ABSTRACT

Lynda Dixon, Advisor

Since World War II, the American military-industrial complex has governed political, economic, and scientific change on a global scale. Largely because of the agricultural industry’s political power in domestic and foreign policymaking, it continues to hold a privileged status in matters of war and peace. The purpose of this dissertation is to direct an increasingly urbanized American public’s attention to this reality and to show what is globally at stake in the industry’s participation in today’s war on terror. Through case studies and extended theoretical analysis of the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) multiple hidden roles in the G.W. Bush administration’s response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, I argue that democratic protection of public well-being is under attack. My investigation develops a model for partisan advocacy and ethical stakeholder citizenship that envisions a public culture of active and informed dissent. Through rhetorical criticism guided by the philosophy of Kenneth Burke, I show the political functions of organizational texts in the public experience of war. My argument is that the USDA’s global solicitation of public participation in its narration of war unethically blocks off critical self-understanding and deflects critical publicity. I propose that a Burkean perspective offers a necessary measure of ambivalence toward rhetorics of transcendence, purity, self-defense, and control that appear in the organizational production of war drama. Specifically, Burke’s notion of rhetoric of identification, which explains the intertwined workings of cooperation and conflict, offers a device for contesting the USDA’s self-proclaimed moral identity in the war on terror.
DEDICATION

To my dad, whose life as a farmer embodies the importance of a spirited wrangle in the barnyard for the future of democracy. The dignity of his relentless fight lives in these pages and in everything I do.
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There are several people who deserve acknowledgment for helping me complete the doctorate. First, without my family I would not even have made it past my undergraduate studies. Through times of poverty, both emotional and monetary, they kept me moving down a long and winding road. If my family created the conditions for me to pursue the degree, then my partner Melanie did the rest. She has been a great friend who deserves a debt of gratitude for patiently helping me manage my ups and downs as I moved through several years of study. As I regularly broke self-imposed writing deadlines for this project (and expressed discouragement), she was there to hold me up.

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INTRODUCTION

These pages inquire into a federal government agency’s symbolic public practices and the ways that they shape stakeholders’ performance of citizenship in relation to today’s global war on terror. Specifically, I critique the organizational identity of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) using the resources of rhetorical theory and criticism. The USDA is an important site for study because it animates organizational advocacy of war that has been largely hidden from mainstream public discussion. The significance of the agency’s advocacy is that it uniquely contributes to war projects in the U.S. and in the Middle East.

In this chapter, I offer some necessary groundwork for this study. I begin by describing the primary objective of the study, its embedded presence in the current historical juncture, and some of the major pivotal terms that help organize it. Next, I situate the USDA, which has long been known as the “People’s Department,” as a modernist project spawned and shaped by America’s wars. I then trace this process invention to past USDA history writing and contend that it manifests the modernist political rationality of liberal-humanism. This rationality, I posit, helps explain the perceived legitimacy of largely self-authored USDA historical literature. In the section that follows, I propose that a democratically productive way to contest these modernist constraints on the rhetoric of USDA history is through rhetoric. Here, I explain the advantage of rhetorical organizational criticism for the advancement of post-humanist ethical judgment of public organizational identity. Finally, I preview each of the four remaining chapters.

Writing From Inside the War on Terror

Despite the dominant trope of time in public discourse on the war on terror, it goes on in a fashion that signals no end. As is the case with any critical object, there are multiple existing stories on the war on terror that are all inherently relative to the experience-based perspective
from which they emerge. In this study, I show that at stake across all perspectives are dangerous consequences emerging from uncritical acceptance of a single story articulated by government actors as official. Thus, my analysis is built on the assumption that Americans must aspire to a higher collective standard in the ethical practice of difference if they are to protect themselves from violence that ensues otherwise. Correspondingly, my central concern in this study is with the human impulse to transcend our constitutive surroundings and come to perfect terms with the targets off of which we project symbols to give ourselves meaning. I offer a study on what I argue is the USDA’s attempt to perfectly communicate the war on terror and its role in relation to this war. If the agency is able to persuade its publics to participate in its expressed logic, then it is able to justify the existence of the war as well as its own functions.

The war on terror is so communicatively complex that scholars will no doubt be studying it for decades to come. Although this study is not able to leverage the significant advantage of longitudinal retrospect that this future work will have, it benefits from the fact that it emerges at a politically important and transitional moment of hope. Not long from now, Americans will vote a new president into office and end the troubled presidency of George W. Bush. Like many Americans, I have been troubled by the Bush administration’s decisions on how to respond to the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001—especially the decision to go to war in Afghanistan and later, Iraq. Today, over five years after Bush proclaimed the end of major combat missions from aboard a U.S. aircraft carrier at sea, the U.S. military continues to engage in combat in both countries. As of today, an estimated 655,000 Iraq civilians and over 4,000 American soldiers have died (Johns Hopkins, 2006). For me, these deaths are intolerably troubling in light of the recent crumbling of the Bush administration’s case for invading the country, which rested on insufficient evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed Weapons of Mass
Destruction. Although American forces captured and later executed Hussein for crimes of genocide committed in previous decades, the mastermind behind 9/11, Osama bin Laden, has not been captured.

This study does not argue that all actions taken to enhance national self-defense after 9/11 should be understood as illegitimate and misguided. To be sure, self-defense is a primary purpose of any national government. What I do argue through two case studies of the USDA’s role in the war at home and abroad, is that current conditions for ethical decision making on counter-terrorist measures are deeply flawed. A major contributing factor to these conditions is an oversimplified but dominant interpretation of the war. This narrative positions America in a historically recurring ideological conflict between the forces of democracy, freedom, and goodness against a faceless aggressor who advances totalitarian evil that threatens civilization itself (Ivie, 2005). As I will show, other narratives build off of and support this mythology in ways that reveal a problematic orientation toward a pluralistic communication ethic. Together, these case studies reflect the need for what I conceptualize in detail in the final chapter as a rhetorical ethic of stakeholder citizenship in which publics affected by organizational war practices become active and educated performers who slow these practices down for critical, self-reflective judgment. The case of the USDA in the war on terror reveals that government actions publicly labeled humanitarian are seldom labeled as such without corresponding self-interests and may actually do additional harm to the publics they claim to help.

Exactly why the Bush administration’s narrative of 9/11 and the war on terror has held up in American culture after the fall of the case for war in Iraq is beyond the scope of this study. What I am able to show is that in symbolic and in material ways, unlikely allies such as the USDA have offered significant assistance in this endeavor across the globe. My aim is to
carefully trace and critically infuse insights into the process in which one of these allies has coordinated and circulated a persuasive narrative that positions the war as the construction of an imperative and a new way of life that is humane, empowering, and aggressively proactive. To do so, I offer a study in *comic criticism*, which is essentially a dialectical approach guided by an ambivalent attitude toward what it suggests are dangerous extremes manifested and bred by heroic and tragic narrative frames. I borrow this approach from the critical social philosophy of twentieth century American writer Kenneth Burke.

This study can be situated at the intersection of knowledge production, persuasion by means of ingrained *identification*, and retrospective ethical judgment. Identification refers to the irreducible existence of “us-them” symbolic distinctions and subsequent abstractions in everyday affairs that function at various levels of consciousness. A Burkean approach to rhetorical criticism views identification as the essence of human communication, which makes knowledge and ethical judgment possible. As a result, the concept is pivotal in this investigation. As an ongoing relational negotiation and “the appropriation of identity,” identification constitutes the basic human motives of belonging, understanding, and rational action (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, p. 5, emphasis in original). Burke offers the most comprehensive treatment of the concept as a symbolic phenomenon. A successful invitation to identification constitutes a state of “consubstantiality,” which is “a product or state of identification that leads an individual to see things from the ‘perspective’ of a target” (Cheney, 1983b, p. 146).

Through in-depth study of the USDA’s tactics of identification used to solicit the audience compliance with its war practices, I show that organizational identification is among the war on terror’s most pressing ethical issues. This investigation offers conceptually driven and broadly applicable guidance toward the advancement of organizational ethics and citizens’
intertwined practice of responsible citizenship. Necessarily, then, my analysis concerns
pragmatics of situated action and rich possibilities of Burkean analysis for exploring and
extending theory. It does so by using existing theory as an organizing framework rather than
testable predictor, typology, or measuring device. I begin with a basic argument generated
through case study research and then offer useful ways to understand this narrative through
theoretical concepts. A summary of some of my argument’s core claims may provide a helpful
preview of the chapters to come.

My argument is that especially since 9/11, the USDA—a large presidential cabinet
agency that regulates, conducts research on, and markets U.S. agricultural interests—has worked
to perfect its case for existence through socially correct identity armor. After 9/11, the USDA
assumed two new identities. First, the agency has been the nation’s primary protector against
agricultural bioterorrism (agroterrorism)—the intentional introduction of harmful contaminants
into the food system (Moats, 2007). Second, the USDA stands as the leading agency in the
agricultural reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. I contend that through these identities, the
USDA has played a significant role in the post-9/11 invention of the “self-defensive citizen-
consumer” (Hay, 2007, p. 218). The USDA’s war on bioterrorism role radically extends the
agency’s previous role as a leading organization in federal food safety regulation. The agency’s
role in international reconstruction extends its prior pursuit of agricultural “development” in
countries less technologically advanced. In separate chapters, I shall examine each of these roles
as well as their overlapping public functions. In both cases, I argue that the agency’s public
discourse is ethically questionable.

As briefly noted, the process through which I extend this argument through theory
emerges from a position of tension—that is, through a Burkean prism of comic ambivalence. By
ambivalence I mean I attempt to avoid oversimplified and absolute judgments that are made possible through a closed perspective and apathy. Although the critic’s language is always and necessarily a simplification of experience, this does not mean the critic is helpless. For example, because I presume the masking power of ideology is part of a natural linguistic condition of contradiction, it would be a mistake to place blame for actions outside of or against the interests of agricultural publics exclusively on the USDA. Conversely, I would be naïve not to examine the structure of governance as well as the asymmetrical outcomes that the USDA has helped distribute to particular groups in society. Thus, by ambivalence, I also refer to the limits of a genre of interpretive practice that stresses the endless play of meanings. Indeed, some groups have historically installed and maintained their preferred meanings with far more success than others (Cloud, 1992).

Comic ambivalence is, however, more than a socially responsible mode of academic criticism. Additionally, ambivalence advocates the practice of informed citizenship while pointing to absence of it in the public sphere. Ambivalent criticism in society, by which I mean a suspicious but hopeful attitude toward rural and agricultural practices and policies, has not actualized. I attempt to show that rural and agricultural issues are worthy of lay as well as scholarly attention because they affect all citizens in an array of important ways. Food nutrition and safety, clothing, environmental health, poverty, and now, alternative energy must be defined as rural and farm related issues. As a presidential cabinet agency, the USDA wields significant political power directly affecting policies and programs across these areas. In fact, the organization is arguably the most influential agent in the world food system. In light of the USDA’s governing power, the lack of scholarly attention to its communicative practices perpetuates the current lack of public awareness of their implications for citizens’ best interests.
By exposing the functioning of these practices toward organizational interests, scholars play a role in building argument for social accountability and promoting an attitude of informed citizenship.

The purpose of this study is to build such an argument through the lens of rhetoric, which Burke understands as an agent’s use of symbolic means to target, create, and bridge social divisions in ways that foster audience participation in the pursuit of her goals. Burke offers a contemporary perspective on the ancient art of rhetoric that falls between modernism and postmodernism. Burke’s view modifies Aristotle’s (1954) description of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering in any given case the available means of persuasion” (p. 3). Rhetoric is, of course, commonly used in U.S. political culture to refer to decorative flattery, baseless argument, and a dangerous linguistic ornament of power and deception that obscures and hides what is really going on. Ironically, for those of us who take serious interest in rhetoric as a formal area of academic study, such commonplace definitions are hard to come by. Burke’s rhetoric of identification “considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 22). Identifications can occur unconsciously, spontaneously, or intuitively, inventing and bridging divisions in society (Burke, 1966). Thus, a Burkean perspective stands apart from a neo-Aristotelian one insofar as it suggests that audience members participate in and embody the discourse by which they are persuaded.

This study focuses its attention on the phenomenon of organizational rhetoric of identification (Cheney, 1983b), which situates the persuading actor as a collective voice. By organizational rhetoric I refer to an interdisciplinary tradition that takes interest in “messages created within and/or on behalf of organizations that seek to create identifications, solicit
cooperation, and/or persuade” (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006, p. 102). Since organizations are ironically the primary promulgators of individualist rationality and perhaps the most influential citizens in Western society (Deetz, 1992), understanding their rhetorical forms and functions is especially important for public well-being. This is especially true in the case of the USDA, which is the most powerful regulatory organization in the agricultural system and a $275 billion-dollar industry among the top employers in the U.S. (BLS, 2007; ERS, 2006). Given the USDA’s long history, vast size, and complex system of programs, it makes sense that this study gives in-depth attention to a particular set of events in particular historical period of organizational practice. Through an inquiry into the link between the USDA and the current militarization of civic life (Lasswell, 1941; Stahl, 2006)—a project mobilized through state and industrial symbols—this study illustrates the utility of Burkean organizational analysis as political critique. Below, I show that the USDA’s historical connection to war suggests that such a critique is long overdue.

The “People’s Department” as Modernist Intervention

During the Civil War, within only a matter of months, federal legislation passed that reconfigured the meaning of American citizenship. One of bills that passed during these months in 1862 was the Morrill Act, which established land grant universities and most notably, vocational training for agriculturalists of all types. Another bill established the Department of Agriculture. The succession of southern legislative representatives during the Civil War allowed for moving forward with a post-agrarian agenda of industrialization, expansion, science, technical education, and regulation (Ross, 1946). Indeed, the Department of Agriculture emerged as a test of the existence of a Federal Union (Baker, Rasmussen, Wiser, & Porter, 1963).

Rather than benevolent unity, heated division and fiery protest expressed in leading
agricultural journals marked the start-up of the Department. Although not without defenders, Isaac Newton, the first Agricultural Commissioner (now titled Secretary of Agriculture), was according to Ross (1929), “accused of incompetence to the point of illiteracy, of waste and malfeasance in the purchase and distribution of seeds and plants, and intrigues with congressman for personal ends.” Newton was a highly successful dairy farmer who had been an intimate personal friend of his appointer, President Lincoln (p. 60). Newton’s tenure is perhaps symbolic of the beginning of a new era of agricultural politics that has been anything but a democratic enterprise by the people and for the people. The advent of the USDA ushered in historical, political, technocratic, capitalistic, and cultural accumulations that signaled the end of the era of the yeoman agrarian.

According to Gates (1960), the emergence of the USDA marks the approximate end of a forty-year period he calls “The Farmer’s Age.” In support of this contention, Rasmussen (1965) shows that the Civil War brought nothing less than “agricultural revolution.” The war was a catalyst for the rapid adoption of horse-drawn machinery and other equipment, which allowed for offsetting labor shortages and profit from higher wartime prices. Rasmussen observes that, the widely circulated annual reports of the Department—120,000 copies in 1863—perhaps encouraged some farmers to adopt improved methods and to buy farm machinery; and it cannot be doubted that the department, long one of the world’s leading research organizations, over the years has had a major influence on production. (p. 195)

What Rasmussen fails to observe, which makes sense given his position as a public historian long employed by the USDA, is that the Civil War’s rapid institutionalization of major agricultural reform measures subverted a robust democratic process enabled by war’s
suppression of critical publicity. Agricultural technologies brought forth an assorted bag of positive and negative implications for society, including environmental destruction and even the white farmer’s chances of maintaining a small farm. Collectively, these effects bolstered an already visible divide between emerging merchant middle-class modernists and rural agrarian traditionalists. The Civil War was the precursor to the 1870 onset of a fifty-year period that Nugent (1981) refers to as the great conjuncture—a time in which the emerging merchant middle-class competed with rural agrarian traditionalists for cultural supremacy. Even before the Civil War, progressive authors of the belles lettres had begun to frame the farmer as an “unsophisticated, ignorant country bumpkin,” turning away from constructions of Thomas Jefferson’s heroic figure of the agrarian frontier. Publishers, readers, and the aesthetic writers of the belles lettres advanced a modernist narrative of upward mobility, education, urban growth, and market faith (Van Tassel, 2002, pp. 52-53).

All this is to suggest that when President Lincoln dubbed the USDA as the People’s Department, giving it a name that it continues to celebrate today, the name functioned to bridge ailing social divisions in society, most of which were present in the explicit and implicit motives driving the war. As Sharer (2001) observes, “The terms an organization selects for its name do not simply or directly signify the members of that organization; rather they are synecdochic structures that stand in for the larger arguments informing the collective identification of the group” (p. 234). For Lincoln, the times seem to have invited curing persuasive power that could only be supplied by a forcefully democratic name such as the “People’s Department.” The organizational naming of the USDA, then, seems to follow a technique of rhetorically calling forth a new public (Charland, 1987). Laclau (2005) perhaps captures this identity constituting move when he writes, “constructing ‘a people...involves constructing the frontier which the
‘people’ presupposes. Frontiers are unstable, and in the process of constant displacement.” Only through production of a guiding narrative could a new order be invented and secured, for “any new ‘people’ would require the reconstitution of the space of representation through the construction of a new frontier” (p. 153). At least initially, it appeared that Lincoln succeeded, for he had created a key rhetorical condition for a Department that would serve a wide variety of often competing agricultural interest groups across the U.S. and the world. USDA history shows, however, that the popular political phrase “the people” has masked the complex and inequitable division of power among agency stakeholders.

Partially through ethos made possible by appealing to common ground with the public, the USDA has always advanced a move past agrarian community and self-sufficiency, the small farm, and a society in which most citizens are farmers. Although the organization has never been a picture of democracy, its public narrative at the time of its establishment assured the public that no one person or group was to be entirely responsible for or in control of the Department (Baker, Rasmussen, Wiser, & Porter, 1963). If used effectively, Lincoln’s name for the agency would, as Eisenberg (1984) suggests, supply the “strategic ambiguity” an organizational identity often needs for symbolic accommodation of the interests of diverse groups it entertains (p. 227). U.S. agriculture is certainly realm of diverse occupations, cultures, organizational structures, and economic motives. Yet, the agency would not merely adapt to an existing multiplicity of conditions. Rather, the USDA sought to significantly shape its political, economic, and cultural topography by inventing a new agricultural order. The USDA’s flexible democratic name has promoted “unified diversity,” facilitated organizational change, and preserved a position of privilege for the USDA in the agricultural system (p. 227). Borrowing a term from Williams and Goss (1975), the USDA’s identity as the People’s Department offers a foundation for taking out
“character insurance” with its internal and external audiences (p. 235).

Until the 1880s, the time at which the USDA obtained the power to regulate transportation and importation of livestock by gaining its first bureau—the Bureau of American Industry—it had exclusively provided research and educational services. The Department was elevated to cabinet status in 1889 (Rasmussen, 1990, p. 293). At the time of the USDA’s origination, it had nine professional employees. By 1891, the Department had 1,577 full-time employees. As of 2006, the USDA consisted of 101,792 employees (OASCR, 2007). The deconstruction of 1930s New Deal state building during World War II arguably remains the most significant influence on the growth and modernized identity of the contemporary People’s Department (Hadwiger, 1976; Hooks, 1990). The fall of agricultural components and other components of the New Deal came as the government shifted its attention to war projects and supported the integration of emerging economic, political, and scientific elites in and beyond agriculture (Hooks, 1990; Mills, 1956). A culture directed by this configuration of a new managerial class achieved its ethos through post-war foreign and domestic policy marking a new culture of fear toward communism and totalitarian advancement. Traces of the New Deal, including the so-called inefficient and lazy farmer were the most visible sign of this threat, which was spoken of by the managerial class and its interest groups through a metaphor of disease (Field, 1998).

The USDA assumed a significant and formal national defense role in World War II, which means the post-9/11 war on terror does not mark the first time the USDA has contributed to American war drama. During the war, the USDA expanded upon and took over the responsibilities of Herbert Hoover’s World War I Food Administration, which has been described as at times a more effective propaganda program than that ran by the state’s official
war propaganda wing known as the Committee on Public Information (Ponder, 1995). From the outset of the USDA’s wartime efforts, the mainstream media helped construct a heroic and militant identity for the agency as well as its American farmers. In 1941, the cover of TIME magazine featured a portrait of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and former Indiana hog farmer Claude Wickard. The cover story depicted Wickard as “generalissmo of the U.S. forces in the Battle of Food” and alerted readers that, “the name Claude Wickard may well become a household word in the next twelvemonth. For through him will be worked this part of the world’s economic earthquake.” The Roosevelt administration later announced an international food supply emergency created by the Nazi invasion of Europe. The USDA took on this challenge upon which the government placed the fate of the war. President Franklin Roosevelt designated Wickard to organize the 30 million people comprising the nation’s number one industry. Within 48 hours, the USDA instructed six million farmers to change their crop plans from domestic staples to other crops needed for this war project. Wickard’s rally slogan, which was elaborated upon in Roosevelt’s national address on Farm Mobilization Day in 1943, was “food will win the war and write the peace” (Hunger, 1941; Roosevelt, 1943).

