movies) – except the movie that is playing offers very little escape. It is Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*. Is Robert DeNiro an anti-hero in the land of Gamma? I doubt they have any actual heroes or positive role models. DeNiro would seem to be in the running along with other “bad boys” like Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchem (from the old Film Noir era) and Joe Pesci or even Jack Nicholson (from our more contemporary era).

Perhaps even the humorous and painfully insightful movies (and real life) of Woody Allen qualifies him as an anti-hero in the land of Gamma. There are also movie posters for a coming attraction. They are announcing the arrival soon of another film classic: Paddy Chayefsky’s *Network*. The poster displays the now-famous declaration made by the film’s anti-hero protagonist, Howard Beale, who screams out” “I’m as mad as hell,

and I'm not going to take this anymore!". This declaration seems appropriate to and aligned with the contentious perspectives that saturate the land of Gamma.,

I notice a newsstand located on the other side of the avenue from the large movie theater. I didn't see any of these stands in either Alpha or Beta. Prominently displayed on the racks of the stand are tabloids that shout out about scandals, illicit affairs, the presence of aliens from other planets (and from other Earthly nations) and the fascinating (and offensively portrayed) lives of people who are declared "freaks of nature". Nothing on these back streets and avenues provides relief from the shouting that occurred in the Gamma park. This land is truly a dystopia. I don't think there was ever much in the way of collective utopian thought in Gamma (since no one could possibly agree about what an ideal society might actually look like).

Learning about Gamma

I find myself wanting to be alone and suspect that most of the other folks in this land would similarly declare: "leave me alone!" The glue is definitely absent in this land and I'm not sure there is any glue to be found or manufactured. I feel unsafe – yet I don't think anyone will actually do me harm. There is too much chaos for anyone to notice me and decide that I either have something to offer them or that they have sufficient reason to attack me. All that any of the Gamma residents can do is scream at one another and ensure that no one is truly in charge of anything.

When no authority can be trusted and all institutions are corrupt, then nothing is trustworthy – and everything is corrupt. It is all a matter of expedience and who can shout the loudest or purchase the biggest bull horn (or media empire). As in the late 1960s of America (after the demoralization and disillusionment of the hippy era and the emergence of post-Viet Nam trauma) there was nothing much to form a foundation of shared belief. And there was very little hope.

I am reminded of a quotation from one of the major multiplicity writers of the 1960s: Phillip K. Dick. As author of books that led to movies such as *Blade Runner* and *The*

Matrix, and a disturbing Television series about multiple realities (*Man in the High Castle*), Dick wrote:

What is real? Because unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudo-realities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. I do not distrust their motives; I distrust their power. They have a lot of it. And it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of the mind. I ought to know. I do the same thing.

If Dick is right about the world in which we live, then the land of Gamma might not be far removed from the world in which we now live. Certainly, to live in Gamma we must be guided in some sense by our own internal compass. Internal locus of control is essential. Yet, we are also living in a world that insists on being real and that we must carefully (and perhaps artfully) negotiate.

We can't simply dope up our self as Alphanians have done with drugs or indifference. We must be engaged in our world and fight for justice and equality. The demands of life require us to embrace an external locus of control along with an internal locus: we must pay attention to the ways in which our external world impacts our head, heart and soul – for (as Dick suggests) the external world and those in power can create whole universes of the mind,

What about my conclusions regarding the white-water status of Gamma? I see nothing but chaos – that complex fourth subsystem that resides between the other three subsystems. This is the subsystem where the leaf is twirling in an unpredictable manner under the influence of several different and competing currents of water. At times, it might even seem that Gamma will look like swirling and plunging Category Four or Category Five rapids: very difficult to navigate on a raft without the guidance of an experienced rafting guide. I visited Gamma on a rather calm day. I could imagine on other days, when there is heightened anxiety or a rogue event, the land of Gamma

could get quite treacherous and we would need that skillful and experienced river guide to help us. Perhaps an experienced coach or consultant could be hired.

As I began reflecting back on my time in the chaotic land of Gamma. I replayed the competing discourses in the park and the diverse offerings of film, music and newsprint on the side streets. I came to an important realization for me as a traveler through this domain of dissent. I recognized that there are actually three different kinds of dissenters and rebels in this land. First, there are the “rebels without a cause”.