As the U.S. entered the war, the USDA became a narrative symbol of the nation’s still dominant agricultural body politic. Secretary Wickard and the farm constituency became the mass media’s superhero action figures on the homefront, selflessly defending God’s pastoral garden against Evil. I want to offer a textual sampling of TIME’s cover story to provide a sense of the dramatic narrative structure at work in the public construction of the USDA’s identity. These excerpts show that the story clearly and descriptively situates Wickard as a strong leader and personalized synecdoche standing in for his brave organization and the nation’s agricultural industry:
Hog farm to Cabinet. The change would be, to a large extent, in his hands. They are large hands, strong, thick, sure. He is a man of few nerves; doubts seldom gnaw his mind. Even the pressing fog of worry that hangs over Washington rolls back before his full smile. He is solid, his feet on earth, and his roots go deep into the Middle of the U.S..

The article continued,

He knew what it was to walk all day behind a plow pulled by a restless team; to pick corn with cold fingers and an aching back, to spread manure by hand, to shock wheat all day under a hot sun…Wickard has a thick baritone voice with the gravy-thick Indiana accent…a jaw so square and solid that it looks as if it had been laid out by a brick mason. His shoulders, neck and torso are wrestler-heavy.

Other leading publications such as *Capper’s Farmer*, a monthly farm magazine, extended *TIME*’s heroic narrative of agricultural emergency and aided the Roosevelt administration’s efforts to secure war identification with the rural populous. Especially in 1942, *Capper’s* featured numerous visual images and stories promoting patriotism on the farm. Like *TIME*, *Capper’s* situated agriculture as an able leader of homefront efforts to back the troops in their fight against Hitler. The publication urged the nation’s rural agricultural citizenry to vigilantly show its patriotism through extra hours of hard work, increased farm production, and efficient use of farm resources including labor, equipment, and materials. A sketch in the June issue shows Uncle Sam standing in a field near a tractor, in conversation with two farmers. A bubble caption reads, “UNCLE SAM SAYS, ‘Harvest 16 million more acres of corn, cotton, barley, soybeans.’” Another June issue sketch features a close-up image of farmer holding the wheel of a tractor, and reads, “Battle Station.” The August issue offers a photo of two farmers cooperatively
at work harvesting crops. It reads, “Easing LABOR SHORTAGE” and corresponding bubble
caption states, “Thru machinery and labor pools, by hiring power, changing schedules, swapping
work and community pinch-hitting, farmers are getting the food and production job done.” A
September sketch shows a farmer on a tractor looking down upon rows of marching army troops,
with a caption below reading, “It’s Up to You to Keep that Army Marching!” (Grant, 1997).

From March 1943 until June 1945, the Department of Agriculture was organized
into two units: The War Food Administration to manage war programs and another unit tending
to non-war issues. This second unit consisted of the Forest Service, the Rural Electrification
Administration, the Agricultural Research Administration, the Bureau of Agricultural
Economics, and the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations. Staff and service agencies of the
USDA were considered accountable to both units. The Farm Labor Supply Program, which ran
from 1943 to 1947, played an important role in rallying the rural agricultural citizenry. Its
purpose was “to assist farmers in producing vital food by making labor available at the time and
place it was most needed.” Aspects of the program such as provision of housing and medical
care were re-appropriated from a Depression era farm labor program. The Extension Service and
the Office of Labor implemented the World War II farm labor responsibilities Congress gave to
the USDA. Through a number of programs, the Extension service placed farm workers and
recruited domestic workers. The Office of Labor carried out an agricultural wage stabilization
program and imported workers from neighboring countries where labor was available. Both
agencies provided farm workers with services (Rasmussen, 1951, p. 5).

Playing a major role in the war’s unfolding agricultural boom was the second Women’s
Land Army (WLA), which was formulated in 1943 by the federal government as part of the
emergency farm labor program (Carpenter, 2003; Rasmussen, 1951). Under the direction of the
USDA, the WLA and other farm labor programs such as the Victory Farm Volunteers and the United States Crops Corps, recruited, hired, and placed millions of laborers where American farmers needed help (Rasmussen, 1951). The three million women who worked in the WLA helped open the door for new post-war employment opportunities for women (Carpenter, 2003).

In the wake of victory in World War II, the U.S. War Food Administrator sent a letter to Congress boasting,

The United States has produced 50 percent more food annually in this war than in World War I…During this present conflict, twice as much food has gone annually to the armed services and for overseas shipments as…each year of the last war…We take pride in the magnificent production record.

The administrator elaborated that this record was achieved with the U.S. population up one third and with ten percent fewer workers on farms. What the administrator leaves out is the difficulty that comes with comparing the two wars given unfavorable crop growing years in the first war and the shortness of the war period. Nevertheless, there can be little question that the second war revealed U.S. agriculture’s new flexibility in its ability to expand production to meet emergency needs (Wilcox, 1947, p. 51). On the downside, the war steered attention away from several of the USDA’s domestic and long-term programs that once provided assistance for farmers and other citizens outside of the managerial class. The budget authority of New Deal administrators in the USDA declined dramatically during the war (Hooks, 1990, p. 35). During the 1930s, agricultural spending had been approximately equal to military spending. In the war period, the state allocated a remarkably low seven percent of federal spending to non-defense expenditures (including agriculture) (Smith, 1959).

These developments led to the “capture” of the USDA during World War II. According
to Hooks (1990), an “iron triangle” consisting of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), Congressional agricultural committees, and reform-minded USDA officials began to steer the direction of the Department (pp. 39-40). The AFBF, a national farm interest group largely supporting the aims of “big” agriculture, began to stress market rationality over government control, which they associated with an advancing but hidden threat of communism. The postwar period further developed and consolidated close ties made between elite farmers and the USDA during the war period (Hooks, 1990, p. 29; McConnell, 1969).

World War II played a definitive role in the modernization of U.S. agricultural enterprise and the formation of a broader military-industrial American society. In the two decades before World War II, excess farm labor was becoming visible in low wages, low standards of living, and unemployment of wage farm workers. Industrial wages became noticeably higher than farm wages between 1910 and 1940. Additionally, key factors contributing to a recognizable farm labor surplus were the end of agriculture’s geographical frontier, a shortage of quality farmland because of erosion and depletion, shrinking of export markets, and increases in mechanization, technology, and efficiency (Rasmussen, 1951). During the war, high farm product prices and perceived shortage of farm labor combined with a war emergency production imperative. This created conditions for the rapid diffusion of wartime technological developments in the field of disease and pest control (Wilcox, 1947). These accumulations of capitalism and the urban population’s near eclipse of the long-dominant rural agricultural population signaled that agriculture had moved toward marginal status (McConnell, 1969).

Wartime production of a permanent military-industrial complex offered a temporary economic, cultural, and political solution as well as a unifying rhetoric for an industry of 30 million strong. From 1940 to 1943, agricultural production increased by roughly 16 percent
(USDA, 1947, p. 532), despite the fact that significant farm labor was said to be lost to the war industries (Kaufman, 1949). During this period, there was a decline of 3.6 million citizens in the total farm population. (BAE, 1947, p. 499). Thanks to replacement labor, especially that of inexperienced women and children, farm employment in 1943 was only 322,000 less than in 1940 and 100,000 less than in 1941 (BAE, 1946, pp. 6, 23). In 1943, output per worker was 21 percent higher than in than in 1940 (Ducoff, 1945, p. 16). Kaufman (1949) cites increased technical mechanization, better utilization of farm labor, and increased work hours as contributors. Revealing the marketing power of war rhetoric in its support for the rapid diffusion of farm innovations, the number of tractors used on farms increased by more than one-third (USDA, 1947, p. 550). Beyond the benefit of the tractor manufacturers, salespeople, and land grant schools’ agriscience gurus, these tractors gave farms and the war economy what Kaufman (1949) estimates as over 83 million human work hours. Government campaigning for greater utilization of existing equipment through exchange and pooling among farmers also added additional human work hours.

Beyond labor and machinery, technological wartime developments that remain in order today also took hold, reshaping and commercializing the realm of crop science. After the war, pesticides derived from poisonous gases developed for the war were conveniently used to launch the pesticide industry. Similarly, the USDA played a primary role in the development of insecticides for military purposes and heavily advocated for the conversion of the principal ingredient of war explosives, ammonium nitrate, into nitrogen crop fertilizer. As a result of agronomists in the USDA, the war’s domestic leftovers provided the foundation for a wealthy chemical fertilizer industry. To help build the industry, workers converted physical facilities from the wartime military-industrial complex to agribusiness production plants. The first
conversion of war facilities took place when in 1947 when a massive munitions plant in Muscle Shoals, Alabama switched from making bombs to making farm fertilizer (Pollan, 2006, p. 41).

USDA History as Rhetorical Invention

Rasmussen’s (1990) essay “The People’s Department: Myth or Reality?” observes, “When Abraham Lincoln used that term to describe the Department…farm people made up 50 percent of the population compared with just over 2 percent today.” In the 1860s, farm products made up 80 percent of total exports, compared to 18 to 20 percent in 1990. Despite these changes, Rasmussen concludes, “the Department of Agriculture is still worthy of being called truly the people’s department” (p. 291). Rasmussen’s employment in the USDA suggests that the chances of him arguing otherwise are slim. The USDA certainly provides vital services to the world that would otherwise endanger lives, but these services are now provided by relatively few large farms and corporate food companies that control production and pricing.

It is surprising to me that academic agricultural historians have not contested the major presence of current and former USDA employees and USDA-sponsored projects (including financial and research assistance) in existing book-length historical literature on the agency (Baker, 1939; Baker et al., 1963; Chew, 1948; Harding, 1947; Larson & Zimmerman, 2003; Moore, 1967; Rasmussen, 1989; Tolley, 1943; Wilcox, 1947). Although this is an agency that historians may know more about than any other organization in the federal government (Hamilton, 1990), the literature includes significant shortcomings, only one of which is a lack of multiple paradigmatic perspectives. Another limitation is arguably justified concentration of attention on the USDA in the New Deal and World War eras (Albertson, 1961; Badger, 1980; Chew, 1948; Conrad, 1965; Tolley, 1943; Wilcox, 1947). Finally, as Hamilton (1990) suggests, another limitation of past studies is that historians have rarely focused on the USDA as a formal
institution and have instead have been most interested in the formulation and outcomes of agricultural policies.

Although these limitations clearly support USDA scholarship that moves beyond New Deal and World War history and does so through an alternative perspective, the issue of authorship is precarious. I want to give additional attention to this issue and specifically, the ways that USDA history constitutes a type of organizational rhetoric. My concern is with making clear a key assumption upon which this study advances: that rhetoric of identification constitutes organizational conditions that make persuasion possible. My reading of the implications of writing one’s own history admittedly rests on my view of agency as performed by the historian. Nevertheless, I propose that as the USDA writes its own history of its influential role in societal affairs, there are implications that work against a democratic public culture. I contend that self-authored organizational history sets the agenda for public discussion on its actions and by extension, how to interpret them. Thus, particularly in the present political economic climate, scholars would do well to limit academic and lay trust that provides conditions for self-authorship of organizational, governmental, and industrial history.

With my general thesis in order, to label the USDA as unethical, unprofessional, or producing completely negative effects would be to naively deny its positive functions. Yet, there is a measure of social responsibility and an invaluable concern for human knowledge production that comes with history writing. The USDA’s perspective therefore offers a useful contribution to knowledge. The limits of this contribution are arguably more of a product of epistemological dogma concerning the legitimacy of self-authorship and faith in a rational self-correction. The very act of self-authored identity in the absence of a community of historians reproduces the humanist epistemology of the liberal state. Free from external critique, the USDA historian
becomes a rhetor who installs preferred meanings through radical individualism rather than
democracy. The liberal humanist is a mythical figure of modernism autonomously and rationally
producing knowledge through internal capacities. This figure is most often traced back to Kant’s
through his faith in objective moral law, justice, and equality conceived and prescribed by a
knowing, autonomous, and ethical subject. Kantian thought works toward the formation of rights
and a regime of individual freedom through an ethic of reason. This is possible within a liberal
state backing the notion of progress as the collective development and emancipation of the
rational-moral capacity of humanity (Kersting, 1992; Whelan, 2004).

From a Kantian perspective, the USDA is able to ethically speak through monologue
because principles of morality are synonymous with those of reason. Self-authored USDA
history sponsors the notion of humanity as an end of rational agency. This end can be obtained
through the discovery of a priori principles of law and universal motives, which allow humans to
attribute morality to themselves in the form of freedom. Given that I have established that
Enlightenment epistemology drove the formation of the USDA, one does not have to look far
into the organization to find traces of Kantian “Enlightenment liberalism,” which operates as a
kind of “secular humanism.” As a secular organization, the USDA not only privileges reason and
science, but also implicitly refutes religious foundations of traditional agrarianism. The agency
does so through an ideology of militant confidence in the human ability to control and predict the

Bringing Kant in allows for understanding and rethinking USDA history, and thus helps
build a rationale for the present study. At this point, there are at least three arguments supporting
a rhetorical approach to the organization’s past practices. First, there is a clear need for
expanding the future of USDA history writing into several alternative histories. Second, understanding organizational history as rhetoric serves the public’s ability to trace the effects of the agency’s Enlightenment ideology, which it has rigorously preserved since its founding. Third, rethinking the writing of USDA organizational history allows for breaking through the instrument metaphor for knowledge. That is, a rhetorical approach is equipped to mount a challenge against the notion that organizational agency is a possession to be used instrumentally by a transcendent author who can internally derive knowledge and morality to give order to the world. Practical reason’s insight, not human experience, derives insights applicable to experience and contingency.

Beginning with Heidegger (1993), critics of liberal humanist agency have suggested that there is something romantic and at the same time arrogant about its faith in self-mastery (Lundberg & Gunn, 2005). Indeed, the liberal notion of an organization’s freedom to actively pursue its self-interests is held up by faith in self-transparency and full consciousness in the making of the social world during the pursuit of goals. The humanist limits in USDA history writing have been not only in the source and the ethos assumed to be inherent to this source, but in humanist method as well. The social science model of historical research legitimizes the notion of mutual understanding advanced by self-monitored and privileged parties. These parties are assumed to have the correct knowledge, to have a superior and unique ability to write history through the right questions, and to know who and what objects are important for historical treatment.

If a rhetorical understanding of the USDA’s organizational history is to be advanced, it must overcome the liberal humanist limits that have constrained past studies. Like other academic areas, rhetorical and organizational studies have not escaped the question of agency in
theory, critique, and practice. A humanist narrative commonly advanced suggests the author deliberately chooses her actions and observes the norms of timeliness, appropriateness, and decorum through strategic thinking. The extra-rhetorical orator in full command speaks to achieve instrumental and intentional ends. The critic in full command produces analyses firmly and inherently possessing true observations made possible by objective method (Gaonkar, 1997). It is not difficult to see how a community of scholars concerned with persuasion and strategy could get caught up in the imaginary world of a free-roaming social actor—or what Gaonkar (1997) calls the “ideology of human agency” (p. 33). This humanist view is an effect of the area’s traditional commitment to a dominant, procedural interpretation of the work of Aristotle. Hill (1972) succinctly summarizes the procedure: “Its end is to discover whether the speaker makes the best choices from the inventory to get a favorable decision from a specified group of auditors in a specific situation” (p. 374). The neo-Aristotelian critic first outlines the situation, then specifies the group of auditors and the decision they are to make. Finally, the critic reveals the choice and disposition of the intertwined persuasive factors—logical (logos), psychological (pathos), and characterological (ethos)—and evaluates them against the standard of Aristotle’s (1954) *Rhetoric*.

Although this approach has been subjected to criticism in the last half century, its sedimentation and persuasive narrative enables it to thrive today. This is perhaps especially evident in undergraduate public speaking textbooks. Unfortunately, the first wave of movement beyond neo-Aristotelianism ironically attempted to replace it with new grand narratives such as dramatism, structuralism, and other competing theories. These provided new insights only to reproduce an unimaginative and formulaic rationalism that continues to exclude certain questions, certain forms of texts, certain types of audiences, the formation of certain mental
states, and motives for rhetoric beyond instrumentalism. Rather than cleanly extracted intelligible purpose, rhetoric can alternatively be understood as an effect of a reading strategy. This means that if the critic locates the rhetorical qualities of a text, then masterful criticism can globalize rhetoric, making traces of it visible everywhere in public culture. This argument underlies the interpretive turn in rhetorical studies and has resulted in a move toward a multiplicity of critical methods. Although some of these methods repeat the formulism of past techniques, others contributing to a post-humanist slant productively situate the “critic as a sort of bricoleur who exemplifies Burke’s dictum to ‘use all that there is to use’ in making a critical object intelligible.” A flexible system of perspectives and recognition of the complexity of rhetoric advances a certain “atheoretical” view. Nonetheless, advocates of this view must be alert to the risk of denying the inherent language and ideology of criticism built within a critical act. This act of denial only retains a classical focus on performance-based insights over facilitation of interpretation and understanding (Gaonkar, 1997, p. 32, emphasis in original).

I situate the present study within the tradition of post-humanism, within which are various perspectives including but not limited to poststructuralism and structuralism. Post-humanism does not take agency away from the speaker, but does recognize the author as a point of articulation that artistically invents agency under the ideological and material constraints constituted by the mingling of internal and external forces. Perhaps Mills (1958) captures the sensibility of post-humanism in his statement, “I should contend that ‘men are free to make history’, but that some men are indeed much freer than others” (pp. 30-31). Indeed, post-humanist positioning of agency as in-flux between subject and structure allows for understanding the USDA’s self-authoring as a power play that suppresses the formation of a democratic program of knowledge production. The public historian’s knowledge arranges power
and even scholarship written in the name of understanding makes a difference (Lentricchia, 1983). In this case, the USDA has partially controlled public discussion of its relationship with “the people” through circulation of a preferred identity. The National Agricultural Library near USDA headquarters in Washington D.C. has provided one of several powerful channels.

The post-humanist angle from which I work in this study contrasts with the current federal-level public administration’s practice of liberal governance. From this position, the name the People’s Department can be read as expert-guided unification toward individual freedom. A unified agricultural system has been made possible with the help of the boundary-spanning function of the USDA. This boundary-spanning function emerged through the perception that accumulations of modernity reached a point at which in order to move forward with a rationalist vision of progress, “the people” would need to be culturally onboard. Politically, industrial-state colonization of agriculture in the Civil War and again in World War II reinvigorated the Platonic doctrine of classical liberalism, which suggests that under the rule of a republic, the superior capabilities of the government may very well have to save the public from itself. From a rhetorical standpoint, this is particularly significant because it configures the meaning of democratic society and the notion of public argument. From an organizational standpoint, it shows that USDA aided this project through research on and education for the rural agrarian public toward progressively correct economic, technological, and scientific practices that transformed American culture.

The idea of a speaking liberal collectivity is foundational to organizational criticism of the public function of the contemporary government agency. Kant may have described the Enlightenment, but based on Plato’s distrust of rhetoric and the public’s best judgment, it was Locke (1689/1988) who articulated a mode of government based on the liberal principles. The
Lockean or Anglo tradition privileges individual rights protected under the notion of liberty. Locke argues that humans exist in a perfect state of freedom and equality. By virtue of the capacity for reason, humans allow one another the basic right of liberty. Liberal doctrine privileges executive knowledge and position-to-know governance. The republic’s role is to enlarge and refine public views while guarding against the confusion of direct democracy (Ivie, 2005; Madison, Hamilton, & Jay, 1990). By contrast, democratic communitarianism goes back to the ancient philosophy of Hellenic Greece, with Rousseau (1988) offering its contemporary philosophical form. Arguing that general will legitimizes governance, the Rousseauian or Continental tradition favors collective identity, equality, and the idea of democracy by general will (Holden, 1988). These two traditions co-comprise what is known as American democracy.

Given considerable scholarly attention given in recent years to moving beyond what is sometimes referred to as “liberal-minimalism” or elite governance by “guardianship,” interest in theory and practice of democratic public dissent through rhetorical practice has grown. Political theorists have begun to consider process-based politics in which experience-based conflict is seen as natural rather than harmful (Connolly, 2004; Dryzek, 2000; Rehg & Bohman, 2002; Mouffé, 2005; Young, 1996). Aune (2007) has recently demonstrated the importance of such a turn by showing that before any set of normative decision making protocol can be put to work under an established standard of rational argument, the speaker must “build on the ‘ethical’ self-understanding of the audience” at the level of situated rhetoric. Drawing from the rhetorical tradition, Aune notes that if a democratic ethic is to be achieved, it is first necessary to “start with the beliefs, values, and goals of this audience in this place and time, the standard recommendation of rhetoricians from the Sophists, Aristotle, and Cicero down to Kenneth Burke and Perelman-Olbrechts-Tyteca” (p. 346). Thus, in any given social field, rhetorically
constitutive assumptions inform situated argument. Below, I build on Aune’s argument for a rhetorical sensibility by adapting it to the critique of organizational texts.

Toward Organizational Criticism-as-Critical Publicity

Lyon (2007) has recently asked, how does one locate self-deceiving consent and clearly differentiate it from manipulation and the deliberate deception of others? An actor’s manipulative communication is often a function of larger systematic distortion—an ingrained cultural logic normalized in a social system. In turn, systematic distortion is often a function of believing one is working toward consensus or positive ends when really engaging in a manipulative strategic action (Deetz, 1992). Indeed, conceptual lines between the two are blurred in actual deliberative practice because all communication is rhetorically political and constitutively functional. As a localized hermeneutic approach to the explication of pathological communication constraints, rhetorical organizational analysis offers way to account for such situational contingencies. This investigation advances the perspective that organizational rhetoric offers the possibility of understanding the emancipatory potential of situated communication. A rhetorical approach is advantageous because it escapes the problem of empirical and situational application in the public sphere.

As illustrated by Burke (1937/1984), problems of dogma and the success of particular narratives of reality in modernism, public consciousness, and violence are also products of rather than merely obstacles to consensus politics. Organizational motives are therefore not as simple as moral or immoral, unintentional or intentional, collectivist or individualist, objective or subjective, neutral or power-laden. In everyday settings, these distinctions fade through the mediating power of semi-conscious identifications. The rhetorician’s work is made possible by these blurry distinctions and the ambiguous space they provide for insight and social change. As
Burke (1950/1969) famously iterates, “put identification and division together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric” (p. 25).

In this study, I offer an academic contribution to what Habermas (1989) dubs as “critical publicity”—the exposure of the exercise of state power in a way that brings it under public control through civic debate (p. 232). The notion of critical publicity is inherent to rhetorical practice and its ends. Beginning in classical Greece, the art of rhetoric stressed its character as critical practice over its quality as interpretive sense-making. Only in modern times have academics reversed this emphasis toward the latter, with popular emphasis now situating rhetoric within the general realm of hermeneutics (Eden, 1987; Hernadi, 1989; Hyde & Smith, 1979). From Gorgias to Cicero, the guiding assumption was that any practice called rhetoric must take the form of an intervention or disruption into the practices and beliefs of the specific community it serves. Unfortunately, today such intervention is unpopular. Since the liberal core of contemporary politics privileges expert over activist knowledge and universalism over contingency, it more often than not aids denial of a minimal condition for public argument: acknowledgment of the controversial nature of a claim. There can be little doubt that government as well as corporate actors typically resort to a tactic of avoidance through the realization that entering public argument always entails risk. On a daily basis, this ethical violation represents idealism in and denial of symmetrical respect in civic engagement (Crowley, 2006).

Rather than mobilizing critical publicity through the liberal impulse to completely and rationally remove all social antagonisms, a rhetorical perspective revises and re-channels the meaning of antagonism in terms of adversarial agonism and the meaning of passion in terms of voice (Mouffé, 2005). Without denying the importance of reason and truth, a post-humanist
rhetorical perspective, I shall illustrate, does not privilege the notion of critical practice as a way to determine what (organizational) actors have really been thinking when they have made particular moves. Rather the post-humanist critic offers judgment on the ways in which particular rhetorical constellations, social conditions, and logics have functioned—however intentionally. The concern becomes how meanings take hold over others and call forth a particular kind of experience with specific implications for understanding and changing reality. Public and organizational experience, I argue, is partially managed by expression of organizational identity and its definition of the social situation. Thus, in the context of the present study, to call all U.S. government acts in the war on terror manipulative is to assume too much. It is unlikely that government actors and the range of actors involved in the war purposely brought forth the death of thousands of soldiers, that they knew the invasion Iraq would get this grizzly, and that they have not desired the best possible national defense strategy in the wake of the misery of 9/11. It is more likely that a collection of intentionally manipulated arguments and apparent ethical lapses combined with indirect, but unintentional factors. American self-attachment to God’s exceptional will, particularly in validating redemption in times of crisis (Ivie, 2005) and the mass mediated public sphere’s eroding ability to critically evaluate the quality of evidence (Habermas, 1989) are just a couple of contributors. Yet, to shift full blame to the former is to assume too much as well because it removes accountability from government actors, citizens, and a range of institutions and organizations. Both must be taken into consideration so that we do not leave ourselves without a vision for political agency.

This investigation probes the public meanings and identities partially generated by post-9/11 culture in light of political-economic interests. In enacting my approach toward organizational criticism, I work toward a vision of open communication while holding to several
assumptions on distorted, closed communication. Distorted communication closes off potential conflict and inclusive rhetorical deliberation by steering the conversation, excluding particular issues and parties, and making the terms of discussion seem natural and value-free. Distorted communication conceals the production of subjects, the denial of experience and its conflict-laden nature, as well as the plurality of motivations involved. Since distorted communication defines itself in its own terms and is unable to form relationships with its external constitutive targets, it denies alternative logics and potential conflict with other actors. The anti-democratic consequence is that actors respond to themselves, their “shadows” projected on events, and their own logic rather than alternative terms and logics (Deetz, 1992, p. 187).

In everyday situations, in the pursuit of shared understanding, common distortions may give way to open communication as well as expanded and conflicted meanings. However, the concealed nature of some distortions hinders the realization of open communication, with the result of actors participating in distorted communication that reproduces their identities and rationalities. In open communication, the subject matter is seen as socially historical and as a constituted and constituting object defined in relation to participants (Deetz, 1992). Thus, local action takes priority. Huspek (2007) suggests that a vision of rhetorical action, a term borrowed from Rehg (1997), Dryzek (2000), and Young (1996), makes sense and differs from openly strategic action in several ways. First, rather than a mode of concealment, rhetorical action is a transparently biased practice that disrupts “fear-inducing” or “ideological befogged norms” dominant parties cling to in undisclosed ways. As Burke (1950/1969) states, “Rhetoric deals with the possibilities of classification in its partisan aspects; it considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another” (p. 22, emphasis in original). This open partisanship challenges past failures in
reciprocation caused by asymmetry and is foremost an invitation to join in collaboration toward a higher normative possibility (Huspek, 2007, p. 363).

This study conceives of an “us-them” identity distinction as part of the human condition (Burke, 1937/1984). In other words, I do not envision open communication as the removal of power, politics, and threats to consensus. Organizational power and politics are often positive and can never be completely removed. A more appealing alternative is a moderately contingent politics that begins with inequality and difference (Mouffe, 2005). This investigation follows the notion that although the goal of forming a general interest through binding ethical standards and human rights should be upheld, the problem of publicity is due to the practice of plurality, not its presence, nor the absence of “objective agreement” toward stable “equilibrium” and consensus (p. 234). This position is consistent with the Burkean approach I elaborate upon in the next chapter and best suits a vision of adversarial agonism. My analysis of the USDA’s new post-9/11 public identity supports the argument that through close analysis of organizational action, communication scholars play a key role in making government regulatory actors accountable for maintaining the general public’s best interests (Schwarze, 2003a, 2003b). A rhetorical ethic is needed both inside and outside of organizations to ensure ethical decision-making through the integration of diverse values and mutual recognition between parties. As Huspek (2007) implies, liberal governance is not enough: “Above and beyond the assurance of free speech and other rights-based means of citizen empowerment, every effort needs to be made to ensure that citizens are exposed to diverse viewpoints, including those outside of the mainstream” (p. 364).

Like several other government organizations going through post-9/11 change, the USDA has largely enjoyed concealment from significant public criticism. A driving concern in this study, then, is the rhetorical maneuvering that makes this possible as these organizations
ambitiously pursue political economic ends. It is important that organizational publics are aware of ideological work that persuades them to believe and act in ways they ordinarily would not. One way this process has articulated itself since 9/11 is through organizational invention of the “self-defensive citizen-consumer” (Hay, 2007, p. 218). This figure is rhetorically materialized in domestic as well international spheres as a stakeholder of free market capitalism who takes on new responsibilities in the completion of a transcendental narrative of identity. This narrative is fundamentally American and speaks of the benevolent security of freedom against the threats of risk, fear, uncertainty, and totalitarian oppression. The self-defensive citizen-consumer identifies with and legitimizes the motives of the U.S. government and those agents with which it works in alliance.

Recognizing that a multiplicity of interlocked powerholders continue to shape and sustain the identity of the post-9/11 citizen, this study examines the USDA as one governing actor. My interest is in contributing to scholarship and public participation that performs and promotes an ethic of democratic governance. The study of public functions of organizational texts contributes to democratization of government organizations through informed citizenship. As such, this study of the USDA illustrates and contributes to the exposure of the exercise of state power to bring it under public control. Scholarship that promotes the formation of critical publics is particularly vital for the troubled U.S. agro-food system, a structure consolidated and owned by a few powerful corporate actors.

This project toward critical publicity is driven by a tentative, socially productive, and forward-looking vision, albeit a telos of democratic culture. Critics need not look for power structures that are inherently right and wrong. Instead, a more advantageous move is practicing both-at-once ambivalence while simultaneously deciding not to play but rather to create an end
for guiding attempts at social change. Additionally, critics should not seek a solid, stationary endpoint of a final utopian teleology. Instead, a non-classical telos is best envisioned as situational and as taking a stance for a larger purpose as if it were Truth (Ono & Sloop, 1992). The actualization of productive social change is, however, impossible without continuously, critically, and contingently developing the best possible understanding of its relationship to changes in the current world order. This study of the U.S. agricultural institution in relation to the U.S. government and international political economy after 9/11 builds on this assumption and offers one contribution.

Overview of the Study

Chapter One accomplishes two significant tasks. First, I examine relevant organizational communication studies literature on identification and propose what rhetorical study of identification through a return to the work of Kenneth Burke stands to contribute. Second, I offer Burkean criticism as a productive conceptual framework for rhetorical organizational analysis. I summarize Burke’s major intellectual commitments and then describe the corresponding interpretive moves I follow in my reading of organizational texts. With a review of the literature and a conceptual framework for rhetorical analysis in order, I am ready to construct two case studies on the USDA’s organizational rhetoric of identification.

Chapter Two offers the first of two cases studies on the USDA’s public face after 9/11. I offer a reading of the USDA’s public invitation to identification in relation to its post-9/11 role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. More specifically, I mobilize Burke’s (1950/1969) principle of the oxymoron as an organizing term. Through the term, I provide insights into this variation of organizational identification as well as the political work it has accomplished since 9/11. Reading the case of the USDA through the principle reveals that within the context of a
war-waging American military-industrial complex, organizational rhetoric contributes to and draws upon a transcendental, internationalist narrative that rhetorically returns the USDA to “the people.” This rhetoric fosters organizational legitimacy and avoids criticism. This case study as well as that presented in Chapter Three, illustrates one way organizational scholarship might contribute to the use of public debate to democratically reclaim control of the state’s exercise of power.

Chapter Three offers the second of two case studies on the USDA’s rhetoric of identification in the war on terror. In this chapter, I appropriate Burke’s (1937/1984) concept of the constabulary function, which offers organizational scholars a new concept for the study of identification and control. The case study traces the USDA’s domestic participation in the war on bioterrorism after 9/11. I read the USDA’s constabulary rhetoric of identification as participating in a larger set of organizational control functions and paradoxes in the literature (Deetz, 1992; Edwards, 1981; Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). I also link identification and control to relatively untapped issues in organizational communication studies—notably risk communication and governmental regulatory policy. Building on the first case study, I show that like other organizations after 9/11, the USDA has situated itself as fulfilling a useful and socially responsible public support role. I argue that the agency has done so in a way that allows it to tighten control over stakeholders and subvert significant change.

The final chapter clarifies, reviews, and substantively extends insights generated in previous chapters. The first section gives special attention to the theoretical utility of key rhetorical distinctions drawn between the USDA’s two war on terror identities. In addition, I wrestle with the ethical limits of organizational rhetoric of identification and explicate some major contributions to the literature. Throughout this section, I offer some caveats and directions
for future organizational scholarship. Having heavily focused on the ethical limits of
identification in the first section, the second section offers directions for advancement of
agricultural publicity in the liberal national security state. Additionally, I outline some necessary
future measures in government policy and critical public practice for positive social change. I
consider the general political, economic, and cultural status of agriculture in the U.S. and on the
world stage. Finally, in the third section, extending some of my earlier propositions toward an
agonistic organizational ethic, I re-characterize the study. I close the chapter by outlining several
general assumptions validated by the study toward an ethical model of rhetorical organizational
criticism.
CHAPTER I: LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: IDENTIFICATION AS RHETORIC, ETHICS, AND CONTROL

The narrative an organization tells about itself is a statement of its position and character in the social field of everyday life. This chapter complicates this notion so that the subsequent chapters are in position to advance existing knowledge on organizational rhetoric as identity work. In the previous chapter, I advocated organizational criticism-as-critical publicity as a viable situational approach to organizational study. I posited that insofar as a relatively coherent set of core themes emerges in USDA history, this history constitutes an organizational rhetoric of identification. Specifically, the agency’s appeals to war identification manifest liberalism’s favor of the Enlightenment rationality and military-industrial state building. The remainder of this study builds on my introductory chapter account by providing a post-9/11 extension to the agency’s war history.

To set up my study, it is necessary that I first examine past research on organizational identification to locate what scholars know about it and what a rhetorical approach to the phenomenon stands to contribute. Scholarly interest in organizational identification is interdisciplinary and therefore, I will need to set some parameters to prevent my review of existing literature from becoming unwieldy. First, I limit my attention to organizational studies research published in scholarly organizational or communication journals and books. By 

organizational studies, I refer to a diverse project consisting of management studies, organizational communication, public relations, organizational psychology and behavior, and related areas of inquiry. Second, rather than offering an in-depth review of every study on identification conducted in organizational studies since they first began to appear in academic journals over three decades ago, I focus on studies immediately relevant to a particular interest
established in the opening chapter: rhetoric of identification as a constitutive mechanism of ethics and control in the organization’s relationship with its publics. To engage scholarship in these areas, I shift from my general rationale for studying the USDA rhetorically to a more specific analysis of findings, useful concepts, definitions, theoretical propositions, knowledge gaps, questions, and calls for research. Third, it will become clear that these three areas heavily manifest my organizational communication orientation. Thus, my review largely consists of studies in the organizational communication studies tradition.

The chapter begins by discussing the recent emergence of public organizational identity as a legitimate topic of study in organizational communication. I then review past studies that develop the concept of organizational identification as a central concern in the study of identity. I work through studies on rhetorical tactics used to create identification, the role of identification in controlling decisional premises, and emerging interest in the ethics of public organizational communication. Finally, I bring all of this literature together in a discussion of directions for rhetorical study of the ethics of organizational identity.

The last section of the chapter provides a jump-off from my review of the literature to a study of the USDA’s ethics and rhetoric of identification. In this section, I offer a conceptual framework for the case studies and extended analysis I offer in the last three chapters. Here, I outline the major assumptions of a Burkean approach to organizational criticism. Although each case study chapter offers a brief description of this conceptual framework as it pertains to the case’s specific guiding interests, theoretical concepts, and organizational texts, this chapter offers an opportunity for a foregrounding account of the comprehensive theoretical system guiding both of them. Using this opportunity, I articulate a conceptual framework and corresponding hermeneutic processes that I undertake.
Organizational Identity

Given that organizations are collective sense-making processes that provide frames for action, organizational identity is organization (Taylor, 2006; Weick, 1995). Perhaps the fundamental identity paradox of the organization is that in order to be perceived as collectively legitimate, it must be self-interested. Thus, a vision of organizational communication as “a set of processes through which organizations create, negotiate, and manage meanings (including those related to their own constitution)” allows for serious consideration of public communication as a subset of these processes (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 234; Taylor, Flanagin, Cheney, & Seibold, 2000). The organizational communication perspective taken in this study privileges the organizing properties of public articulations of identity and the ways organizations persuasively enable and constrain the symbolic and material realities of their audiences.

Especially in the last decade or so, organizational communication scholarship has begun to blur the conceptual boundaries between traditionally emphasized internal, micro-level communication and external, macro-level communication (Krone & Harter, 2001; Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005; Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1997). Process metaphors used to describe organizations now disrupt traditional epistemological boundaries and expand possible topics of study (Deetz, 2001). In practice, traditional lines have already merged into a unified domain (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Cheney, 1991; Cheney & Christensen, 2001). In public relations and issues management, internal audiences are now addressed much like external audiences. Studies in organizational communication show that the same ambiguous organizational message may successfully address internal and external audiences (Eisenberg, 1984; Ulmer, 2001). Despite these changes, the dominant and most rapidly expanding areas of study in organizational communication today remain in the realm of internal
affairs (Cheney, 2007).

This investigation builds on these developments by directing attention to public organizational communication, or organizational rhetoric, and its implications for ethical identification with stakeholder groups. By stakeholder groups, I mean internal and external publics representing competing and complementary interests in the organization’s success. Examination of the organization’s relationships with various stakeholder groups allows for gauging inequitable distribution of participatory power in decisional processes (Deetz, 1995; Scott & Lane, 2000). Stakeholder theory, which actually encompasses several related models and perspectives, generally defines the management and ethics of organizations as a process of negotiating stakes among parties affected by a given decision (Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2003). Various stakeholder groups have different commitments, experiences, and levels of awareness, which impacts how they receive a message of change (Gallivan, 2001). High-level stakeholders should not be considered the only ones to recognize their own interests and the interests of those around them (Rowley, 1997). In other words, power does not always conform to the formal organizational hierarchy. In addition, as Deetz (1992) observes, “Different stakeholders are not always in positions to analyze their own interests, owing to the lack of undistorted information of insight into fundamental processes” (p. 55).

If an organization is an ongoing negotiation of internal and external stakeholder interests, organizational identity is the mediating force. The notion of a collective identity is as useful as any for disrupting the traditional organization-as-container metaphor in organizational studies. This is illustrated by the insights of Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) metaphor of organization-as-complex-organizing, which builds on the breakthrough work of Weick (1979, 1995) and points to various bonds between identity and interpretation. This metaphor situates the
organization as an interaction between text and conversation. Beyond the dimension of everyday conversation comprising an organization’s networks, the organization is a unitary actor. That is, the organization is an agency with a motive legally entitled in society “to enter into contracts, sue and be sued, lobby and be lobbied, and take over and be taken over.” The “metaconversation” is the dimension of human communication “out of which the identity of the organization to which people belong must be constructed.” This dimension involves contentious moves and the deal-making by various competing parties. Metaconversation-as-organizational identity traces back to conversation in concrete everyday contexts. From a perspective of communication-as-complex-organizing, organizations become the ongoing sum of the transactions of dispersed and diverse agencies and motives. Organizations constitute their members as agents and, in turn, these agents’ actions, as everyday manifestations of the organization, constitute it (Taylor, 2006, pp. 139-140).

Although the metaphor lacks a theory of ideology, it informs a rhetorical sensibility toward organizational action. Taylor and Van Every (2000) suggest, “communication as a site of study furnishes the surface on which organizations can be read—made sense out of” (p. x). This notion implicitly provides sense-making agency to both the organizational critic and the stakeholder interested in the functions, meanings, and conditions that produce and distribute the effects of contentious deal-making processes. As such, the text is only semi-stable and always open-ended. Therefore, a precarious moment between text and the conversation offers the possibility of organizing a new, emergent organization.

The metaphor of organization-as-complex organizing complicates the more generic, traditional definition of the study of organizational identity as taking interest in that which is distinctive, central, and enduring about a social collectivity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Although
management scholars sometimes situate identity as a set of beliefs or cognitive state shared by managers about these three qualities (S.G. Scott & Lane, 2000), a rhetorical organizational perspective is inclined to be more oriented toward symbol systems, relational processes, and contingent meanings. Identity certainly suggests a loosely enduring quality, but it does so through identification and repetitious ritualization of patterns of organization. From a rhetorical perspective, a particular organizational identity is only distinctive and central insofar as it is symbolically thematized and secured as such. This is to say that identity frames must be understood as linguistically conditioned and must be reconfigured over time to make sense of new cues and situated meanings (Weick, 1995).

Organizational Identification

The concept of identification is useful for making sense of organizational identity as a generative source of stakeholder cooperation. Identification has easily been the central concept in the study of collective identity in organizational communication. The foundations of its study in the subdiscipline go back to considerations of the utility of Burkean theory in what was at the time an almost atheoretical area of study. Theory-based exploration in the realm of identification began with Tompkins, Fisher, Infante, and Tompkins’ (1975) introduction of several Burkean concepts, including mystery, hierarchy, and alienation. The study called for future work through Burke that would quantitatively extract these concepts as measurable organizational communication variables present in the perceptions and attitudes of organizational members. Cheney (1982) followed this call and developed the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ), which several studies validated, applied, and adapted in the subsequent decades (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Bullis & Bach, 1991; Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; Cheney, 1983a; Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). Additional work has critiqued the OIQ scale in light of research on

In an essay that implicitly defends the utility and accuracy of Cheney’s (1982) measure, Cheney and Tompkins (1987) attempted to settle emerging conceptual difficulty between identification and commitment by suggesting, “the ongoing process of identity development involves, among other things, the selection and management of particular commitments—commitments which are made toward actual or potential targets/loci of identification” (p. 7). Thus, commitment falls within the larger domain of the identity-identification dialectic and is a more limited concept. The creation of identification allows the individual to make and hold social commitments. Indeed, identification may very well be present without commitment, for approval does not necessitate active engagement. A given identification descriptively names the situation as well as its agents in relation to it, and directs actions accordingly.