These are often the young dissenters who are simply angry about everything and about nothing in particular. A dose of adolescent angst or mid-life trauma produces the “angry young man” or the “angry middle-aged woman” or some other version of diffuse alienation from the world in which one lives. There are not really any heroes among this first group of rebels (only anti-heroes, such as the one the James Dean convincingly depicted in the movie appropriately called *A Rebel without a Cause*). Do the heavy metal rockers also belong in this category?

The second form of dissent and the second kind of rebel is one with a specific cause. Orators on the Gamma soap boxes were focusing on a specific issue and were diligent and determined in an attempt to make a difference regarding resolution of their issue. I think about someone like Caesar Chavez who focused his attention on the rights of migrant workers. I think of: Susan B. Anthony (and the other early 20th Century suffragettes who advocated for the rights of women to vote). These rebels with a cause are providing first order change. They are working hard to create more or create less of something that already exists in their society (such as wages or access to shared political authority).

These two models of the Gamma rebel don't seem suffice. Though I didn't stay long enough in the land of Gamma to observe change or expansion of dissent, I know a bit about the history of notable rebels like Gandhi and Martin Luther King. I recognize that there can be expansion in the breadth of vision regarding social injustice. Gandhi began

by demonstrating and sacrificing for the rights and welfare of workers in salt factories, yet ended his life advocating for a single, unified India that embraces multiple religious beliefs (a stance that led to his assassination). Similarly, Martin Luther King began with a commitment to racial equality and just treatment of Black Americans in the South, but ended up beginning to advocate (before assassination) for broader worker rights and more equitable distribution of wealth throughout America.

With some hesitation, I also recall a third rebel: Che Guevara. He expanded his vision, as someone who became the chief architect of profound social reform in Cuba. Do we discount Che because we don't like what he said or did? I suggest that Che, like Gandhi and King, represents a second order change agent. He changed the way change was envisioned in Cuba – and changed the way a government (with immense power and absolute control) can be overthrown by an ill-equipped cadre of revolutionaries operating in the Cuban Sierras. Do we find that Che Guevara (with Gandhi and King) is an eternal rebel – one whose identity and very being is embedded in resistance and advocacy for profound change?

Might Gandhi, King or Che have shifted their soapboxes in the Gamma park and would they have been subject to the cutting edge of a knife or the piercing impact of a bullet when changing and expanding their message in this park? I would suggest that the level of anger directed toward each of these eternal rebels and martyrs can be attributed in part to the second order change that they introduced into their society (India, the United States and Cuba) – societies that were struggling with and strangled by multiple layers of injustice and despair.

Gandhi, King and Guevara all recognized that the very process of change must change: there must be change in the way that change is brought about. They dissented against the fundamental ways in which dissent was expressed in their society and the way in which rebellion took place. In a quite ironic manner, Gandhi, King and Guevara brought a new kind of order to a world that was maintained by (and even thriving on) disorder and ineffective change agency.

It seems that everything was getting more complex and perhaps more unpredictable and contradictory as I moved from the lands of Alpha and Beta to the land of Gamma. What will I find when I arrive at my final destination: the land of Delta? Have these other three lands prepared me for the challenges of Hard Irony in the land of Delta?

Delta: Land of Eternal Ironists [Irony of Reality]

Exhaustion would seem to describe my condition as I enter the fourth and final land. Yet, I am still actively engaged in and wishing to learn from each land – to find out more about myself and about the way in which people think and feel as residents of a specific land. In this fourth land, I will observe how Irony plays out in the life of Delta residents (Soft Irony). I will also examine how I experience Irony in myself while visiting and engaging the land of Delta (Hard Irony).

Exploring Delta

When entering the land of Delta, I am immediately present (and reflecting upon) a *Polis* (the fourth P and the Greek word for an ideal state or community). While our word for “politics” comes from the Greek word “polis”, the setting in which I find myself is not the political setting of a contemporary legislature or presidential office. Rather, it is filled with dialogue (rather than contentious discussion). The Polis is a place where there is extended and thoughtful explorations of differing (and often contradictory) perspectives and where potential actions are carefully considered as paths to be taken in addressing complex issues.