Cheney and Tompkins (1987) also take on the distinction between identity and identification, conceptualizing identity as both a process (identifying) and a product (identification). Organizations do not have identities as much as they perform and reproduce them through shared interests in conversation. As such, the organization is never an independently acting subject or an entity of an essential meaning. Identification is a process that “tells its own story” and a product that teaches how it is manifested in the form of decisions, behaviors, and commitments (p. 6). Identification is “the appropriation of identity” by an individual or collective—an identity that is a maintained negotiation between an organization and its audiences. In turn, identity is “what is commonly taken as representative of a person or group” as indicated by the meanings of common discourse (p. 5, emphasis in original).

More recently, C.R. Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) have extended Cheney and
Tompkins’ (1987) conceptualization of identification and identity through the lens of structurational theory. Their structurational theory of identification (STI) promotes the concepts of duality and multiplicity in the study of organizational identification. Duality, a term extracted from Giddens (1984, 1991), refers to organizational structures, albeit rules and resources, as both the media and outcomes of communicative processes composing a system. Identity is therefore a structural source and not equivalent with identification insofar as individuals use identity to construct expressions. From this perspective, identities are properties of social structures—structures that are both medium and outcome. Identities are both sources of and targets for identifications. In contrast, identification illustrates attachment to one or more identity structures and in doing so, draws upon and builds upon individual and collective structures. Identification reconfigures and (re)produces the definition of sensible organizational activity. Identification is purely a communicative process that implicates, shapes, expresses, and transforms identity structures during coordinated organizational participation. As such, organizational identification is interactive in that it is a combination of top-down and bottom-up shaping of identity structures.

Cheney has clearly been a central figure in the social scientific measurement and theoretical formulation of organizational identification. He has also played a major role in the development of rhetorical study and critical-interpretive study of the phenomenon. For the purpose of the present study, Cheney’s (1983b) path-breaking rhetorical application of Burke’s concept of identification in organizational communication stands as a major contribution. His analysis is the first in organizational communication studies to suggest that the dialectical practice of segregation and congregation captured by Burkean identification offers a foundation for the study of organizational rhetoric. The proposition is significant because it helped pave the
way for a new understanding of organizations as collective speakers.

Importantly, Cheney (1983b) recognizes the potential of Burke’s proposition that individuals respond to divisions in society by inventing connection or a series of “corporate identities” in which “The so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s’” (Burke, 1938, pp. 243-244). Public organizational communication operates through rhetoric of identification insofar as it is mediated by cooperation between the organization and the individual. This basis of a rhetorical epistemology is significant because it suggests the organization communicates to move audiences toward particular identities and goals while attempting to shape its particular image as a rhetor (Cheney, Christensen, Conrad, & Lair, 2004). Cheney (1983b) not only invokes this discursive frame, but also demonstrates its utility through a study of actual organizational texts. Using in-house employee newsletters, his analysis explicates textual variations and instances of three rhetorical strategies of organizational identification in Burkean theory. The first of these strategies is the “common ground” technique, or suggesting the organization has the same values as the targeted individual. The second strategy is “anti-thesis” or indicating that the organization and the individual have the same enemy. Third, is the strategy of the “assumed or transcendent ‘we,’” or the subtle by potent use of “we” language suggesting that parties are cooperatively working together (pp. 148-149). These strategies collectively underscore the “us-them” distinctions held up by the persuasive power of organizational symbols. Organizations foster and secure identification with stakeholders through their varying ability to constitute and maintain identity distinctions, as well as satisfaction individuals get from them. Identity differences established by identification play a major part in materializing targets of organizational motives and future action.

Although Cheney’s (1983b) study is limited insofar as it risks reducing organizational
rhetoric of identification to a set of rational-humanist techniques intentionally used to secure a particular end, it makes contributions that remain overlooked in the study of identification today. For example, Cheney directs attention the prominent place of the bureaucratic capitalist structure and thus, ideological power, in Burke’s theory of the creation and maintenance of human cooperation. He points out that in Burke’s theory, bureaucratic force is never pure and thus the rhetoric of organizations is always an open-ended call for contingent and agonistic negotiation. Burke (1950/1969) notes, “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division” and “there is a wavering line between identification and division” that complicates social life (pp. 22, 45).

Since Cheney’s (1983b) study, organizational rhetoric has become a viable tradition in organizational communication studies (Cheney, 2005; Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). Putnam and Fairhurst’s (2001) typology of discourse analysis approaches in organizational communication studies define rhetorical analysis as focusing on “the text of a discourse and the ways that meaning intertwines with function to shape messages and message responses” (p. 102) Other studies that began to appear in leading communication journals at approximately the same time as Cheney’s (1983b) important work certainly aided the initial development of this type of analysis. One of these studies is Crable and Vibbert’s (1983) assessment of Mobil Oil’s corporate epideictic in times of distress. Epideictic rhetoric refers to the projection of shared values in a way that defines and re-unifies a community. Similarly, Foss (1984) showed the untapped potential of Burkean theory by offering an analysis of Chrysler’s rhetorical redemption during its government bailout. Foss argued Chrysler was able to reinvent itself through strategies for unloading what Burke identifies as guilt in its corporate advertisements. In addition to creating the conditions for other work that I review in this chapter, these early studies made
possible studies of organizational *apologia* (formal public apology) (Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Rowland & Jerome, 2004), issues and crisis management (Kuhn, 1997; Vibbert & Bostdorff, 1993), rhetoric of the new economy (Cheney, 2004; Cloud, 2001; Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005; Gorden & Nevins, 1987), organizational rhetoric as competitive advantage (Sillince, 2006), as well as the relationship between organizational rhetoric and a democratically robust public sphere (Sproule, 1989, 1990).

Despite this summary of important developments in organizational rhetoric, organizational communication scholarship has progressively moved farther away from the concept of organizational identification’s Burkean roots. Although Burke’s influence continues to be explicitly recognized in identification scholarship, the focus of much of the literature has been on internally directed discourse and its affect on micro-level affairs of employees. More specifically, the dominant concern has been organizational members’ responses to or interactions with managerial rhetoric and multiple targets of identification such as organizational leadership, professional occupation, technology, geographically dispersed organizational structures, and change-related process. The internal focus of Cheney’s (1983b) original study probably fostered this trend and helps account for the lack of existing research on organizational identification with external publics. In addition to quantitative studies (Scott, 1997, 1999; Scott & Fontenot, 1999), interpretive studies (Bullis, 1991; Gossett, 2002; Morgan, Reynolds, Nelson, Johanningmeier, Griffin, & Andrade, 2004; Russo, 1998) and multi-methodological analyses (Bullis & Bach, 1989a, 1989b; Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Scott, Connaughton, Diaz-saenz, Maguire, Ramirez, 1999; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002) have emerged in the study of organizational identification. Several of these studies include rhetorical, ethical, and control related components. As I will show in the upcoming pages, these studies offer important insights
into the present rhetorical study of identification. Organizational rhetoric’s boundary-spanning concern for the interdependence of internal and external affairs makes it naturally concerned with scholarship across multiple directions and structural levels (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006).

In addition to Cheney’s (1982, 1983b) early development of the OIQ scale and a rhetorical approach to organizational identification, he contributed to a critical-interpretive approach as well. Tompkins and Cheney (1983a) developed an influential account analysis interviewing approach. This method is an attempt to extract the function and impact of identification in organizational members’ accounts of daily decisions at work. In light of observations on identification’s role as a powerful managerial steering device for everyday action, Tompkins and Cheney (1985) later developed a theory of “concertive control” (p. 183), which integrates Burke’s view of identification with perspectives on decision-making and control in organizational theory. The theory of concertive control moves beyond Cheney’s (1983b) limited perspective of identification-as-strategy by situating identification within a larger conceptual framework of organizational control. The theory suggests the process of identification results in profound internalization of the organization’s preferred value premises, which unfolds in two stages. First, members internalize factual and value premises articulated by the organization. Second, consideration of the organization’s interests above other parties’ interest becomes a natural and preferred premise for decision-making. Identifications operate to control decision making in two ways: First identification functions by “guiding us to ‘see’ certain ‘problems’ and alternatives.” Second, identification operates by “biasing our choices toward the alternatives tied to the most salient identifications. Across both stages, identification narrows members’ “span of attention” (p. 194).
Importantly, Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) theory also links identification to what Edwards (1981, p. 161) articulates as four types of organizational control. First, in “simple control,” administrators “exercise power openly, arbitrarily, and personally (or through hired bosses who act in much the same way.” As a remnant of the 19th century, this control function continues today, in small enterprises in competitive industries. However, it has been corrected through two more impersonal and predictable types. Second, “technical control” is “embedded in the physical technology of the firm” in a way that paces and directs the labor process. This type of control emerged as a response to worker unrest with simple control’s often tyrannical bosses who had the power to set rates, hire, fire, discipline, and assign tasks, sometimes to meet their own interests. In a technical control system, a governing technology transcends the power of a boss and a single workplace. The ratio of supervisors to workers increased, violating classical management principles of span of control and direct supervision. The efficiency of this approach reached its limit when workers realized a small group of dissenters could shut down the entire line. The successful labor strikes of the 1930s represent this realization.

At this time, firms began seeking less obtrusive ways to activate control. Worker resistance and apathy, as well as the growth of the firm’s size (and layers of supervisors) through capital concentration, has gradually led to “bureaucratic control,” which is sometimes blended with other strategies. Bureaucratic control, the third organizational control type, is “embedded in the social organization, in the contrived social relations of production at point of production.” Rule of law as passed down by supervisors replaces the rule of supervisor command. Edwards (1981) observes, “Work activities became defined and directed by a set of work criteria: the rules, procedures, and expectations governing particular jobs” (p. 172). In bureaucratic control, even evaluation is done by a set of criteria understood by the employee. The content of such
criteria may value compliance with rules as much as productivity. With regard to motivation, bureaucratic firms have emphasized the positive incentives of compliance and reliability rather than negative ones. The organizational approach of promoting loyalty and career advancement from within has fostered identification and helped break up union building attempts. This type of control is building up boredom, frustration, discontent, and dissatisfaction, promoting workers’ interest in industrial democracy.

Tompkins and Cheney (1985) add concertive control as a fourth category of organizational control. Concertive control is “postbureaucratic” in the sense that it stresses teamwork and coordination at all stages production, as well as flexibility, innovation, flat hierarchy, blurring line of staff distinctions, intense face-to-face interactions concerning non-routines, and relative value consensus. This type of control emerged most visibly in the small and moderately sized technological work units of Silicon Valley, which brought together highly sophisticated employee skills. Employees, particularly managers are allowed great deal of freedom while adhering to a set of core values. Through concertive control, “explicit rules and regulations are largely replaced by the common understanding of values, objectives, and means of achievement, allow with a deep appreciation for the organization’s ‘mission’” (p. 184).

Organizations depend on loose and tight properties because members can be depended on to act within a range of alternatives tied to implicit but highly motivating core values. This type of control may actually increase the amount of control in the system.

Simon’s (1976) well-known study stands one of the founding contributions for Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) theory. Simon outlines a theory of unobtrusive control that suggests action is guided by decisional premises rather than what he views as the more crude concept of the role. Choice or decision is the process of drawing conclusions from premises. Since many premises
combine is a typical decision, the premise the smallest unit of analysis. Organizational objectives supply value or ethical premises and factual premises of decisions. Organizations control members by controlling decisions. Even when not empirically validated, members perceive premises guiding decisions as true or probably true, and members are impressed by them. Identification is, of course, one way that organizations influence decisional premises. According to Tompkins and Cheney, there are at least three factors that play into member acceptance of decisional premises. First, members’ considerations of autonomy, some of which is already given up to participate in organizations, come into play. Second, members consider the fairness of incentives for them to accept the premises. Third, the receiver’s perception of legitimate power or significant authority is marked by acceptance of and compliance with the character of an authoritative directive.

Drawing from Burke (1966), Tompkins and Cheney (1985) posit that identification immediately shapes the decision process by constituting the situation: “The organization member is limited at the outset to alternatives tied to his/her identifications; other options will simply not come into view, and therefore will not be considered” (p. 194). Thus, identification helps formulate alternatives before selection of a particular choice. Members may seek out decisional premises or these premises can be installed in them. When the installation of major organizational premises leads to members’ recognition of extensions in the form of minor premises, organizational enthymeme becomes a powerful device for directing preferred decisions. Methodologically, Tompkins and Cheney make an important contribution. They propose that decisional premises can be identified in discourse leading to agreement and can be shown to drive out personal premises. Moreover, discourse analysis allows for explication of organizationally preferred decision premises and the targets of identification. Finally, Tompkins
and Cheney recommend using the four types of organizational control as frames for examining microphenomena such as superior-subordinate communication in larger contexts.

Since the emergence of Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) theory of concertive control, several studies have engaged the intriguing link between identification and control. The first cluster of investigations targeted the geographically dispersed structure of the U.S. Forest Service, a major branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Bullis, 1991; Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999). These studies supplemented a rich interdisciplinary literature that had emerged since Kaufman’s (1960) classic descriptive study of the Service. The USFS has received serious attention from organizational scholars and has been widely recognized as an excellent organization. Scholars cite the study as an exemplar of cultural control and value consensus. In multiple creative ways, the USFS has historically encouraged identification. For example, it has used symbols such as Smokey the Bear, the badge, the uniform, the belt buckle, the USFS emblem, and the common design of ranger stations. Kaufman’s study of the USFS has been important in the study of identification because it shows that even though geographically dispersed structures have myriad forces promoting fragmentation at the local levels, members can be induced to strongly identify with the whole of the organization and its services. Indeed, the USFS as reported by Kaufman has been referred to as effective centralized control and in a decentralized system (Berman, 1982; Bromiley & Marcus, 1987; Szafran, 1981; Weick, 1987).

After the 1970s, despite continuing reference to Kaufman’s (1960) study, a clear change appeared in the USFS system of control. This change had to do with its response to court decisions and heated public scrutiny of its environmental practices, especially clearcutting—the act of harvesting all the trees on a tract before replanting. After these events, the USFS lost its ability to act as if it alone knew what was best for the public. Previously, decisions had been
made based on shared values or decision premises, among members. The public began to
demand the right to contest these decisions rather than to accept them as expertise in action
(Bullis & Tompkins, 1989). Realizing these changes through their familiarity with USFS history,
organizational communication scholars went to work. Bullis and Tompkins’ (1989) conducted
the first of multiple organizational communication studies on the USFS. They designed a
multi-methodological study consisting of interviews and surveys, and took interest in how the so-
called new USFS practiced organizational control. The study simultaneously set out to test
Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) theory of unobtrusive control. Bullis and Tompkins (1989) were
interested in the theory’s claims that (1) unobtrusive control is associated with organizational
identification and (2) members who report higher identification privilege organizational decision
premises in their decisions. In two ways, Bullis and Tompkins gave serious methodological
attention to decision premises. First, they examined the history of the organization to reveal its
core premises. Second, “relevant leaders were asked what premises were ‘correct’” (p. 299). For
accounts, Bullis and Tompkins directly went to “the best sources of information and
organizationally-preferred decision premises” (p. 292). They found that the USFS had turned
away from unobtrusive, concertive control and toward obtrusive, bureaucratic governance. That
is, the organization’s system of governance shifted toward external control and away from
internal, concertive control through identification. Identification appeared most strongly in line
officers rather than staff officers, with “bureaucracy has taken on a life of its own, often stifling
work “on the ground” (p. 301).

Bullis and Tompkins (1989) found that since Kaufman’s (1960) study, the USFS has
turned toward bureaucratic and technical control, and away from cultural control. The Forest
Service Manual, which provides specific orders for decisions that come up on a regular basis,
tripled in size. More rigid criteria were found in order for judging whether a lower officer made the “right” decision as articulated by the Manual. Efforts devoted to planning of less routine had also increased. Plans became more comprehensive, detailed, and long-range in nature, involving more balancing of multiple resources and uses for larger areas of land. A computer system integrates these plans with multi-level budgets. The USFS now heavily relies on written communication such as memorandums, oral communication, and reports exchanged through new communication technology. Clearances and dispute resolutions, which refers to a trend of higher levels not only approving lower level decisions but now taking part in their formulation, making for less deviation. Overhead services now come from higher levels and more diverse expertise has also become available. A stronger focus on efficiency resulted in a higher concentration of expertise at higher offices. The number of local branches significantly declined as they have been consolidated and experienced improved communication. Higher-level officers conduct regular inspections and sanctions as well as frequent employee transfer discourages potential deviations. Appeals from the public, resulting from advanced public involvement and its move from friendly or neutral to occasionally hostile, play a greater role in decisional accounts. Compared to Kaufman’s (1960) observations, Bullis and Tompkins (1989) witnessed a stronger network of communication practices for detecting and discouraging deviations. The USFS’s strong culture of the past made the organization less flexible and adaptive to environmental changes. As a result of a homogeneous culture, recognition of organizational threats at one level was stifled at other levels and opposition was not heard. Among the limits of the concertive control, then, are the loss of autonomous critical thinking and even loss of human feeling.

DiSanza and Bullis (1999) also used a multi-methodological approach to gauge identification strategies in a USFS in-house employee newsletter as well as responses to the
The newsletter was chosen because it represents one viable means the organization has used to link together widely-dispersed structure’s nodal points. DiSanza and Bullis use Cheney’s (1983b) general categories of identification strategies, within which may be various tactical forms of appeals, to assess the textual content of the newsletter. In addition, they use a focused interview method with employees at thirteen offices affiliated with three national forests to collect responses to this content and their reading of it. These qualitative responses were then compared to survey questionnaire responses. The study added four additional techniques or categories to Cheney’s (1983b) common ground strategy. Although Cheney’s scheme included recognition of individual contributions as a common ground tactic, the USFS newsletter made frequent references work group and team contributions. DiSanza and Bullis (1999) label this technique “global recognition of individuals” (p. 360). Since the newsletter also praised members for contributions to or awards from groups outside the organization, they added the additional tactic of “recognition of individual(s) contributions outside the organization.” The study located a third new tactic, “invitation,” to represent the newsletter’s invitation to members to connect themselves to the organization by becoming part of a group or contacting organizational members. Representing a fourth new tactic, the newsletter emphasized the USFS’s “dedication to competence and accomplishment by bragging about the completion of various projects” (p. 361). This tactic of “bragging” denotes “boasts about the amount of time, money, or effort a group puts into a task” (p. 386). Strikingly, the common ground tactic appeared in eighty seven percent of all identification inducements in the USFS newsletter, in a total of seven different forms.

Qualitative interview responses fell into several categories. First, “nonidentification” responses were those that did not indicate feelings of either identification or disidentification—
they did not touch on the reader’s organizational identity (p. 368). Second, in contrast, “textual identification” responses were based on the newsletter content and manifested positive identification for readers (p. 370). This was evident as readers linked themselves to the organization through depictions in the newsletter. Some employees reported feelings of membership and commitment by identifying with individuals depicted in the newsletter and similarly, how the organization was depicted. Additionally, some employees identified with the organization through displayed affection for unifying symbols in the newsletter such as a Smokey the Bear ice sculpture. Third, “contextual identification” responses referred to narratives of remembrance of past experiences with a person depicted, places visited or worked at, similarities with people depicted, and agreeing with decision premises given in the newsletter (p. 375).

Most employees did identify with the newsletter, but a smaller group did disidentify. “Disidentification” occurred in three ways. First, personal experiences sometimes contradicted a newsletter story, thus clashing with the organization’s decision premises. Second, some readers had negative perceptions of the newsletter, suggesting it was a waste of resources better save for projects on the ground. Others labeled it as “propaganda,” “silly,” or “corny,” or included “not real world” portrayals (p. 382). Others noted that the newsletter’s inclusion of letters sent by citizen-customers left out negative ones, which may be useful for improving services. Finally, some readers felt that the newsletter slighted their own local forest. Here, not enough recognition of the local unit’s accomplishments hurt identification with the larger organization. DiSanza and Bullis (1999) verify the categories Cheney (1983b) identified in his rhetorical study of ten corporate newsletters. Like Cheney (1983b), they found frequent use of recognition tactics—particularly the “assumed we” strategy, which as Cheney notes, gains its power through its
subtlety. Unlike Cheney, who found several examples of antithesis across all exampled newsletters, this study found only one. As they note, Cheney’s finding that the federal government was portrayed as the enemy of commerce is less than likely to be found in federal government organization discourse. They suspected the agency’s focus on “multiple use” made it inappropriate to create enemies out of any particular user group. These groups are similar to customers in a for-profit enterprise (p. 387).

DiSanza and Bullis (1999) move beyond the suggestion that the formation of identification through texts demands more than two-way interaction. That is, their study points to the importance of active engagement in “micromoments when the inducements were encountered” and suggest that if such moments are not engaged, “the organization was engaged in a monologue” (p. 388). They stress past experience as a major conditional factor and observe that, “by reading the stories and using past experience as a guide for interpreting the stories, members who provided contextual responses invented reasons for identifying with the organization” (p. 390). Thus, there may be “a strong urge to identify” that precedes a particular persuasive message (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989, p. 304). DiSanza and Bullis (1999) posit that personal experience with the organization constitutes the most important interpretive context through which organizational persuasions are read. If the organization is unsuccessful at shaping members’ early identification, past experiences may be negative. If past experiences contradict current persuasive efforts, past experiences will guide interpretation, and organizational efforts are likely to be dismissed.