I am fascinated with what is being said among the fifty to sixty women and men who are standing around in this room. Quite a contrast from the interactions occurring in the Alpha and Gamma parks. And much different from the feel of collective marching in Beta. It seems to be a setting in which the “Republic of Virtue” (so important in the establishment of the American government) is seeking to be present. I think Richard Rorty (1989) would be delighted with the contingency in operation at the Polis.

I linger for one hour, listening to deliberations about legal policies and social services. An emphasis on individual rights is interspersed and sometimes intertwined with an emphasis on collective responsibility. I am reminded of the concept of “communitarianism” offered by George Cabot Lodge (of the famous Cabot and Lodge families in US business and government history) (Lodge, 1995). Lodge was an unsuccessful candidate for the US senate from Massachusetts –losing out to a young man from another powerful family: John Kennedy.

In looking around the room, I focus finally on its entrance. I find that the word “Polis” is chiseled on the room’s marble portico. Also chiseled on the wall next to the entrance is a quotation from the Greek philosopher Aristotle. It reads:

Any member of the assembly, taken separately, is certainly inferior to the wise man. But the state is made up of many individuals. And as a feast to which all the guests contribute is better than a banquet furnished by a single man, so a multitude is a better judge of many things than any individual. – Aristotle, *Politics*

I find this Aristotelian statement to be inspiring – and it also makes me a bit hungry. I have not eaten since snacking on the small treats available at the Alpha picnic. Somehow, the Delta feast sounds much more appetizing (and fulfilling – figuratively and literally) than the individually-prepared Alpha snacks. But how valid is this assumption about collective wisdom that Aristotle conveys? Sure, it is nice to sample the diverse dishes being provided collectively at a no-host potluck-feast, but does this same process hold any credence in the realm of public deliberation and decision-making?

Fortunately, I don’t have to arrive at a judgment about the credibility of a Polis right away. Perhaps, I can be invited to a Delta feast. As I leave the Polis, I find myself wandering through a cluster of somewhat disorganized streets. This reminds me of the insanely disruptive design of streets in Boston area communities: rotaries, random

squares, quads and commons, old cow paths now paved over (that belong in quaint villages not major urban cities). As seems to be the case in Boston, the land of Delta offers a mixture of premodern and modern. Topographically, both Boston and Delta require multiple dimensions and substantial information to be properly mapped. They are both very complex. By comparison, the lands of Alpha, Beta and Gamma are much less complex.

While Alpha is mostly entrenched in a nostalgic premodern bliss, Delta seems to be embedded in a premodern community design that is realistic, appropriate and naturally emerging (like the converted cow paths in Boston). A vibrant and living premodernism exists everywhere in Delta – even in the premodern vision enacted in the Polis. There is certainly a profound difference between the ordered street grid and society of Beta and the dynamic and somewhat disordering dynamics and disordered street map of Delta. A similar difference exists between the deeply distrustful ambience of Gamma and the trust inherent in the interactions I have observed in the land of Delta.

I pause my analyses and judgments at this point. Am I kidding myself about Delta? After all, I am exhausted and hungry. I could believe anything. Perhaps, Delta (or at least my current physical and mental state in visiting Delta) doesn't differ much from true-believing Beta. Am I just buying into another utopian dream and marching to a drum that leads initially to a palace but eventually to a dystopia of disillusionment and destruction? Is Richard Rorty's (1989) utopia just as flawed or unrealistic? I am tasting some Hard Irony!

In order to escape a bit from my internal world of contradiction, I began hunting, as I have done in the other three lands, for movie theaters. I soon found one that was featuring a re-release of the movie, *Norma Rae*, and announcing an upcoming film festival (yes, another one), featuring the 1930s and 1940s "Capra-corn" movies of Frank Capra – beginning with *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and finishing with the now-classic Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

These films all have something to do with civic engagement and collective responsibility – fitting for a world of the Polis. Are they nothing more than propaganda pieces (such as those shown in both the United States and Germany during World War II)? Are the Capra movies no better than the marching bands of Beta? I seem to be caught up in my own contradictory thoughts and feelings about Delta. I am once again confronting Hard Irony.

I do notice that there is a second festival being offered for the “kids” at this theater. These matinee movies were identified as “ironic animations” – so I was curious about which films were included in this series. They were popular movies like *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters*, and *Frozen*. These are interesting animations that appeal to both children and adults (with interesting moments of double-entendre and indirect political commentary – hence the label “ironic”.) However, I would consider these to be examples of what I labeled “Fleeting” Irony in the first essay. These movies clearly differ from the early Disney creations (which are honored in the land of Alpha). The earlier Disney features certainly don’t qualify as Ironic (or even Fleeting Ironic) exemplars to be shown at this Delta animation festival.

While searching out the local movie theater, I notice something about the way people interact with one another on the streets of Delta. There seems to be a lot of congregating of people in not only the Delta parks, but also around fountains, benches, and small public gardens. Abstract sculptures are placed in beautifully landscaped beds of flowers and diverse ornamental trees. Both the abstraction and beauty are attracting attention and dialogue.

People are coming together to observe and comment. Perhaps it is just because the weather is nice today in Delta, but there seems to be a pull toward congregation – what Robert Sommer (1969) calls a “sociopetal” social space that attracts and holds people in aggregation (while “sociofugal” space pushes people away from one another – the sort of space, culture and interpersonal dynamics we find in Alpha and Gamma). What about the sociopetal pull that is abundant in Beta? How does a Beta parade differ from a

Delta Polis? As William Perry noted, commitment in relativism (Polis) looks a lot like dualism (Parade).

I also notice that the architecture of Delta is a bit odd. Beta offers a blueprint for order and uniformity, featuring large modern buildings that resemble glass cubes and stately premodern government buildings with the prerequisite columns and strategically-based statues honoring the fallen war heroes and noble founders of Beta. By contrast, the Delta buildings tend to be an amalgamation of many styles. Delta offers a blueprint for disorder and diversity. Delta buildings are composed of both concrete and wood, with a smattering of marble and brick. Some of the buildings even display warped surfaces. Frank Gehry's designs are alive and well in Delta. These compositions and designs seem appropriate given the placement of Delta on the warped plane of postmodernism.

I see a building that reminds me of Gehry's European building honoring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers: one building is leaning into the other and both seem to swing and sway. The building in Delta is a bit more up to date. It honors a dance at the end of the movie, *Greece*, featuring Olivia Newton John and John Travolta. Both buildings display gleaming black marble and obsidian facades (honoring the outfits worn by both Olivia and John during their dance). One of the building is very slim and glass-filled (in honor of Olivia), while the second, adjacent building is larger with less glass and more granite (in honor of John). As with Fred and Ginger's buildings, Olivia's is leaning seductively toward John's.

I look for a record shop, but soon discover that records are no longer sold in Delta stores. Residents of this land order them on the Internet – thereby gaining greater access to a much broader selection of recordings. When I check my own mobile phone (that seems to be working in Delta, but in none of the other lands), I find that there is an abundance of musical options – ranging from the swing music of the 1930s to contemporary Rap music.

The latter form of music is dominant. Rap songs offer melody and rhythm interweaving with social and political commentary. I was surprised (and pleased) to find that the compositions of Steven Sondheim also populated my mobile device – ranging from poignant songs coming from *Company* and *Follies* to those (more complex and challenging) some coming from his later works (*Assassins* and *Passion*).

I am particularly taken with the playing of two songs from *Company*: “Sorry/Grateful” and “Being Alive”, These two seem to capture something of the Irony found in the complex relationships among intimate couples and in the inevitable appearance of Irony in the life of anyone who is truly “alive.” I appreciate the recognition of this intimate Irony among the residents of Delta. Hard Irony is to be found deeply embedded in human relationships. There is even the appearance on my mobile device of Sondheim’s early musical, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, that offers “fleeting irony” in its plot and songs.