Investigations of identification beyond those of the USFS also prove insightful in the realm of geographical dispersion of organizational identification. One of these is a book-length case study by Cheney (1991), which concerns the management of multiple identities in the 1983
U.S. Catholic bishop’s pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*. Cheney situates his investigation as one of the “development of a historic ‘corporate’ document” (p. 164). He integrates several types of texts into his analysis, including drafts of the pastoral letter, several other major Catholic documents, articles from the popular religious press, audiocassettes from the National Catholic Education (NCE) association, content from a Catholic news service, and in-depth interview transcripts conducted with principle actors, critics, and observers. Cheney found that the bishops’ letter effectively challenged the Reagan administration’s advancement of a nuclear arms race and its general defense policy, and did so through advocacy of the Church’s mission of global peacemaking and good will. The bishops felt a need to create a rhetoric that seemed to reflect diverse interests of groups within the very large church and at the same time, appeal to outsiders. They responded by styling themselves as citizens rather than political and defined their audiences as those who had or could have a direct impact on the political process. At the center of the response was the management of hierarchy and community. Defining community proved among the most significant rhetorical challenges because a vision of community as purely open communication invited contestation to institutional authority and hierarchical identity.

Cheney’s (1991) book is important in several ways. First, it engages a contemporary controversy of international, sociopolitical, and historical significance in a subdiscipline that continues to give relatively limited attention such affairs. Second, Cheney offers a way of thinking about and conducting analysis of organizational rhetoric through the integration of multiple texts to provide a case history and inform a thorough case account. Third, Cheney’s conceptual approach is novel. He notes, “As a guiding concept, the management of multiple identities can be used to understand and evaluate all types of organizations and rhetorical situations” (p. 21). The study shows that this approach is particular useful for exploring
organizational rhetoric in an international setting and as affecting multiple and potentially conflicting public groups.

Another boundary-spanning investigation that is particularly relevant to the present study’s concerns is that by Papa, Auwal, and Singhal (1997). Like the USFS studies, Papa et al. offer a multi-methodological case study that examines an organization widely recognized for its excellence. In this case, the organization is the (non-profit) Grameen (rural) Bank in Bangladesh, a grassroots development organization that offers low interest loans to the impoverished, engages a heavily studied and celebrated organization. Papa et al.’s critical-interpretive inquiry is guided by the question of whether concertive control through identification is a worthwhile experience in light of empowerment ends. In a study of what they dub “interpersonal identification,” they find that the Grameen Bank’s concertive control system offers significant economic empowerment as well as a high level of personal gratification to bank employees. Grameen is a flat-structure organization, an organizational form that decentralizes power and coordination, offering significant flexibility and autonomy to their members. Consistent with past research, Papa et al. find that the Grameen Bank manifests several power-related paradoxes Stohl and Cheney (2001) describe at work in the contemporary systems of organizational participation. One of the more notably paradoxes for the purpose of the present study is the paradox of consensus, which refers to achievement of group cohesion at the expense of the vitality of oppositional and marginalized voices. Papa et al. also extract the paradox of control—gaining control in a way that actually gives it up—and the paradox of sociality—the practice of democracy only to have another aspect of participation in one’s life (in this case, members’ personal lives) withdrawn.

Invoking Foucault’s (1979) concept of discipline, which approaches control as inclusive
of unobtrusive surveillance as a dominant mode of enforcing the internalization of cultural norms and expectations, Papa et al. (1997) pinpoint several forms of regulation in the Bank’s smooth-running operation. Employees use formal and informal pressure mechanisms upon one another to enforce performance expectations. Worker performance is also strictly and formally assessed on a daily basis through a system of surveillance. Grameen also uses motivational programs as well as post-entry employee training programs. The motivational programs describe the humanitarian purpose of the organization as well as the recognition it has received from international agencies, scholars, and entrepreneurs. Papa et al. note their similarity to the USFS training offered to U.S. Forest Rangers. As Kaufman (1960) observed, one of the purposes of training is to instill “the importance of the Forest Service job to the welfare and strength of the nation” (p. 173). Importantly, Papa et al. (1997) observe that, “the theory of concertive control provided us with a framework for understanding how member identification with value-based appeals masks the mechanisms of discipline” (p. 228). Members identified with only the positive aspects of discipline without perceiving or expressing the negative ones. Papa et al. conclude that even though control mechanisms employed by Grameen in some cases are almost inhumane, members did not perceive the presence of disciplinary techniques. Identification and a general sense of empowerment throughout the organization were so strongly and meaningfully experienced that organizational control is not questioned. Indeed, the organization is all that is available for its benefactors to claim.

When the subdiscipline of organizational communication studies slowly began opening its doors to diverse methods in the early 1980s, the study of identification began to significantly expand. However, where the diversity has begun to show most clearly is not in a move beyond the micro-level of interaction and toward the public sphere, but rather to further complicate the
micro-level by bringing in new theories and new post-positivistic measurements. Scott and associates (Scott, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2007; Scott, Connaughton, Diaz-saenz, Maguire, Ramirez, 1999; Scott & Fontenot, 1999; Scott & Timmerman, 1999) have in the last decade have developed a leading project in the study of organizational identification, has played a significant role in implicitly directing identification scholars’ attention away from rhetorical and interpretive approaches. Scott (2007) bemoans the fact that organizational communication studies has not led the field of communication studies toward the integration of communication and Social Identity Theory (SIT), a decidedly psychological theory focused on identity categories and judgment at the level of the individual (Hogg & Terry, 2001). He cites the area’s Burkean orientation toward identification as one reason for its slow expansion into other theories of identity. Scott observes that although DeWine and Daniels (1993) first called upon organizational communication scholars to make greater use of SIT well over a decade ago, few have responded. For Scott (1997, 2007), pursuing a bridge between SIT and identification offers an opportunity for social scientific project of measurement and assessment of identification and identity. He advocates “better methods” for engaging identification, which he suggests includes more diverse methods as well as “more communication-based measures of organizational identification itself” (p. 134).

Despite this trend toward a post-positivistic conception of multiple identifications, recent studies by Boyd (2004) and Lair et al. (2005) signal the continuing presence and potential of organizational rhetoric as a useful path to identification. By appropriating the “principle of the oxymoron,” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 324), Boyd (2004) brings a new Burkean concept into the study of organizational rhetoric of identification. Boyd’s study, which emerges from a public relations and corporate advocacy perspective, refers to the principle of the oxymoron as “identification with an advanced status, a transcendent identification that does not necessarily
reflect current reality” (p. 49). The oxymoron is that one identifies with something that may not be real and moreover, the powerful uplift the identification brings makes the person reflect on her relative smallness and imperfection. One moves from the depths of oppression and victimization toward empowerment and freedom through appeals not to a common enemy but rather to shared values. Boyd applies the principle to the failure of an early 1990s R.J. Reynolds corporate advocacy campaign and finds that improper use of the principle brings forth symbolic and material implications for organizational success. The campaign, which rallied against government regulation of cigarette advertising, mistakenly assumed its audiences would perceive its common ground identification pitch as genuine and credible, and identify with its democratic struggle toward freedom from “big government” (p. 60). Instead, audiences identified with life (preventing children from smoking) over freedom and in light of recent state lawsuits, did not see the organization’s moves as legitimate. Boyd shows that the principle only works in a unidirectional, vertical fashion rather than mere dissociation or negative appeals.

By showing not how organizational rhetoric of identification fails in persuasion but how it may persuade only to fail in the realm of ethics, Lair et al. (2005) offer an interesting contrast to Boyd’s (2004) study. A common concern between these studies, however, is the artificiality of messages and the ethics of the rhetor’s motives. Lair et al. (2005) examine the popular business rhetoric of personal branding, which takes the form of a self-help management movement stressing self-packaging and self-commodification as today’s path to success in the employment market. The study is an explication of the overt rhetorical strategies and appeals put forth by the movement, as well as its ethical implications. Lair et al note, “we are concerned here by the potential identifications invited by personal branding discourse and the limitations of those identifications should they be adopted by audiences uncritically.” Such a direction clearly offers
an important and largely unexplored path for future work. Arguably, of equal importance is that Lair et al. are able to recover from problematic distinctions they seem to make in this excerpt. They do this by recognizing that identification may have “long-range and potentially damaging implications, unanticipated and unacknowledged by its proponents and practitioners…devoid of opportunities for self-reflection and improvement” (p. 310, emphasis in original). Here, the authors show awareness to the notion that lines drawn between potential and actual as well as adopted and invited identifications would be blurred through situated action in light of the notion that many identifications from semi-consciously.

Three major themes emerge from this review of relevant literature. First, there has been a lasting concern for micro-level processes of organizational identification, particularly in self-reported and consciously enacted decisional premises inside organizational cultures. Second, creative and rigorous methods have been developed, adapted, critiqued and deployed to complicate the study of identification. Self-report survey questionnaires and interviews have gauged conscious identifications and studies of concertive control have done well to recognize the need for inferring political communicative functions from actual organizational messages. These studies illustrate Deetz’s (1982) suggestion that what is in need of interpretation in organizational texts is “that which is public but unseen” (p. 261). Third, despite advancements in epistemological alternatives to the dominant social science tradition of organizational communication studies, the twenty-five year life of identification scholarship continues to favor what Redding (1979, 1996) calls managerial bias in organizational communication scholarship. All three of these trends emerged at the earliest stage of development of the literature with Tompkins and Cheney’s (1983a) innovative account analysis interview approach. Together, these three themes and their supporting body of literature suggest the study of organizational
identification now stands as one of the most developed literatures within the subdiscipline of organizational communication. In the path the new research in the area, the dominant motive behind this work must not be taken lightly and the presence of methodological diversity should not be taken as evidence of a new deliberative spirit of philosophical and epistemological exchange. The field of communication studies’ current impulse to triangulate methods must be approached with suspicion in light of historical preservation of a knowledge hierarchy.

Perhaps few areas of study across the field exemplify this warning as well as that of organizational identification. As illustrated, even in those studies that have moved away from quantification, managerial bias appears in their instrumental logic and however explicit standards for evaluating identification studies. The winning concern, if not the only concern, remains the extent of influence that identification with a particular target has on premise-guided action that is administratively significant. On this point, Gossett (2002) notes past studies have largely examined the role of identification in the decisions of professional, full-time organizational employees with the ability to have substantive impact on organizational ends. These decisions are articulated as worthwhile largely because they directly pertain to the effectiveness and efficiency the organization’s pursuit of its goals. Gossett does well to note the importance of future studies on entry-level employees, manual laborers, customer service workers, and temporary workers. She adds that organizations and jobs in which identification is not presumed as important are certainly worthwhile topics of study for they may disrupt now normalized conceptions of identification. Gossett offers an additional call for research questioning the organizational desirability of identification as well as study of attempts to prevent it.

Although almost exclusively with regard to internal affairs, the literature has made it clear that identification is not purely positive in its effects and that it always works within a
larger system of control that must wrangle competing motives. This competition is brought forth by the everyday need to most effectively and efficiently obtain individual and collective ends. Since contradictions inevitably emerge as people simultaneously work with and against each other from various positions of experience and knowledge, organizations are highly prone to close of communication and conceal information. It is, of course, for this reason that recent work in organizational communication studies has begun to question the symbolic and material costs, the control function, and the desirability of organizational identification (Gossett, 2002; Lair et al., 2005; Larson & Tompkins, 2005; Papa et al., 1997; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Alongside the emergence of a post-positivist project of measuring multiple identifications, study of the ethics of organizational identification is gaining some new attention as well.

Linking Identification to Emerging Directions in Organizational Ethics

The case studies that I present in the next two chapters further extend the study of organizational identification into organizational ethics—an area of inquiry that is currently gaining momentum (Conrad, 2003a, 2003b; Haas & Deetz, 2000; Meisenbach, 2006; May, Roper, & Cheney, 2007; Schwarze, 2003a, 2003b; Seeger, 1997). Still, few studies consider a broadly applicable theoretical basis for coming to terms with organizational ethics (Anderson & Englehardt, 2000; Deetz, 1995; Meisenbach, 2006). Most recently, Meisenbach (2006) has advocated Habermas’s (1990, 1996) discourse ethics as a moral framework for organizational communication. Meisenbach proposes a five-step procedure for judging organizational communication as ethical. The model is grounded on the notion that a standard of rational argumentation places all participants on equal ground. Moreover, the model suggests that ethic of moral consensus rests on the assumptions that (1) everyone with a stake in the decision has the opportunity to participate in it and (2) any given decision must not affect equal standing
in the community. Yet it might be argued that both of these conditions are idealistic because stakes are seldom equal, voices are seldom given equal weight, and there is no reason to privilege rational argument over other forms of rhetoric at work in public deliberation (Bohman, 2004; Roper, 2005).

Despite these refutations, Meisenbach (2006) makes an important contribution because she is able to show that a Habermasian approach is useful for gauging the presence of certain ethical conditions in decision-making as precursors for decisional quality. Some of these include the truthfulness and sincerity of a claim as well as determining if those parties affected by a given decision were able to adequately participate in it through a process of dialogic consensus. Beyond this contribution, Meisenbach risks straying too far from a dominant tendency in past organizational ethics research that she initially observes: that of beginning and ending with prescriptions for ethical action in a particular situation. Although I am in agreement on the need for new metatheoretical frameworks, there is space for disagreement on where they are most needed. What I am willing to agree with Meisenbach on is her observation that research on ethics has been heavily tied to the tradition of internal study of micro-issues, thus signaling the continuing and problematic presence of the container metaphor of organizations. Some of these existing areas of internal ethics study include whistle-blowing (Bok, 1982), workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006), sexual harassment (Clair, 1993), the role of an ethical consultant (Lippitt, 1982; Redding, 1979), and the identity of the public relations practitioner (Thomsen, 1998). Meisenbach (2006) rightly directs attention to the importance of ethics beyond individual action within the organization as well as the relatively limited organizational ethics research concerning public communication (Edgett, 2002; Seeger, 1997). Finally, recognizing the need for a sustained effort, Meisenbach iterates that despite recent attention to the phenomenon of
corporate social responsibility (Conrad, 2003a, 2003b; Townsley & Stohl, 2003; May et al.,
2007), there is a correlation between media attention to corporate scandals and scholarly interest
in issues of ethics (May & Zorn, 2003).

for expansion beyond internal organizational ethics phenomena such as sexual harassment and
workplace bullying. Johnson et al. support further research on outsider or external
whistle-blowing and the different dynamics they deal with compared to whistle-blowers
traditionally seen as only inclusive of internal employee. By whistle-blowing, they refer to “an
individual with some level of unique or inside knowledge using public communication to bring
attention to some perceived wrongdoing or problem” (p. 353, Johannesen, 1996; Seeger, 1997;
Vinten, 1994). Johnson et al. also urge future research on interorganizational alliances in whistle-
blowing attempts and draw attention to the importance of gaining credibility in effective whistle-
blowing. Following Nilsen (1974), they advocate examination of the role of an “ethic of
significant choice” (p. 1) in decisions to whistle-blow. An ethic of significant choice refers to the
democratic value of free access to information to make the best possible choices on significant
issues. Significant choice marks a condition of alternative possibilities, possible implications,
and adequate information to protect and enhance personal well-being. Study toward critical
publicity, which falls within the larger realm of democratic dissent and is sometimes performed
through whistle-blowing episodes, follows the general direction for inquiry that Johnson et al.

Taking identification into the realm of ethics in the organization-society relationship is
important because among other reasons, ethics provide a sense of empowered personal control,
voice, opportunity, and influence relatively free from external constraints (Albrecht, 1988; Chiles
& Zorn, 1995; Deetz, 1994). When individuals feel they can reach desired ends, they look to identify ways to secure those ends (Papa et al., 1997). By extension, the ethics of identification has much to do with the degree of mutual coordination, albeit the presence of openness and equality, in empowerment organizing. Transactional balance of power must be at the center of ethical judgment and quality organizational decision-making (Deetz, 1992).

An examination of the rhetoric and ethics of organizational identification is in order. The review of literature that I have constructed has allowed for locating the present study within a specific intellectual enterprise. I approach subsequent chapters as meditations on the organizational rhetoricians’ ethical role in identification and control. Like Tompkins and Cheney (1985), I argue that, “Wherever we find organizations restricting the flow of communication…there is room for the social-rhetorical critic. And the critic-as-advocate is charged with bringing about (or at least encouraging) an awareness of the possibilities” (p. 206, emphasis in original). Toward this project, I have made an initial argument that rhetorical organizational scholarship offers a viable alternative to organizational communication scholars’ ongoing absorption in internal, micro-level interaction. Studies locating the presence of identification in control and others questioning the ethics, resistance to, and practicality of identification in particular situations offer incentive for coming to terms with the political functions of identification in the public sphere.

The remainder of this chapter concerns the specific assumptions of the approach to rhetorical organizational criticism that I practice in subsequent chapters. First, I begin with a discussion on how organizational communication scholars’ lasting interest in the function of identification in decisional premises informs further consideration of identification’s constitutive power among external stakeholders. Second, having linked this constitutive power to Burkean
theory, I propose that rhetorical organizational criticism offers a viable mode for engaging the rhetoric and ethics of identification as constitutive practices. In doing so, I foreground some of Burke’s guiding assumptions and interests that inform the case studies I present. As an alternative to examining identification in self-reported decisional premises of internal organizational members, the organizational rhetorician is equipped to assess the ethics of the invention and circulation of invitations to identification. Here, Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) integration of Burke’s rhetoric of identification into their theory of concertive control is helpful because it establishes that members partially generate discourse leading to agreement from a larger, rhetorical constituted and socially constraining formation. The organizational rhetorician’s job, then, is to account for the invention of persuasive identity frames, which occurs when identifying appeals and various levels of social structure intersect (C.R. Scott et al., 1998). Although Tompkins and Cheney (1985) recommend using the four types of organizational control as frames for examining micro-phenomena such as superior-subordinate communication, the organizational rhetorician stands to make a useful contribution by examining them in macro-phenomena. As I show in the second case study that I present, control functions in public decisional accounts and motives of control fosters particular moves toward identification with particular stakeholder groups. Inquiry into the role of identification in concertive control can be extended into the installation of the enthymeme into the consciousness of public culture.

Charland (1987) observes that, “audiences are constituted as subjects through a process of identification…through a series of ideological effects arising from the narrative structure of constitutive rhetoric” (p. 147). Rhetorical premises circulate and accumulate into available interpretive frames as well as subject positions within an existing social structure. Complicating the pre-existence of identifications that may conflict with new ones, is the notion that
achievement of organizational identification is easier to foster in homogeneous societies than it is in heterogeneous ones (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). In my first case study, I show that organizations, too, are participants in enthymematic systems of identification and control, for as participants in industry, government, and cultural formations of discourse they draw upon major premises to recognize and promote extensions in the form of minor premises.

My overarching point in this discussion is that the organizational rhetorician is in an ideal position to invert Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) proposition that since many premises combine is a typical decision, the premise is the smallest unit of analysis. The premise can just as easily be resituated as the earliest unit to emerge and by extension to external audiences, the largest unit of analysis in the development of identification. By drawing attention to the invention and articulation of semi-conscious interpretive premises, the focus shifts toward Burkean theory’s constitutive (“us-them”) dialectics (Charland, 1987). A constitutive organizational rhetoric maps the movement of symbolism as a shifting structure for invention and understanding of individual and organizational identities. Following Burke, constitutive rhetoric does not assume audiences are open to be persuaded, nor does it deny that some identifications are installed and despite real affects, go unnoticed. Thus, constitutive rhetoric is a type of symbolic preconditioning. Charland (1987) states of constitutive rhetoric, “persuasive discourse requires a subject-as-audience who is already constituted with an identity and with an ideology” because “identity defines the inherent motives and interests that a rhetoric can appeal to” (p. 134). As such, the organization rhetorically attaches itself to bodies. The critic’s intervention in the process of rhetorical constitution is therefore preventative of consequences of control related to public awareness. It is only through the initial creation of a structure that a collective difference in motives and action can be persuasively put to work in particular stakeholder group. An organization is able to
publicly and semi-consciously guide future action across a potential wide-ranging social field not by instrumental, one-shot attempts at persuasion, but rather by repetitious, ritualized practices that naturalize a symbolic structure as real.

General Assumptions of a Burkean Framework

Rueckert (1994), a leading Burke scholar, observes that many Kenneth Burkes appear across Burke’s corpus of published work, which spans approximately three quarters of century (Burke, 1913/2007b). Burke’s work is deeply interdisciplinary, with some of his important works falling within the category of literary criticism and others concerning major issues in rhetoric, sociology, and philosophy. Burke’s oeuvre constitutes a complete analytic system on social being that has been interpreted and appropriated in various ways across almost every subdiscipline in communication studies, as well as several other academic fields. In the study of Burke’s system, the existence of multiple interpretations should not be taken in negative terms, for some misreadings, adaptations, and strategic deviations have proven productive for the advancement of new ideas.