There is a second musical that seems to be quite popular in Delta – or at least on the play list that is being promoted on my mobile app. This musical is *Hamilton* – a contemporary Broadway musical that fits the bill in Delta: focusing on the life of the American founding father, Alexander Hamilton. This musical (written by Lin-Manual Miranda) incorporates ballads, hip hop, rap and discursive form of recitative. With irony, actors of color inhabit and powerfully enact the roles of the “very-white” founding fathers of the American republic. The music I am hearing on my mobile device is warping around and wrapping around widely divergent musical forms and content.

I appreciate what I have learned about Delta from the musical tastes of its residents. However, I want to push my learning about Delta culture and society further. I spend some time wandering around the streets of Delta. I continue to be impressed with the diversity of elements in the music of Delta and the architecture of the Delta building. I am impressed with the intertwining and mashup (officially called “pastiche”) of different art forms.

Movie figures are introduced into architecture. Warping occurs in the design of buildings, reflecting the conditions of the world in which these buildings have been constructed. Musical compositions are a compilation of many musical offerings (1910 and 1920 blues and jazz meet 1930s swing and American song book, which meet 1940s and 1950s popular music, which meet 1960s, 1970s and 1980s protest songs, which meet radical Rock and Roll, which meet Hip Hop and Rap). Even the Polis, where I first landed, is a mashup of several disciplines: political science, philosophy, sociology, psychology and history.

Learning about Delta

I am about to end my time in Delta, as well as my journey through the four lands. What have I learned about life in the land of Delta? I will first offer my analysis of how control operates in Delta: there is an interplay between an internal and external locus of control. The residents of Delta are given a considerable amount of independence and control over their own life==evident in the diversity of political, social and cultural expressions.

I observed that this individualism and internal locus of control was often offset by a concern for and commitment to collective responsibility. George Lodge's communitarian balance between rights and responsibilities seems to be alive and well in the quality of discourse ("Polis") being engaged. This balance was also manifest in the interweaving of various social and cultural expressions of these rights and responsibilities (the "sociopetal" dynamics).

In this land, we must make a choice regarding which alternative perspective and which truth will serve as the foundation for our actions in the world. Ultimately, this is an individual decision that requires a fair amount of epistemological courage. I turn for insight about this matter to one of my favorite quotations - from the American poet, Wallace Stevens: "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a

fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.”

This quote concerns my own right to belief; it also concerns the individual rights of other people (whether residents of Delta or residents of our real world). We must respect the individual rights of other people in our community to make this choice. Our own choice might not be their choice. Our “fiction” might not be their “fiction” ---and we can’t accuse other people of making an “arbitrary” or will-founded choice, when their choice and our own choice are both “exquisite truths.” As Richard Rorty proposes, we must engage those people and beliefs that are ‘unfamiliar.’”

I once again face Hard Irony. Are all truths exquisite and how do I discover my own exquisite truth midst many (often “unfamiliar”) voices declaring the “true truth”? As my colleague, Walt Anderson (1995), implies in the title of his compendium of postmodern thought: “what is the truth about truth”? Where do we find our epistemological courage? How do we determine which optional path of action to take, given that many options are available in a land of diversity – such as we find in Delta? Those dwelling in Delta might have provided an answer. We might find the courage and wisdom of choice through the collaborative dialogue that seems to pervade life at the Polis and elsewhere in Delta. This is about collective responsibility.

The motto of life in Delta might be: “how do we together discover the best path forward?” It might not be a matter of holding tight to an internal locus of control and declaring that my truth is more exquisite than yours, or that I can go my own merry way without conferring with other members of my community. It seems that an external locus of control must be added to the mix of my epistemological deliberations. I must listen to other people and I must, in turn, think about (and act based on) the premise of influencing other people and being influenced by other people, rather than controlling their behavior or allowing them to control my own behavior. Hopefully, George Lodge would applaud my new insights and encourage me to learn from life in Delta.

What else have I learned from my brief stay in Delta? First, if asked to describe the status of Delta in an analysis of white-water environments, I would conclude that Delta is composed of the entire white-water system. All four sub-sectors are present and interplay in this land. I have seen rapid movement, cyclical movement, chaotic movement and places and times of quietude and peace. Quite clearly, Delta is a complex, unpredictable and inconsistent system in which all of its parts (sub-sectors) are intimately intertwined.