Through my review of the literature, I have shown that although organizational communication scholars have taken Burke seriously and used his work productively, the subdiscipline has under-appropriated and implicitly underestimated his system’s theoretical complexity. There is a need to move beyond the notion of micro-moments of identifying with a single message to the constitution of the conditions for those moments. This means conducting further inquiry into the notion that identification sometimes controls stakeholders’ span of attention and masks its effects as individuals participate in it. In a global and technological age of organizational rhetoric in which it is increasingly difficult to locate a single source for any given message, a top-down, bottom-up, or organization-as-container approach to identification
no longer suffices. Organizational communication studies stands to benefit from the development of a Burkean map of today’s new social field of complex social, temporal, and spatial dimensions. Burke’s interest in repetition of identifications as the constitutive background of the structure of everyday life allows for consideration of organizational rhetoric as a post-humanist articulation. In organizational communication studies’ past use of identification, it is clear that it has not drawn upon the definition of rhetoric Burke offers in the following statement:

And often we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily enforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill.

(Burke, 1950/1969, p. 26, emphasis in original)

As such, identification organizes reality though a participatory function that includes but moves beyond persuasion into the cultural production of purpose and meaning.

This definition of rhetoric envisions constitutive articulation rather than humanist persuasion. From a Burkean perspective, organizational rhetoric as articulation means it is multidirectional, intertextual, semi-conscious, and embedded dramatism (Anderson & Prelli, 2001; Slack, 2006). Burke’s distinctly post-humanist bent is perhaps captured in his proposition that persuasion means leading the audience to identify itself with the speaker’s interests “even when their interests are not joined, if [it] assumes they are, or is persuaded to believe so” (p. 20). In this excerpt, one finds the very communicative glue that keeps a hierarchical society in order. Burkean identification is organizational because it generates and occupies society’s inherently hierarchical structure, which creates mystery, segregation, alienation, and correspondingly, the need for connection, belonging, transcendence, and self-definition. These are needs and realities that often integrate into the mundane performative structure of everyday life, which becomes
normalized and thus persuasive in hidden ways. Charland (1987) echoes this Burkean assumption when he suggests,

Constitutive rhetoric is part of the background of social life. It is always there, usually implicitly, and sometimes explicitly articulated. It is more than a set of commonplaces, but is the con-text, the pre-rhetoric that is necessary to any successful interpretation. (p. 147)

Moreover, constitutive rhetoric should not be considered value-neutral. Bygrave (1993) shows that for Burke, “our actions and specifically our ‘symbolic actions’ can be shown to rest on grounds which are themselves discovered to be acts” (p. 112). Thus, ideology always presents itself as a temporally prior ground of social order. Burke’s corpus is constantly in search of this ground. Burke’s stance on ideology, like any other term, is that there is no reason to privilege any single term (B. Crable, 1998). However, Burke’s theory is overtly political and is especially so in his early to mid-career writing. This is an important point because it reminds the Burkan critic that what is commonly referred to as the public sphere—a space of freedom where citizens can join free of coercion to openly and rationally deliberate on issues that affect them (Habermas, 1989)—is for Burke closer to a political sphere. The “us-them” distinction at the core of human affairs means that conflict and ideology cannot be evacuated and must be ethically re-channeled. This view of the public sphere is akin to the well-known political theories of Schmidt (1932/1976) and Mouffe (1993, 2000, 2005).

The Burkan assumption that identification is constitutional and participatory is central to Burke’s larger theoretical system known as dramatism. Communication scholars have widely applied the basic structure of dramatism known as the dramatistic pentad in the analysis of texts. The pentad is a cluster analytic model that explicates a text’s symbolically manifested motives
found in the emphasis and interplay between an act (what was done), scene (where it was done), agent (who did it), agency (how that person or collectivity did it), and purpose (for what reason the person/collectivity did it). The pentad supplies a metavocabulary in the form of a comprehensive narrative structure for encompassing any given social situation. According to Burke (1945/1969), those elements emphasized are suggestive of the speaker’s viewpoint. Two elements in combination constitute a strategy (p. 59).

As noted in the previous chapter, with the fall of neo-Aristotelianism in rhetorical studies came attempts to replace it with other grand narrative systems—one being a humanist reading of Burkean dramatism. Although Burkean theory is used more loosely and abductively in this study, the pentad is not fruitless in application to organizational rhetoric. As Smudde (2004) points out, the pentad allows for understanding public relations practice as encompassing literal dramas with all the corresponding elements. Communication professionals do more than tell a story; they do so through emphasis on particular dramatic dimensions that Burke identifies. These dimensions invite a particular kind of public interaction and show that these professionals are in the business of producing symbols that are more or less humane in their functions.

The notion of identification as constitutional and participatory is also deeply tied to Burke’s concept of *symbolic form*, which captures the dramatic structure of the experience of texts and has also been given significant attention by communication scholars. In popular society, form is a condition of public expectation for narrative drama appeal and increasingly, entertainment. Form actualizes through logically complementary qualities such as good and evil, as well progress and destruction. The form of a text can itself function as a piece of rhetorical persuasion. Burke (1931/1968) defines form as “the creation of an appetite in the mind of an auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite” (p. 31). By encouraging a target to fill in the
blanks using an implied suggestion, form may very well secure identification by enthymematic argument. This tendency manifests in Western popular culture’s quite predictable structure of gratification made possible by the seductive flow of simple, pure, and romantic visions, as well as uplifting, perfect endings. This is not only the case in public texts sponsored and widely circulated by organizations, but in everyday interpersonal interactions at the micro-level as well.

Popular dramatic expectations, like the Western impulse toward individualist motives, are most often functions of what Burke (1931/1968) calls “progressive form,” which actualizes a particular “way of experiencing” (pp. 124, 143). First, repetition functions as “consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises”—that is, saying the same thing in different ways (p. 125). Second, syllogism directs attention to step-by-step sequences of events that necessarily lead to a conclusion. Third, qualitative progression happens when one quality or state of mind created by an event more subtly prepares an audience for another, corresponding quality. Fourth, minor forms are literary devices such as metaphor, disclosure, and paradox that can themselves be treated as events or incidents. Fifth, conventional form refers to anterior expectations for a text that may come before rather than during the experience of that text.

Like other Burkean concepts, form is potentially useful for the organizational rhetorician because it highlights that texts are experienced through literal movement or turning of their parts. Form is fundamental to a public’s ability to identify with and be persuaded by an orator because it allows an audience to feel as it were not merely receiving a message but creatively participating in the rhetor’s assertion (Burke, 1950/1969). In other words, progressive form invites an audience’s completion of a collective narrative. Since form is expectation-based and expectations are normalized into the performance of everyday life, it plays a powerful role in semi-consciously securing organizational identifications.
To understand the location of form in Burke’s system it is helpful to distinguish the term from his concepts of the grammar and rhetoric of motives (Burke, 1945/1969, 1950/1969). Allow me to first offer treatment to the former. By grammar, Burke refers to an emergent system of consistently appearing elements, themes, and forms of messages and practices that are extracted from a text by the critic. Burke’s ultimate grammar is outlined by the dramatistic pentad, which encompasses key elements in any social situation. A (rather than the) grammar is similar to what poststructuralists call a discourse. A grammar consists of intersubjective meanings, terms, and statements that if articulated in a coherent and responsible way, help the public make sense of the text, texts like it, and its relationship with other texts. The notion of a grammar does not necessarily refer to intended strategies of a text’s author, but rather to items found useful by the critic for coming to terms with the text and its orientation to the world. Grammars may function through devices that direct attention away from the function as well as its motives, hiding or deflecting attention from them. Ideological movement is traceable in grammar through functions of contradiction, concealment, and distortion of difference.

Rhetoric, by contrast, is movement, arrangement, and function of grammatical elements. A rhetoric describes an attitude, motive, or politics of symbolic action, which includes the mode of criticism inventively practiced to locate them. In other words, rhetoric is an invitation to identification that is never is full sight. Rhetoric offers judgment on how representations and the arrangement of grammatical elements consciously or unconsciously move people to act, think, or believe differently. As I have shown, Burkean rhetoric is always dialectically constitutional. The critic’s movements locate traces of logics for action and connections between them across levels of abstraction, texts, language choices, social structures, individuals, contexts, and functions. Burkean rhetoric articulates a method by which an entity expresses identity and persuades
audiences. Since the critic is inherently involved in explication of this method, rhetoric is the movement and arrangement of the entity’s vocabulary as identified by the critic through hermeneutic interaction with the text. This interaction demands not only self-reflection, but self-suspicion about the ways in which one inherently reproduces operating assumptions about agency, knowledge, and criticism. In addition to rigorous self-reflection, understanding a phenomenon rhetorically includes coming to terms with it as negotiable, protean, contingent, and only available for partial and indirect explication through case study.

With some of Burke’s major concepts in order, I am in good position to locate Burke within the larger field of social philosophers and critics. Foremost, Burke is a democratic critic who recognizes the linguistic limits of human interpretation, the ever-present desire to perfect one terminology, and the need for a counter-statement for any given iteration. The democratic moment of the counter-statement refers not to heresies or orthodoxies, which will always be trading places, nor to “either an eagerness for the fray or a sense of defeat,” but to “whatever the minority view happens to be at a given time” and the matching of an opposite toward the equilibrium of “indeterminate wavering” (Burke, 1931/1968, p. vii). Thus, Burke is a democratic theorist and is skeptical of any attempt to offer a final and universally correct way of speaking. Using one of his own terms, Burke’s approach to the truth of a situation is not relativism nor universal, but “roundabout” insofar as it is moderately pluralist insofar as it denies caricatures but privileges no perspective a priori.

With similar modesty, Burke stands somewhere between modernism and postmodernism (Nelson, 1989). What some critics see as “relativism” in Burke is mistaken for his advocacy of “perspective by incongruity,” metaphor, contingency, and interpretive humility. Burke suggests that shifting through multiple perspectives does not absorb objective reality into relativity, but
“on the contrary, it is by the approach through a variety of perspectives that we establish a character’s reality.” (Burke, 1945/1969, p. 504). Burke anticipates poststructuralism by suggesting that language is a system of motives that has already done much of the thinking for us (Nelson, 1989). Thus, Burke moves away from the Aristotelian rhetoric-as-tool approach that suggests individuals can choose their terms and have complete consciousness over what to do with them. Here, “there is a kind of ‘unconscious’ that is sheerly a reflection of whatever terminology one happens to be using” (Burke, 1966, p. 71). Alternatively, the Burkean system is in some ways a grand narrative, but its breadth and nonconformity also previews of the post-disciplinary attitude of cultural studies. In Burke’s (1966) realization that humans can never really step outside of language and experience because they co-constitute a necessarily persuasive “terministic screen” that always shades and limits perspective, he also realizes the importance of trying (p. 45).

Especially revealing of Burke’s (1935/1984) intellectual location as social philosopher and critic is his well-known proposition that, “All Living Things are Critics” (p. 5, emphasis in original). The phrase is telling of Burke’s democratic epistemology as well as his ontology. Burke means all living beings are interpreters (Lentricchia, 1983) and understands human nature is different from the nature of other animals because of an ability to interpret our interpretations or reflect upon the process of reading (Burke, 1935/1984). Humans always deal with interpretations of reality rather than reality itself—even stimuli and motives are linguistic products. Lentricchia (1983) states of Burke’s theory, “what all conflicting interpretations aim at—a shared desire whose object, the full realization of freedom in the stream if actual historical life, may be called ‘transcendental’.” The only existing universal human essence is the principle of freedom or the human impulse to make sense of an always-present hermeneutic situation he
calls the “Babel of orientations.” Since human desire for freedom is ahistorical, no single historical view of the world needs to be accepted as the underlying basis of a series of universal causes (Burke, 1935/1984, p. 228). Through this perspective, Burke prevents any locally engendered reading of human symbolism from taking privilege over others in the explanation of history. The principle of freedom gives agency to the human motive of interpretation and positions it as synonymous with the origin of a history that is an arena of confusion and constraint. The ultimate goal of criticism, then, is the recovery of freedom for social life through the narrative process motored by the principle of freedom (Lentricchia, 1983). To summarize, since Burke assumes freedom to be the sole human essence, that no one perspective should be privileged, and that interpretation is the origin of history, self-understanding, and direction, the critic’s work is productive.

Burke scholars regularly point out that he situates man [sic] as the “symbol-using animal,” but tend to leave incomplete his stance on the nature of human symbolism by failing to include the rest of this statement. Additionally, the statement is seldom placed within the context of related statements Burke makes in his body of work. Burke’s (1966, p. 5) extension is as follows: “But can we bring ourselves to realize just what that formula implies, just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by ‘reality’ has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems?” “Man” is also, Burke states in the same book, “the symbol-made” (p. 63), “symbol-making,” and “symbol-misusing” animal (p. 16, emphasis in original). Burke explains that his project is to “take care of those who would define man as the tool-using animal (homo faber, homo economicus, and such)” (p. 13, emphasis in original). Defining human nature this way “would not be taking into account the ‘priority’ of its own nature as a definition.” Humans are uniquely capable of definition and “second level” ability—or reflexivity—that ties symbols
to tools, suggesting the former’s ability to conceptualize the latter. The *motion* performed by most animals is not reflexive *symbolic action* that humans have the capacity to perform (pp. 13-14).

Perhaps Burke’s post-humanist perspective on human agency is most clear in his statement, “the driver drives the car, but the traffic drives the driver” (Burke, 1974, p. 311). In other words, humans are granted certain choice, but are driven by historical participation in a linguistic situation. According to Burke, “overly naturalistic views conceal from us the full scope of language as motive” (Burke, 1961, p. 10). Burke’s view on the human condition is also made clear in his notion of the “representative anecdote” by which he suggests, “Even if any terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must functions also as a *deflection* of reality” (Burke, 1966, p. 45). Here, Burke reveals how orientations help locate a situation and adopt a role in relation to it through an attitudinally chosen vocabulary. For Burke, any theory of rhetoric is an inherently persuasive device because it provides a way of living.

The representative anecdote is a warning about the danger of epistemological hubris under the limits of interpretation. Knowledge production is best understood as endless engagement and a patient process of becoming an expert, rather than an accumulation of outcomes. Knowledge fits well with what Burke calls “innovation,” which refers not to something new but “simply an emphasis to which the contemporary public is not accustomed.” (Burke, 1931/1968, p. 110). Thus, Burke allows for engaging the possibility of reforming public culture from within through perspective and its possible reconfiguration of human motives toward less violent and more cooperative interests. In Burke’s view of history, the grounds, substance, or rules underlying the conversation are always subject to struggle and debate (Crable,
Criticism functions toward productive social change insofar as it opens the conversation for alternative modes of understanding and communicating. A Burkean perspective, then, stresses the productivity of division as dialectical tension as much as it does the possibility of cooperation. The blurry and shifting boundaries between them are for the critic to judge. In turn, the critic’s argument is for audiences to evaluate. A Burkean telos for criticism of organizational rhetoric is a productive project of respect and openness for disorganization as an ethical path to self-reflective decision-making.

What Burke (1937/1984) classifies as “comic ambivalence” is the only socially responsible and balanced orientation for managing situations in which society must deal with the extremes of dogma, injustice, anguish, death, and disease. Burke describes one of these situations, war, as a “disease of cooperation” that must be purified into a less violent form of the raw human impulse of adversarial action. The possibility of cooperation is often troubled by epically heroic and the tragic “frame(s) of ‘acceptance,’” which are raw extremes that prevent everyday action and criticism through comic ambivalence that allows the critic to “take the bitter with the sweet” and fend off pride’s dangers (pp. 42-43). A comic frame is preferable because it disrupts identification with tragically and epically heroic targets. Comedy is foremost an ethic of pluralistic humility that directs the critic toward agonistic cooperation rather than transcendence through debunking. The necessary application of humility is retained only when identification with a godlike hero is leads to realization that one is not the hero. Rather than pointing to crime as the tragedy does, the comic points to foolishness. However, like the tragedy, the comic warns against the dangers of pride. Comic criticism is about keeping the sparring going and preventing social injustices by expanding meditative powers and vocabularies for dealing with such threats. Criticism requires freedom to flourish against dogmatism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and
isolationism, insistence on conformity and orthodoxy, extreme ambition, and many other phenomena that block humanistic and healthy ends. Criticism fosters self-awareness and allows us to “temper the extreme rawness of our ambitions” and reflect on “the ways we are the victims of our own and one another’s magic” (Burke, 1945/1969, p. 305).

Each of the next two chapters elaborates on the rhetorical approach that I foreground in this section. The approach builds on the assumption that the comic frame’s favorite targets are present in the causes, processes, and effects of organizational communication. Organizational rhetoric, often working through semi-conscious identifications, is one of society’s primary means for shaping the power structure and everyday experiences of it. Especially in situations in which identification and consensus threaten to obscure recognition of damaging choices and conditions, a comic frame promotes ethical distinctions by locating division. One way of employing the comic frame to work in organizational analysis is by shifting between observational interests, theory, and organizational texts (Gaonkar, 1989). Allow me to briefly outline this approach.

First, I look to thicken and refine my organizing concepts, organizational communication theory, and the current understanding of USDA practices in the post-9/11 war on terror. Second, I want to show how the concepts can be used to advance a broader project of Burkean analysis than has traditionally been practiced in organizational communication studies. Rather than advancing a replicable methodological procedure, I construct a conceptually driven argument through an act of critical invention (Gaonkar, 1989; Jasinski, 2001; McGee, 1990, 1997; Schwarze, 2003b). My orientation to rhetorical analysis includes but moves beyond a traditional logic of discovery into the production and critique of knowledge. I approach invention as inherently informed by human choices of what to study, what to say, why to say to it, and to whom to say it (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994). The mediating Burkean concepts that I
activate are rhetorical variations of the theme of organizational identification reviewed in this chapter. The loose conceptual process I employ process is one of abduction, or a tedious back and forth tacking movement between the text and the concept or concepts that are being investigated simultaneously (Jasinski, 2001).

This reading process unfolded as follows. I began with an initial interest in the phenomenon of U.S. agriculture’s response to 9/11 and how it contributed to public identification with the Bush administration’s war on terror. This interest led to me to an engagement with a series of texts not limited to those of the USDA. After inductively and repetitively finding that the majority of these texts directed me back to the USDA’s controlling authority, I gave the organization and its history more careful attention. I began abductively moving back and forth between my interest in post-9/11 changes in public administration, national identity, and how these changes might be understood rhetorically. As I continued to explore USDA texts as well as the literature on organizational communication, I began to realize that particularly complex programs of identification were at work. Identification seemed to present a potentially potent theoretical framework for coming to terms with my texts. By re-reading these texts and exploring Burkean theory more deeply, I began to find that identification was working in different ways through delicate use of grammar and symbolic form.

The process of testing the organizing force of various concepts that co-compise Burke’s (1950/1969) theory of identification followed the loosely guided post-humanist approach supported in the introductory chapter (Gaonkar, 1997). This flexibility allowed for bringing in concepts from organizational communication to extend emerging insights. This Burlean conceptual approach is consistent with a post-Aristotelian reversal in contemporary rhetorical analysis observed by Leff (1980). My approach emphasizes critical practice and concentrates on
particulars. Moreover, my approach moves from a mode of evaluative measurement against a parochial standard of humanist rationality to a discourse of perception and an attitude of openness toward the wide range of immeasurable human experiences.

Summary

I opened this chapter by situating organizational identity as public communication that productively disrupts the subdiscipline of organizational communication’s traditional focus on internal micro-level affairs. I then gave careful treatment to past studies that developed Burke’s (1950/1969) concept of identification as an organization’s symbolic appropriation and negotiation of identity. In particular, I gave thorough attention to studies directly implicated in three primary areas of interest in the present study: identification, ethics, and control in the organization’s relationship with stakeholder publics. I then considered what a rhetorical study of the intersection of these areas stands to contribute to the subdiscipline. After establishing a rationale for inquiry, I established the general assumptions of Burkean theory as well as the hermeneutic process by which I employ it in my case studies of the USDA. With necessary the groundwork in order, I am now ready to offer two case studies and an extended rhetorical analysis of the USDA’s war on terror identities.
CHAPTER II:  
POLITICS OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE OXYMORON:  
THE USDA’S RHETORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

“And identification ranges from the politician who, addressing an audience of farmers, says, ‘I was a farm boy myself,’ through the mysteries of social status, to the mystic’s devote identification with the source of all being.”
(Burke, 1950/1969, p. xiv)

The popular trend of organizations projecting their identities through morally correct discourses emerges from the perception of an increasing need to justify their existence in terms of current sociopolitical values and norms (Christensen & Cheney, 2000; Dahler-Larsen, 1997). By providing an opportunity for organizations to identify with a transcendental national cause, the Bush administration’s response to 9/11 amplified this trend. In the wake of 9/11, corporations fostered identification with the public by including the American flag in their advertisements (Dickinson, 2005; Heller, 2005) and entire industries volunteered their services in the name of patriotic philanthropy (J.B. Scott, 2006). As a result, the previous decade’s neoliberal promise of the market as a benevolent realm of personal freedom, democracy, and earthly salvation (Aune, 2001; Holmer Nadesan, 1999, 2001) has become a national security imperative.

In the midst of these rhetorical developments, the Bush administration put extensive effort into gaining international allies and global public support, and it did so by linking 9/11 to universal human interests. Communication studies have demonstrated that explicit use of a Manichean dualism of America the “good” and superior versus an “evil” and inferior Other has provided the dominant moral frame for post-9/11 war identification (e.g., Cloud, 2004; Ivie,
2005; Zagacki, 2007). This chapter reveals the use of an alternative frame in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq that does not escape ethical problems of the war’s good versus evil dualism. The frame, which I suggest is explained by Burke’s (1950/1969) “principle of the oxymoron” (p. 324), identifies the U.S. with victims of evil in the Middle East through a transcendent rhetoric of benevolent consensus.

This study also demonstrates that diverse and unlikely advocates have helped the Bush administration rhetorically constitute the war on terror and the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. I offer the case of the USDA as a strong example. Through an examination of the executive cabinet agency’s global advocacy as organizational rhetoric, I inquire into Bush’s promise that America would bravely and vigilantly work to build a better life for the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq long troubled by violence and totalitarianism. The process through which this promise has translated into narration of the reconstruction effort provides an important direction for inquiry because this narration shapes how global publics practice citizenship in relation to American foreign policy.

The primary role for organizational rhetoric as global advocacy in the public experience of the war on terror became especially clear immediately after the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Hiebert (2003) offered an early assessment in *Public Relations Review* by noting,

Techniques of public relations and propaganda were an essential part of the 2003 war in Iraq. The government framed the issues, story line, and slogans to serve its purposes. Embedding journalists, staging showing briefings, emphasizing visual and electronic media, and making good television out of it were all important to fighting the war. (p. 243)

Today, this war continues to rely on the invention and periodic adjustment of dominant
moral frames that define this historical juncture for public audiences. Among the material effects include the accumulation of thousands of American deaths as well as the abusive exercise of state power through several cases of corporate-state wrongdoing (Hartnett & Stengrim, 2006). Through the case of the USDA, I argue that moral framing of the reconstruction effort must not be taken for granted as exempt from critical public deliberation. The agency illustrates that strategic organizational control of the public’s understanding of the reconstruction is ethically and democratically contestable. Past studies suggest that moral frames act as identity armor, foster organizational legitimacy, and stall policy reform by articulating the organization’s actions as useful and socially responsible (Boyd, 2000, 2002; Brummer, 1991; Deetz, 1992; Epstein, 1972; Vibbert & Bostdorff, 1993). My investigation also builds on work that questions the desirability, paradoxes, and ethics of identification in light of its ability to suppress critical self-reflection and flexibility (Gossett, 2002; Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005; Larson & Tompkins, 2005; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1997; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

Another impetus for the present study is that organizational scholars must continue to come to terms with the reality that management of collective identity extends beyond the corporate world to government, religious denominations, and even cities (Christensen & Cheney, 2000). Few studies (Conrad, 2003; Schwarze, 2003a, 2003b) have argued against investigation of corporations over government agencies. As a result, organizational communication scholars risk implicitly validating the legitimacy of the latter. Following Schwarze (2003a), I propose that a project on the ethics of organizations would do well to examine organizational and interorganizational alliance through a spirit of critical publicity, which Habermas (1989) originally described as the public’s reclamation of the state’s exercise of power through exposure and debate. This direction aids in the invention of controversy, productively testing the
legitimacy of organizational practices affecting the public’s best interest (Bonewits Feldner & Meisenbach, 2007; Boyd, 2000, 2002), and exposes concealment made possible by “institutional inertia” (Schwarze, 2003b, p. 315).

Through the principle of the oxymoron, I take this avenue by examining rhetoric and ethics of organizational identification practiced by the USDA, which President Lincoln named the “People’s Department” when it came into being during the Civil War. I take seriously the increasingly blurry boundary between internal and external organizational communication as well as the reality that the organization is a constitution of multiple identifications (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). I show that the war on terror offers a rich context for assessing the embeddedness of organizational rhetoric in a sociopolitical environment. The USDA illustrates one instance of how today’s government organizations function as what Taylor (2005) calls “narrative devices,” “significant symbols,” or “portals” in war history’s casts of figures, events, institutions, and technologies (p. 133, emphasis in original). As Taylor (1993, 2002) demonstrates, the importance of studying organizations in the war context is that they play an important role in how war gets discussed.

This case study directs attention to the ways in which the People’s Department has attached a new organizational identity to one of its two post-9/11 roles. The first role, which I do not attempt to cover here, has been to act as a primary defender against the domestic threat of bioterrorism at and within U.S. borders. The second role, and my subject of interest here, has entailed working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of Defense (DOD) in what the Bush administration describes as “humanitarian aid and relief,” “reconstruction,” “food security,” and “technical assistance” to Afghanistan and Iraq.¹ I organize

¹ For examples of the use of these terms and a historical account of U.S. civilian and infrastructure assistance programs, see the Foreign Agricultural Service (n.d.).
my investigation of this latter role into five parts. First, I briefly describe the conditions used to warrant U.S. agricultural intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11. Second, in order to extend the present understanding of the situational forms and functions of Burke’s (1950/1969) principle of the oxymoron in organizational rhetoric, I offer an initial conceptualization. Third, I describe the organizational texts in which I trace the principle of the oxymoron as well as the rhetorical approach that I follow. Fourth, I construct and assess the USDA’s articulation of the principle of the oxymoron in its narration of the agricultural reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, I examine the contributions of the study for understanding the complexity of organizational rhetoric of identification.

The Rationale for U.S. Agricultural Intervention in the Middle East

After October 2001, bombing raids in Afghanistan further displaced the already starving and disillusioned population of one of the world’s poorest countries. Before 9/11, the United Nations (UN) estimated that almost four million people in the country lacked sufficient food, a condition commonly known to government and human rights groups as food insecurity. Half of children showed signs of stunted growth. Scurvy alone accounted for seven percent of deaths among children and adults (Ahmad, 2002; Assefa, Jabarkhil, Salama, & Spiegel, 2001). After 9/11, the U.S. moved from using the concept of food security as a purely domestic term for deciding peoples’ eligibility for welfare and food assistance to using a broader international definition articulated by the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This definition situates food security as a right, which many interpret as encompassing reliable access, adequate quantity and quality, as well as ready availability, cultural acceptability, and safety (Nestle, 2003).

Since 9/11, the U.N. has raised its estimate of food insecure people in Afghanistan to six
million and humanitarian aid has become even more difficult to deliver. Additionally, the
country’s Deputy Minister for Energy and Water recently stated that 70 percent of Afghan
citizens are without safe drinking water. A recent drought and three decades of war are
contributing factors (AFP, 2008). In part to alleviate food shortages and human displacement
caused by bombings, the U.S. began to airdrop food packets. Unlike other food assistance
projects in Afghanistan and Iraq, the distribution of these packages labeled “Food gifts from the
people of the United States of America” (Perlez, 2001) received mainstream media coverage.
Moreover, the drops were repeatedly cited by President Bush (2001a, 2001b) as an example of
swift American-led progress in the region.

The food situation in Iraq continues to be dire as well. Since the American-led invasion in
March 2003, many citizens have abandoned their homes. The war crippled the country’s
agriculture industry, which stands as its leading employer and second largest contributor to
national income. Although agricultural employment supports approximately 27 percent of Iraq
citizens (USAID, 2007a), the war has led it to annually import almost $3 billion in food
commodities (USAID, 2007b). As this study will show, the country’s agrarian cultural heritage,
which goes back over 10,000 years and makes Iraq the birthplace of agriculture, has been
claimed by U.S. industrial agricultural interests. In 2003, weeks before President Bush publicly
proclaimed the end of major combat missions in Iraq and that, “the battle of Iraq is one victory in
the war on terror,” the USDA announced its plans and appointed leaders for agricultural
reconstruction in Iraq (Bush, 2003; OIIP, 2003). The agency efforts have largely been led by the
cabinet agency’s Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) branch. The USDA later appointed
employees to interagency Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) that would be part of the Bush
administration’s “embedded” defense strategy.
The USDA’s case for intervention in Iraq drew upon war displacement figures as well as the argument that Saddam Hussein’s regime neglected Iraq’s agricultural sector. In April 2007, the U.N. estimated that 1.2 million Iraq refugees were in Syria, another 750,000 were in Jordan, and 100,000 were in Egypt. The U.N. projected the number of displaced refugees still within Iraq’s borders at almost two million. Cumulatively, about 15 percent of Iraqis have left their homes. The rate of displacement is 50,000 Iraqis per month and most of the displacement has taken place in the last two years or so. The rate has significantly increased since the bombing of a Shiite holy site in February 2006, which led the country to the brink of civil war. The greatest losses in Iraq have been to the professional class, the group with the resources and talent that might have once rebuilt Iraq on its own terms (Rosen, 2007).

It is clear that especially since 9/11, citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq have been displaced without sufficient food or resources for agricultural production. Unfortunately, communication scholars of human rights and social justice have yet to give significant attention to the discourses of the reconstruction in these countries. Among several important questions: How has reconstruction been rhetorically constituted and with what implications for global politics? What is the ethical status of the rhetoric of reconstruction? There can be little doubt that in almost any case of American intervention, military or otherwise, power relations and vested interests have seldom favored all parties in a symmetrical fashion. The case that I present here is informs the collective scholarly effort needed to understanding the social dimension of the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. Before I begin to construct my argument, it is necessary that I conceptualize the principle of the oxymoron as well as the larger Burkean approach that organizes my rhetorical analysis.
The Principle of the Oxymoron

Gusfield (1989) observes that “Kenneth Burke is the master of the oxymoron, that figure of speech which unites incongruous or contradictory terms” in a single expression (p. 28). In this study, Burke’s (1950/1969) principle of the oxymoron provides a useful descriptor for transcendental rhetoric of organizational identification marking the USDA’s portrayal of function and identity in Afghanistan and Iraq. Drawing upon Burke’s noting of “administrative rhetoric,” Cheney (1983) originally described rhetoric of organizational identification as symbolic action that constitutes an ongoing cooperative negotiation between the individual and the organization. Through identification, the individual sees the world from the perspective of the organization.

Burke (1950/1969) writes, “Since the individual is to some extent distinct from his group, an identifying of him with the group is by the same token a transcending of his distinctness” (pp. 325-326). Moreover, “any improvement in social status is a kind of transcendence” (p. 193). However, through the principle of the oxymoron that Burke shows that some identifications promote a sense of identity transcendence with more immediate and powerful uplift than others. The principle of the oxymoron, which envisions an ultimate order, is an emancipating expression toward “awed and delighted identification.” Burke captures this point when he notes, “identification attains its ultimate expression in mysticism, the identification of the infinitely small with the infinitely powerful” (pp. 325-326). Through oxymoronic identification, then, an individual may identify with a leader’s excellence or as Boyd (2004) proposes, a nation’s might, which is actually not one’s own rather inconsequential agency. Burke (1950/1969) illustrates the principle through Christ, who is both “victimized and victorious” (p. 328). The believer must simultaneously identify with the burden of sin on the cross, which represents suffering and
imperfection, as well as the emancipation, hope, and transcendence of the resurrected body.

The principle of the oxymoron offers an organizing concept for constructing what Burke (1945/1969) calls a “representative anecdote” that necessarily selects, reflects, and deflects aspects of reality in order to manage it (pp. 59-61). As a rhetorical feature, the principle is not an inherent or predictable quality but rather appears as a recurring theme through rigorous interaction. Yet, regular appearance of the principle as well as supporting rhetorical tactics of identification that enact it may very well create loose rules and expectations for organizational action. In the case that I present, the principle serves as loose guide that inductively draws attention to tactics of organizational identification as well as other supporting concepts. Such an approach recognizes the complexity of rhetoric while attempting to make the critical object as intelligible as possible (Gaonkar, 1997).

Following Burke’s (1941/1973) dictum to “use all there is to use” with regard to evidentiary resources (p. 23), I bring together several types of organizational texts. My reading encompasses news releases (with photographs), transcripts of public presentations that USDA leaders have given before various groups, content from the official USDA website, a USDA News employee newsletter, USDA Radio News content, an agency staff memo, as well as print publications from mass media and activist organizations pertaining to U.S. agricultural intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11. Following Burke (1950/1969), I construct a text as a way of recognizing that persuasion often takes the form of a “general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily enforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill” (p. 26, emphasis in original).

Reynolds corporate advocacy campaign. The tobacco company attempted to solicit support from smokers and nonsmokers to fight government regulation of cigarette advertising potentially affecting children. His study reveals that R.J. Reynolds’ ads failed to articulate the principle according to its necessarily fixed and upward progression toward freedom. The campaign mistakenly assumed that smokers would identify with informed debate against the government as well as their own individual freedoms over children’s lives. The campaign’s appeal was equivalent to the expression “You think you’re free [from the government] but you’re not” (p. 66). On R.J. Reynolds’ failed use of the principle of the oxymoron to induce collective transcendence of oppression, Boyd notes that there is no immediate appeal to hope and identification. Furthermore, given the company’s ethically suspect history, the public did not presume that the company’s appeals to identification were genuine.

Unlike Boyd (2004), I do not set out to determine the persuasive effectiveness of the principle of the oxymoron on an intended audience. The case I offer is one in which audiences are only invited to vicariously extend and adapt what they may already believe. I show that for the government organization, the persuasive goal is most often the reproduction of the status quo and thus, public complicity. Given that some of the most powerful identifications are those occupying the unconscious in the background structure of everyday life (Burke, 1950/1969), there is good reason to study them. This study inquires into two intertwined dimensions of oxymoronic organizational rhetoric. First, I examine how the USDA, with varying degrees of intention across particular rhetorical actions, articulates the principle to constitute itself as well as its audiences, the war, American identity, and its relationships with them. Here, I take up the notion that stakeholder publics must know who they are and where they are before they can be persuaded (Charland, 1987). For organizational rhetors, this means performing definitional acts.
of “boundary specification” (Finet, 2001, p. 271) that call forth particular identity distinctions and possibilities for interpretive action. Second, I take interest in the ethics of the principle of the oxymoron, how the principle works politically, and how potential identifications and preferred identities interact with an ethic of democratic citizenship.

The USDA’s Participation in the Rhetoric of Reconstruction

In 2003, Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman took part in a tour of agricultural markets, nurseries, and university facilities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Uzbekistan. The USDA offers an account of tour in USDA News (2003), its bimonthly (internal) employee newsletter, as well as in an online news release (OC, 2003) that includes a captioned photo gallery of the Secretary and other government officials during their Middle East tour. Scholarly attention to the rhetoric of “organizational beings” (R. Crable, 1990, p. 118) such as the Secretary of Agriculture is important because such leaders become synecdoches, albeit a narrative symbols, who stand in for organizations, industries, nations, and entire sociopolitical situations. CEOs are not the only organizational leaders who become what Cheney (1992) calls the “embodiment of organizations” and “personalized faces or personae.” Increasingly, such individuals provide publicly appealing contrast to the impersonal bureaucratic image (pp. 177-178, emphasis in original).

Since the rhetorical technique of contrasting images has been a key strategy for legitimizing war abroad since 9/11 (Cloud, 2004), the presence of photographs in the USDA account of Veneman’s tour is significant. The globalization of these images through the Internet is one reminder that the war on terror is an organizational invention and that rhetoric gives it meaning by creating and managing social division and unity. In the case of the USDA, photographs help insert audiences into a vivid and seemingly captured world, metonymically reducing a complex situation to visual simplicity. This move is conducive to what Burke
suggests is one of the key purposes of the “truly national leader’s” rhetoric of identification—to prevent division of public attention. That is, “Every movement that would recruit its followers from among many discordant and divergent bands, must have some spot toward which all roads lead. Each man [sic] may get there in his own way” (pp. 192-193). Indeed, the pictures circulate a strategically ambiguous frame (Eisenberg, 1984) of “[s]ymbolic rebirth” through a “‘positive’ view of life” (p. 203). The pattern of this rebirth articulates oxymoronic uplift by visually animating the process of “converting...sufferings and handicaps into a good” (p. 194). The term our is flexible enough to promote the principle of the oxymoron’s rhetorically resonation with groups as diverse as American families of fallen soldiers as well as displaced Iraqi families who have suffered through the war.

The dominant theme of the images is a hero’s welcome, especially from women and children. Perhaps even if she was not the first female Secretary of Agriculture, it would be difficult to not notice the explicitly gendered message the USDA’s narration of her tour offers. Several images co-construct a feminine message of interdependence, intimacy, empowerment, and nonviolence. These photos also appeal to the woman’s traditional gender role. In one image, Veneman stands on platform with a small boy before a group of Afghan women, some them veiled. In others, the Secretary is shown holding and standing among smiling children. In additional photos, the Secretary greets a female university agriculture student and hands a loaf of bread to women and children at a local farmer’s market. Together, these photos are powerful because the narrative that they construct is arguably just as appropriate for Middle East cultural norms as it is internationally persuasive. I argue that they are persuasive through the tactic of identification with widely shared values (Cheney, 1983). By narrowing available interpretations of the images to organizationally preferred meanings through photo captions and other newsletter
text, the USDA makes these values explicit. In one instance, a photo caption states that Veneman and Afghan President Karzai “talked about [the] USDA’s many efforts and programs, especially school feeding for Afghan children.” It also notes, for instance, that in Afghanistan, Veneman announced the USDA’s intention to donate $5 million in agricultural commodities and that she unveiled the U.S.’s first Cochran Fellowship Program with Afghanistan, which provides eight women with short-term U.S.-based training in agricultural finance. Veneman’s own background is in this area.

Only months after Veneman’s tour, L. Paul Bremer III, administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, installed a comprehensive set of new laws in Iraq, known as the Iraq Orders (Chandrasekaran & Pincus, 2004). Announced in September 2003, the Orders called for the “full privatization of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign profits…the opening of Iraq’s banks to foreign control, national treatment for foreign companies and…the elimination of nearly all trade barriers.” With the exception of oil, the Orders reorganized the entire economy. “Iraq Order 81: Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety” (CPA, 2004) is one Order that has gained attention moderate attention from pundits and activists outside of mainstream mass media. In October 2004, Focus on the Global South and Against the Grains (GRAIN) jointly released a now more widely circulated report describing and critiquing Bremer’s “declaration of war against farmers.” The report argues that Order 81 forces Iraq’s farmers into dependency on foreign corporations and their genetically modified (biotechnological) seed. A revised report published in February 2005 states that the original report had generated a misunderstanding: Order 81 does not prohibit Iraqi farmers from using or saving traditional non-treated seeds, but it does prohibit them from saving and re-using seeds of new seeds of plant varieties registered under the law (Focus on the Global
Additional media and activist commentary on Order 81 from other outlets around the world soon followed (e.g., Gray, 2005; Smith, 2005). Among these, CorpWatch proclaimed, “What a break for U.S. corporations such as Monsanto” (Jackowski, 2005). The activist group makes reference to the fact that the same few large companies enforcing costs on patent and technology ownership rights in the U.S. and elsewhere would now control Iraqi agriculture as well. Corpwatch observes that Iraq has been home to the proud cultural and family practice of adapting seed to the land. The new seed, which is costly even for industrialized U.S. farms, promises increased productivity and promotes industrialized agriculture rather than farming on small family-owned plots.

The installation and concealment of the Iraq Orders marks the continuing absence of critical publicity in the war on terror. CorpWatch has observed that “The news story about the Iraqi Orders has been virtually ignored by the U.S. press” (Jackowski, 2005). I argue that the lack of widespread debate on their ethical implications marks the reality that a normative ideal of democracy will remain elusive until policies are in place to give all media-produced voices a fair hearing (Huspek, 2007). With the help of the agenda-setting function of the conservative wartime mainstream media in the U.S. (Boyd-Barrett, 2003; Kumar, 2006), corporate-state alliances continue to work in relative autonomy.

The USDA’s narration of agricultural reconstruction in the Middle East after Veneman’s tour aided concealment by offering an invitation to oxymoronic identification that could prevent the division of public attention. When Veneman returned from her tour she began weaving a personal tale of bearing witness to American heroism into her speeches. In fact, the very same day she arrived back in the U.S., she began her personalized war narration in a speech given by
satellite to the annual convention of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters. Veneman (2003a) gave a lengthy account of the tour, which constituted a clear message of advocacy. At one point in the speech, Veneman iterated, “I think it was most telling to see so many people in Afghanistan show so much appreciation for the American presence there for what Americans have done for them and the plea ‘please don't leave.’” Implicitly defining the U.S.’s role in the region as that of a liberator distributing oxymoronic transcendence, Veneman noted of her observations in Afghanistan, “We observed an eagerness among women to assume a growing role in society, to gain access to education, improved health care, and to participate actively in all aspects of civil society.” Near the end of Veneman’s account of her tour, she praised the troops for restoring the lives of many people and recalled stories they had told her about community service work in Iraq during their free time. In doing so, the Madame Secretary articulated an organizational identification move DiSanza and Bullis (1999) refer to as “recognition of individual contributions outside the organization” (p. 357). As exemplified by the following excerpt, Veneman referred USDA employees by name and praised their work:

There are the people like Danny Woodyard, who is a reservist from Arkansas, but he's also a USDA employee. He works in our General Counsel's Office in Arkansas. Danny…has been, as the Minister of Agriculture in Iraq calls it, his ‘hero.’ He went…into the Ag Ministry, and found the appropriate people to contract with to rebuild the ministry…Danny has done a tremendous amount.