Turbulence is wholistic – the subsystems can't possibly be understood or engaged separately. Everything in the system is interdependent. This might be one of the most important ways to think about Richard Rorty's Irony: inconsistencies are inherent in any turbulent system and contingency thought and action are requisite to successful navigation of this turbulent environment. It is fully appropriate and justifiable for us to hold multiple truths that are inconsistent, for these truths arise from our observation of and participation in sub-systems that operate in quite different ways.

One other important factor is operating. As I noted previously, we know that any system will become turbulent (and increasingly turbulent) when pushed to operate faster. This seems to be the case in our 21st Century world. Because a turbulent system is holistic and accelerating, we choose to ignore or isolate one of our inconsistent truths at the risk of not really understanding what is happening in this turbulent system – and as a result choose to act in a manner that is counter-productive or even destructive. Perhaps, this is the ultimate "exquisite truth."

I might also learn something about courage and collaboration from identifying and seeing what lessons might be found in the lives and actions of those who are viewed as heroes in Delta. Four people come immediately to mind as possible heroes in Delta, First, there is Abraham Lincoln. His "team of rivals" (Goodwin,2005) seems to exemplify the spirit of "polis" in the land of Delta.

Second, I would nominate Joan of Arc. Whether the accounts of her actions are real or mythic, the courageous leadership of Jeanne D'arc in the midst of battle is impressive – especially because it is built on a compelling vision. She had to overcome the prejudices of gender and age to inspire and lead an army against the adversary. The residents of Delta would probably admire the way she used vision rather than brute force to build commitment and guide action. This aligns with the third model of leadership I described in an earlier essay: vision (rather than wisdom or bravery) reigns supreme in the legend of Jeanne D'arc. I think Joan would be identified as a hero in Delta, because this seems to be a land in which vision is particularly valued. Wisdom or bravery would only be honored if it were exhibited in the sustained dialogue of the Polis—and if it was engaged on behalf of arriving at a decision and course of action in the midst of complexity, unpredictability, turbulence and inconsistency.

I am reassured regarding my appraisal of Delta's priorities (and potential honoring of Jeanne D'arc) when I think back about the music being played on my mobile app. It was not only the compositions of Sondheim and Maranda, but also those of Lerner and Lowe – and specifically their Broadway production of *Camelot*. There is something about the deliberations of Arthur's round table that intrigued those involved in the Polis. There also seems to be an appreciation for the Hard Irony inherent in the last scene of this musical, when Arthur is faced with the disillusioning prospect of going to war against his best friend, Lancelot.

A young boy lingers near Arthur. He is asked by Arthur to identify why he retains hope about the future of Camelot. The young boy (Tom of Warwick) recites a statement about the values that serve as a foundation for the round table (not unlike the Delta statement placed on the wall of the Polis). With this recitation of the values (and vision) that remain with the younger generation of Camelot, Arthur finds renewed hope. He commands the boy to run away from the battlefield (and work for the restoration of the collaborative values of Camelot): "run boy run!!!" I was touched by this final scene of

this musical when I first encountered *Camelot* and found it touching and reaffirming to be reminded of this scene while visiting Delta.

I think Joan would have similarly been touched. Like Arthur, she lived for a vision of justice and shared commitment. Like Arthur, Jeanne D'arc struggled with belief. They both lived in Hard Irony. If Joan was living in the land of Beta, she would probably have either been ignored as someone too young and of the wrong gender to lead the parade (or army). Though she was a fierce warrior – which the residents of Beta would like – she didn't fit the mold of heroic warrior (because she was a woman and because her primary weapon and source of motivation was vision rather than vengeance). Maybe she could twirl a baton or play a piccolo in the band – but certainly not be the band master or (God-forbid) General of the armed forces! If she did somehow find her way to a position of leadership, Joan probably would have still been burned at the stake, having been declared a sinister “witch” or at the very least an enemy of the state.

I turn in a quite different direction when predicting the third hero of Delta. It would be Dag Hammarskjöld, the first General Secretary of the United Nations. He patiently brought people together from many nations. They shared few values or beliefs; yet they worked with Hammarskjöld on the creation of a joint enterprise of peace and collaboration. Hammarskjöld seems to exemplify the type of leader needed during the time of peace (while Joan exemplifies the type of leader needed during the time of war). I would not be surprised if the residents of Delta would savor the Irony inherent in the roles played by these two heroes: here is a male being engaged in peace and a woman engaged in war. What happened to the traditional roles!!

Fourth, I think that Winston Churchill might thrive and be honored in Delta – at least the Churchill that led Great Britain through the profound and existential challenges of World War II. With many different viewpoints being expressed by the various leaders and political parties of Great Britain, Churchill was able to find common ground (or at least common belief in his capacity to extract an ounce of victory from probably defeat). Churchill made many difficult decisions in the very complex, unpredictable and

turbulent environment of war. Like Lincoln, he heard many contradictory opinions regarding which actions to take. Even more fundamental contradictions were present regarding what the enemy was thinking and doing. Churchill ultimately stood alone in making decisive commitments in the midst of relativism – but made these commitments with the help of his team of allies and rivals – a communitarian blending of individualism and collectivism.

As a side note, I would be remiss if I didn't include a couple of cultural heroes. I should add Frank Gehry to the list, since I have been referencing his work. Perhaps I should also include Lin-Manuel Miranda and Steven Sondheim – Sondheim being the composer of Irony-infused musicals and Miranda being the composer of irony-filled *Hamilton*. The Broadway musicals composed by these men fully exemplified the intermixing of artistic forms and social/political commentary.

A final thought. Why do I call the residents of Delta “eternal ironists”? I do this because I don't think things will change much for these residents during the coming months and years. I think that Irony (in the Rortian sense) is here to stay. The “cat is out of the bag!” Once a society accepts diversity and creative mashing-up of forms and ideas, then it is hard to go back to a former social structure or type of interpersonal relationships where uniformity and constraint prevail. The interplay between rights and responsibilities (“communitarianism”) and the interweaving of premodern, modern and postmodern styles are hard to undo or unweave. As I noted in the subtitle of my book on postmodernism (Bergquist, 1993), certain forms and outcomes of change are irreversible.

Irony and Polarity: Unlocking the Potential

I appreciate the insights I acquired from visiting the four lands – and in particular the lessons learned in Delta about what it means to make commitments in the midst of relativism. I must, therefore, move beyond the role of learner, if I am to avoid being a hypocrite about commitment. What kind of actions might be taken when living in

Irony? How might I translate living in Hard Irony to a pathway forward through action in the world? I will turn to a tool I mentioned earlier that holds great potential in addressing the challenges of Irony. This tool is called *Polarity Management* (Johnson, 1996). I close this afterword with a brief description of this valuable tool and encourage you, the reader, to find out more about and make use of this tool yourself as a coach, consultant or leader in confronting the challenges of Irony.

Barry Johnson (1996), the “dean” of *polarity management*, suggests as a first step for handling everyday contradictions that leaders identify *two or more legitimate but opposite forces* at work in what I am calling a condition of contradiction and Irony. One then analyzes each side’s benefits and disadvantages. Organizationally, the two or more opposing and contradictory forces are often embodied in “camps.” For example, the comptroller’s interest in minimizing expenses is pitted against the marketing department’s need to invest in consumer research. A centralized corporation has the need to standardize its offerings, but the offices in other states or provinces need flexibility in running their daily affairs. Neither position is “wrong.” “Exquisite truth” is to be found in the positions taken by both camps.

The organization is now in the midst of Irony. A coach or consultant who understands polarity management will regularly encourage their client to bring both parties to the table and facilitate a mutual understanding of the respective benefits and possible negative consequences of holding either position *to the exclusion of the other*. Even without the assistance of a coach or consultant, a leader can bring both parties to the table: a Delta Polis is convened. Interventionists can even invite individuals or groups to take the role that is opposite to their usual one, and describe the pros and cons from that unfamiliar perspective. Enormous understanding and empathy result from this first step alone.

Once the strengths and risks of the two sides are understood, the dialogue is directed by the leader (with potential guidance from their coach or consultant) to what happens when we try to *maximize* the benefits of either side at the expense of the other side. For

example, let's begin with the conclusion in our centralized organization that centralization will lead to much greater efficiency.

It turns out that such unilateral bias to one side of a paradox or dilemma soon causes the downsides of that same force to manifest. In our centralized organization, this would mean that we can centralize everything only if we are willing basically to sleep at the office and ignore our family, or if as managers we always drive our subordinates to maximum efficiency. Our nights at the office would eventually lead to divorce, just as a 24/7 romance at the exclusion of work would likely lead to destitution. Total centralization causes the incapacity to customize, but totally giving way to the local interests of a subsidiary would drive up the cost to uncompetitive levels.

Barry Johnson warns us as coaches, consultants and leaders that we not try to maximize but rather carefully *optimize* the degree to which the parties incline toward one side or the other and for how long. Optimizing means that we must find a reasonable and perhaps flexible set-point as we take action in favor of one side or another. Finding these acceptable optimum responses and redefining them again and again is the key to polarity management – and is the key that unlocks the potential of Irony.

As the residents of Delta know, effective management of polarities requires a constant process of vigilance, negotiation and adjustments. As coaches and clients, we want our client to continuously seek and refine a dynamic, flexible balance – so that each side's beneficial contribution can be enjoyed, without engendering serious negative consequences. As leaders, we must not just live with ironic contradictions; we must appreciate these contradictions and become contingent: extracting the insights and guidance embedded in the polarities.

It is wise to encourage our coaching and consulting clients to consult regularly with

the other side of a polarity in order to evaluate to what degree, with what intensity, or for what time period both sides can reap the benefits of one side. This is particularly important given the interconnected nature of complex, turbulent systems with interdependent subsystems. For example, if life-work balance were the issue, our client would listen to their family's feedback, so as not to overshoot their dedication to work. If our CEO client cared about balancing her company's financial health with investments for growth, we would encourage our client to make sure that she regularly brought her conservative CFO as well as her expansionist, visionary head of global marketing to the table, agreeing on trade-offs, measurable goals and milestones for evaluating results.

As a safeguard against overshooting toward either side, it is prudent for us, as interventionists and leaders living in an era of Irony, to build in alarm systems that warn us when we may be trying to maximize one side, and are on the verge of triggering the negative reactions – a tipping point. The alarm signal for overworking and traveling too intensely might be putting on ten pounds over one's average weight or nodding off during a long committee meeting. At such time, we would reduce our travels and dedicate even more specific attention to our health. The alarm signal implicit in America's current handling of the ironic paradox of freedom versus security would be, on the security side, clearly, another attack on this soil. The alarm metric for safeguarding freedom is less clearly defined.

The sign of successful Ironic leadership is that the leader can hold opposing views without flinching. The leader would be a Rortian hero and would seem to emulate the epistemological courage found among the leaders of Delta. The sign of a viable organization is that it can live with and manage its dilemmas, paradoxes and ironic contradictions in real time, without questioning its identity at every turn in the road, whip-lashing its strategies, tearing and rebuilding its structures reactively, or scapegoating its people.

In the words of the British management expert Charles Hardy (1994): “Successful firms live with paradoxes, or what they call ‘dilemmas.’ Those firms have to be planned, yet flexible; be differentiated and integrated at the same time, be mass marketers while catering to niches; they must find ways to produce variety and quality, all at low cost; in short, they have to reconcile what used to be opposites, instead of choosing between them.” Hardy knows about Hard Irony!

As organizational interventionists, we may already be finding (or soon will find) that polarity management, while significantly more sophisticated an approach than straight-line problem-solving, is not always sufficient – for the polarities and the conditions underlying polarities are themselves changing.

Priorities are not only interconnected, they are also constantly shifting, and new alliances between old competing polarities are being forged. This is a world that requires Richard Rorty’s contingency thought and action. Clearly, when a world of complexity and contradiction collides with a world of uncertainty and turbulence, the plain begins to dance. We, as organizational coaches, consultants and leaders must learn how to dance on this plain. We must be committed and engaged. It will be a fascinating and never boring dance. It will be the dance of Hard Irony. Welcome . . .

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