(Veneman, 2003a)

Veneman’s repetitious integration of her advocacy narrative of bearing witness across multiple public speeches steady toggles between the war situation and the USDA’s role in it. Combined with the USDA’s newsletter content and its visual images, these texts generate
moralized advocacy or what Burke (1937/1984) calls a heroic “frame of acceptance” in which the organizational rhetor becomes almost as great as the situation confronted. The Secretary’s speech transcripts show that before her tour, she could only offer brief statements that abstractly praised the President and called for public support of his post-9/11 efforts. In one 2002 speech, she opened with, “President Bush sends his best wishes…I have to tell you what an honor it is, serving in his administration, and I hope you all agree with me that he’s doing a great job” (Veneman, 2002). After Veneman’s tour, however, her speeches reveal the construction of new ethos through a more intimate, descriptive, and persuasive style. At the annual convention of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, Veneman (2004) practiced a difficult if not odd transition toward identification that would become commonplace in the USDA’s rhetoric of reconstruction: “The Administration has… worked hard to expand markets for agriculture…and the administration continues its actions to defeat terrorists and promote freedom and democracy.” Veneman then brought in her tale of bearing witness to American heroism. Note my emphasis on terminology marking the presence of the principle of the oxymoron in an epic frame of humanitarianism:

Last November I traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan where we witnessed the

rebuilding of two newly liberated countries. Farmers talked about how grateful they are for our presence there and also about… basic needs… We also met with the brave men and women of the coalition forces who are helping bring new hope… We were so impressed with their sense of purpose and dedication and they deserve our support, from all of us.

In both instances, Veneman invites identification through expression of shared values (Cheney, 1983) as well as identification by association (Boyd, 2004) that attempts to extend
support to the larger Bush administration’s war agenda. The Secretary’s discourse clearly contributes to the public legitimacy of the USDA’s participation in Afghanistan and Iraq, and to the broader national efforts to which she links it. The Secretary positions the USDA’s work in Iraq as accomplished with the full support of Iraqi citizens. On Veneman’s account, this support transfers to the troops and their actions—meaning she defines the whole of U.S. actions in the region as legitimately useful and responsible (Boyd, 2000). Circulating organizational rhetoric to multiple audiences across the globe, Veneman’s dialectical toggling stands as a performance of organizational border-crossing and boundary-spanning. The principle of the oxymoron encourages farmers and other “non-heroic” publics to engage in “vicariously heroic” identification with a national movement in which their own roles are actually relatively inconsequential (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 36, emphasis in original).

In addition to becoming more overt over time, the USDA’s strategic narration of the agricultural reconstruction in moralized terms also became more complex and programmatic. One way the USDA has globalized its rhetoric of reconstruction and its advocacy for the war is by tightly coordinating, developing, and diversifying its narration across various organizational media channels. A 2006 article in the Washington Post offers a clear example of one of the agency’s strategic management of the public’s understanding of the war and the USDA its industry in it. The Post’s Al Kamen published a story about a White House memo sent to sixty USDA staff, including some unintended recipients. Along with the article, which is titled “The USDA on Iraq: Everything’s Coming up Rosy” (Kamen, 2006b), readers were offered an online link to the memo’s attachment: a list of pro-Iraq war talking points to be included in staff members’ daily speeches on agricultural issues (Kamen, 2006a). The attachment showed staff members how to smoothly incorporate points such as “President Bush has a clear strategy for
victory in Iraq” and “The major poultry producers in Iraq…are using [U.S.] loan guarantees to buy U.S. corn and soybeans.” The memo encourages employees to be sure to note that Iraq farmers are experiencing hard times and that the U.S. is rebuilding Iraq’s once proud agricultural legacy. Staff members are also directed to give a regular report to the White House speechwriter on which points they have been using.

In 2007, the agency extended its strategic use of diverse organizational channels to construct a preferred public identity when *USDA Radio News* began airing testimonials from USDA employees working in Iraq. Cheney (1983) recognizes the testimonial and its expression of commitment and even affection as a tactic of organizational identification through common ground. In this instance, first-hand testimonials were overshadowed by a corresponding move that has not been recognized in past organizational communication studies. This move, which I refer to as *secondary extension of the testimonial*, appears when an organizational rhetor favorably rereads, rearranges, or synthesizes a first-hand testimonial in a way that significantly extends the narrative without providing clear evidentiary justification for doing so. Here, the USDA radio host elaborates upon and morally framed edited testimonial excerpts aired on her show. The host’s elaborations are ethically questionable because they substantively narrow the range of available interpretations of the first-hand testimonials in ways that foster multiple potential identifications through preferred meanings of the organization, the reconstruction, and the war. The host links together brief, first-hand testimonials with elaborations that often serve as transitions between first-hand iterations. Although the first-hand testimonials implicitly express basic commitment, it is only when combined with the host’s secondary narration that they articulate the principle of the oxymoron.

The USDA’s testimonial radio spots span from approximately one minute to five minutes
each in length and overlap in content. A condensed form of all of the spots, which aired across several dates, can be found in a single five-minute spot airing on the organization’s “Agriculture U.S.A.” show (USDA Radio News, 2007c). The five-minute segment includes testimony (and the host’s synthesis of and elaboration on this testimony) from three USDA employees working in different occupational positions in different geographical regions of Iraq. In the excerpts I offer below from these testimonials, note my emphasis on terms suggestive of interdependence, intimacy, and humanitarianism. These terms invite identification, draw from the USDA’s People’s Department identity, extend it to the global scale, and help the Bush administration constitute the war in a preferred way.

One employee, a male agricultural advisor working on a PRT in what the show describes as Saddam Hussein’s hometown of Tikrit, depicts agriculture in Iraq as “not like a third-world country…it’s more like technology that’s twenty or thirty years old.” The host states, “he is helping to rebuild Iraq’s agricultural sector with several different projects.” In another spot titled, “Developing New Markets for Iraqi Farmers,” the same employee describes his day-to-day work (USDA Radio News, 2007a). Elaborating on the radio show host’s reference to the male advisor’s cooperation with “agricultural representatives,” his testimony describes his work as “working with an agricultural task force” of “government officials and leaders of farm groups.” The host notes that the employee is helping to rebuild the infrastructure of agriculture in Iraq.

In addition to being included in the five-minute spot, a second USDA employee radio spot testimony is also repeated in a shorter spot titled, “Helping Iraq to Improve Livestock Production Systems” (USDA Radio News, 2007b). The employee is a veterinarian and “livestock advisor” to a PRT who lives and works an hour’s drive southwest of Baghdad. The veterinarian describes her work in the following way:
When, say, the government veterinarian, she needs to get vaccines. She can only get that from the central government. So I’m there to assist her in being able what she needs to do her job. And we go out with a convoy.

The host adds that the USDA veterinarian “is just one of many volunteers in Iraq helping to build a better foundation for Iraq’s farmers.” The host later iterates, “her work goes on despite the shooting and impact of the war in Iraq because farmers still need vaccinations for their livestock, that can be very hard to get.”

The third USDA employee testimony, also included in the five-minute spot and in a shorter spot, is from a U.S. Lieutenant Colonel. The radio host refers to this employee as a “senior agribusiness official” who “works with the Iraqi government” and “with the basic farmers to try to help them to be able to get the inputs necessary for a successful production season. Such issues as water and irrigation and then helping them to be able to find markets to be able to sell their products.” The host adds, “most of which will be sold locally.” She also notes that the official “said he felt the prospect for increasing production, especially in the area of cereal grains is very good.” The host then summarizes and extends these three USDA testimonies:

All of the volunteers interviewed were very positive about their chances of helping to turn Iraq’s farm economy around, and all of the volunteers work in areas that could put them in harm’s way…all three have no regrets as a volunteer in helping Iraqi farmers.

The use of the term volunteer to refer to U.S. employees is particularly definitive of the USDA’s moralized vocabulary for defining the identity of the organization and the larger reconstruction effort. Moreover, the emergence of these radio spots devoted to the reconstruction directs attention to the significant array of channels through which the USDA has globally distributed
stakeholder identity positions. The organization publicly scatters these identity positions through rhetorical invitations to self-fulfillment in the principle of the oxymoron. Text, images, and embodied performances confront audiences through means such as video satellite, print newsletters, and face-to-face speaking. Radio spots complement public relations talking points, which consist of short and non-descriptive facts and statistical data that the USDA provides online (FAS, n.d.), with softer and descriptive richness. Here, strategic combination of diverse appeals to logos (logical argument) and pathos (emotion) is likely to enhance the perceived ethos (character) and ethics (conduct) of the organizational rhetor.

Most recently, through a slightly different strategy and a different media form than had been used in the past, the USDA has continued to globally constitute post-9/11 American identity and strengthen its own identity armor. In this instance, new Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer (2008) contributes the ongoing multi-media experience of the USDA’s reconstruction efforts. I argue that Secretary Schafer has circulated the USDA’s most complex and overt invitation to identification to emerge thus far in the agency’s reconstruction narration. In March 2008, from the USDA’s main office in Washington D.C., Schafer held a video teleconference with PRT members in Iraq. USDA agriculture advisors and other staff members stationed across Iraq met in Baghdad for this “agricultural coordination conference.” After the conference, Schafer held a media briefing. In Schafer’s statements, he outlined what he called “themes” that he observed in USDA employee comments and he repetitively thanked these employees for their great work and “huge personal sacrifices” and “tremendous assistance.” Consistent with the transcendental form of the other organizational texts described thus far, Schafer’s remarks progressively moved from deep oppression to vast heights of freedom through an uplifting rhetoric. A clear example of this form appears when the Secretary remarks, “that country's
agricultural resources were mismanaged and neglected for decades, and our agriculture advisors are now faced with the task of resolving a situation with overwhelming humanitarian implications.”

Schafer (2008) articulates the same oxymoronic uplift when he moves from defining the USDA’s relation to Iraq’s citizens and its agricultural system to the relationship between the agency, the troops, and the security situation: “Thanks to our military men and women serving our country, the overall security environment in Iraq has improved. Our USDA employees today affirmed that.” Here, one again finds an appeal to identification through secondary narration of employee testimonial. In another statement, Schafer’s appeal to organizational identification shifts to USDA employees, completing an invitation to multiple identifications. Schafer remarks, “Today was my opportunity to thank them for their sacrifices, and for their commitment to the USDA mission.” In both examples, Schafer articulates the organizational identification tactic that DiSanza and Bullis (1999) refer to as “global recognition of individuals,” which consists of praising a sub-unit, work team, or class of people for their contributions. Through this move, praise is directed at a collectivity rather than a named individual. Given today’s common reference to saluting and supporting “the troops” and “our brave men and women,” this tactic, which surely gains some of its symbolic power through ambiguity, seems particularly pervasive in post-9/11 public discourse.

Another way that Schafer’s (2008) remarks prove rhetorically complex is that they reveal just how arbitrary the lines between various tactics of organizational identification may be. For instance, while praising employee contributions, Schafer simultaneously touts the accomplishments of the organization across the globe. Here, he articulates the identification tactic of “bragging” (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999, p. 357). The following excerpt offers an example:
I must say, it was a thrill to talk to them today and hear the work that they are doing... We are providing training and education, seed and feed and improvements in slaughterhouses and hatcheries – all the things that USDA delivers to the people of the United States.

Here, Schafer (2008) directly appeals to organizational identification with U.S. citizens in a way that also transfers to the global level. The Secretary goes on to reach out to the public in several ways. In one instance, Schafer stresses the legitimacy of the USDA’s participation in Iraq: “our employees there want the people of the United States to understand that their tax dollars that are going into these areas are being well-spent: that we are doing good things there.” Like Veneman, Schafer makes sure to represent the voice of the Iraqi people. He states, “they are friendly and receptive, and desire the services of USDA... they want the up-to-date abilities, the up-to-date methods, so that they can improve their lives.” In both excerpts, Schafer stresses the usefulness and morality of the intervention. In a second direct invitation to identification with the American people, the Secretary of Agriculture stresses the similarity between Iraqi and American people, particularly in terms of shared values and human goodness:

I heard over and over again...the similarity between the agriculture people in Iraq to the people of the United States. Our employees there wanted us to know that the Iraqi farmers, the Iraqi ranchers, the Iraqi landowners, are similar to the people here in the United States...they are good and honest and hardworking people.

Finally, the Secretary reaches out to families of employees who continue to be stationed in Iraq and in some cases, have been there for over a year. He does so not only by linking the employees’ efforts to the organization’s mission, but to the higher cause of patriotic service:
“Again, to our USDA employees in Iraq and their families, I thank you all for your service. I appreciate your efforts and your commitment that you are making for us, the sacrifices you are making for your country.”

Thus far, I have traced the process by which the USDA has built an oxymoronic rhetoric of organizational identification and detailed some ways in which it functions as global advocacy in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. This representative anecdote shows how the USDA has helped morally legitimize the larger Bush administration’s war agenda while inventing international opportunity for the industry it was created to promote. The agency’s global political economic advocacy began with Secretary Veneman’s Middle East tour. Organizational texts constituting the reality of the tour contributed to support for U.S. agricultural intervention in Iraq, with the installment of Order 81 coming soon after. The Secretary’s subsequent requests for public support of the administration’s war on terror progressively expanded into a sophisticated program of strategic organizational rhetoric of oxymoronic identification. This program articulates several tactics of identification previously noted by organizational communication scholars as well as a novel tactic I refer to as secondary extension of the testimonial. Together, these tactics create a constellation of meaning, which agency articulates through texts such as employee newsletter content, public relations talking points, radio spot testimonials, and press release accounts. The moralized organizational identity that emerges is that of an international People’s Department. In the remainder of this essay, I shall present some contributions that my analysis makes to the literature on organizational identification and the study of organizational rhetoric.

The Constitutive Form of the Principle of the Oxymoron

The principle of the oxymoron has proven to be a useful hermeneutic device for
providing insights into the USDA’s organizational rhetoric of identification. I have offered evidence that several of the USDA’s articulations of the principle of the oxymoron were strategically manipulative. However, the USDA is part of a bureaucratic chain of command that itself has been embedded in a relatively homogenous larger post-9/11 culture. Therefore, as Lyon (2007) has illustrated, in the unethical action of large organizations, it is likely that at least some employees of the organization participating take part through consent to systematically distorted logic. Like external stakeholder publics, these employees may very well have been denied the opportunity to step outside of preferred meanings to gauge their potentially destructive implications. Given the principle of the oxymoron’s immediate and seductive appearance of consensus through moral, uplifting, and internationalist narration that leverages the appeal of human rights, democracy, freedom, and economic empowerment, this effect is understandable in the case of the USDA.

In several ways, this chapter productively complements Boyd’s (2004) focus on a single type of organizational text and its instrumental effectiveness. To begin with, rather than examining only pre-packaged organizational position statements, I show that the principle of the oxymoron can be studied through an eclectic combination of textual forms. Recently, scholars of organizational rhetoric including Boyd have called for consideration of informal and unbounded texts as well (Cheney, 2005; Stahley & Boyd, 2006). I argue that these texts are important because they collectively speak to the conditions that led to their marginalization. Only by bringing these fragments together and showing their rhetorical unity did they become more important than they originally appeared to be (McGee, 1997). Thus, this study shows that the value of Burke’s (1941/1973) directive to “use all there is to use” (p. 23) is that it allows for reconstituting a body of identifications and revealing the work of repetition in the background of
everyday life. I hope to have shown that humanitarianism offers a kind of identity armor in the form of a constitutive “pre-rhetoric” that occupies the background of social life (Charland, 1987, p. 147). That is, stakeholder publics’ identification with humanitarianism is already in order and thus, organizational appeals to it are already legitimate.

Another insight provided by the approach to oxymoronic identification taken in this study is that it allows for examining organizational rhetoric over time. The case of the People’s Department reveals increasing complexity in the agency’s narration of agricultural reconstruction. I offer an instance of how multiple organizational texts accumulate into what Burke (1931/1968) calls a symbolic “form” or “way of experiencing” (p. 143) through “qualitative progression” (p. 124). Following a fixed progression toward morality and freedom, the principle longitudinally participates in a mythically heroic story over time that animates “the creation of an appetite in the mind of an auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite” (p. 31). The qualitative character of the USDA’s narration alludes to stages of its textual sequence: one event and its qualities prepares audiences for the introduction of other qualities. In other words, the premise invites the stakeholder to accept the invitation by making sure s/he “feels the rightness of the conclusion” (p. 124). As projected by the USDA, the rhetoric of reconstruction’s form does not prepare the audience to demand the completion of the progression, for there is no mystery or set of clues to force a conclusion. Rather, the agency’s public discourse collectively calls upon its audiences to recognize the rightness of the reconstruction after the fact. Especially in the American mind, reconstruction is humanitarianism and is therefore already assumed to be a socially appropriate follow-up gesture to war’s necessary destruction and dehumanization. There can be little doubt, then, that the term reconstruction itself generates persuasive allure toward oxymoronic identification.
In addition to this organizational pre-rhetoric, the rhetorical situation in which the USDA began its narration was particularly advantageous. The USDA’s participation in the reconstruction immediately followed President Bush’s (2003) now-infamous May 1, 2003 celebratory declaration of the end of major combat operations in Iraq. In the declaration, Bush offered an explicit rhetorical transition from the “battles” of Iraq and Afghanistan to the reconstruction period. Although Bush’s statements are now widely recognized as premature, I contend that for organizational actors in the reconstruction effort, his declaration provided a vital foundation for successful activation of the principle of the oxymoron. Bush supplied firm rhetorical ground for morally catapulting a downtrodden people toward the heights of transformational empowerment. For the USDA, this meant that it would be in good position to only occasionally and ambiguously refer to the struggles of war, and that it could do so by placing uplifting emphasis on benevolently overcoming them. By continuously magnifying the exceptional goodness of the reconstruction, the USDA’s heroic frame of acceptance depicting the forging of a new and brave frontier offers a selection of reality that deflects elements of tragedy.

Rather than explicitly fostering identification through the dominant rhetoric of good versus evil that emerged after 9/11 (Cloud, 2004; Ivie, 2005), the USDA identifies with the victim of evil. Yet, this move does not allow the agency to escape the ethical shortcomings of rhetorically inventing an enemy Other or defining one (modernist) culture as civilized and superior to others. With the regard to the former, oxymoronic rhetoric of reconstruction implicitly relies on what Burke (1945/1969) calls self-purification through the “scapegoat mechanism” (p. 406) because war’s crude “us” versus “them” distinction remains present. The latter is of course explicitly celebrated through the principle of the oxymoron as benevolent
modernist liberation. The result is that the USDA generally avoids a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1998) in favor of a purely uplifting and good-spirited identification through common ground strategy (Cheney, 1983). The appeal of common ground is that it envisions perfect communication and complete harmony by transcending the limits of interpretation and the contingency of partisanship.

Ethical Limits of the Principle of the Oxymoron

Now that I have discussed the constitutive form of the USDA’s rhetorical reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq, it makes sense that I assess the ethics of this form. Building on my case that the USDA’s participation in the reconstruction was in several ways already understood as useful and responsible before it even took action, I contend that there are ethical limits that appear in the government agency’s articulation of the principle of the oxymoron. First, the rhetorical conditions upon which the USDA grounded its narration—Bush’s declaration of victory—were illegitimate and concealed the ongoing reality of violence and devastation in the region. Second, operating as an organizational pre-rhetoric, humanitarianism fosters the USDA’s ability to transcend democratic responsibilities made possible by critical publicity. As international identity armor, the principle of the oxymoron supplies competitive advantage to U.S. agribusiness, the constituency that the USDA was created to promote. Through oxymoronic appeals to globally accepted values, the agency has largely been able to escape or deflect public criticism, close off potential conflict, and secure identification that borders on engineered consent. Based on this assessment, I join Lair et al. (2005) and direct scholarly attention to the ways in which transcendent rhetorics of identification suppress critical self-reflection and ethical self-understanding among stakeholders. The case of the post-9/11 globalization of the People’s Department demonstrates the ethical limits of oxymoronic organizational identification through
oversimplified but easily understood humanitarian rhetoric. I argue that in addition to questioning the desirability of certain identifications, scholars must assess possibilities for the installation of alternative identifications. This means considering ways to reduce resentment toward the necessity of division in organizational affairs as well as reforming the violent methods through which it is too often practiced. This area of study is particularly important in the light of the popular trend exemplified by the case of the USDA in which organizations present themselves before rather than in the public sphere (Christensen & Cheney, 2000; Habermas, 1989). For the long-term, crafting an ethic of democratic stakeholder citizenship begins with recognizing that the organizations such as the People’s Department are public personae. Since stakeholder audiences (“the people”), too, exist in and through semi-conscious and rhetorical distribution of meaning, they constitute collective personae as well.

In light of my analysis, I posit that the USDA’s use of the principle of the oxymoron has allowed it to transcend beyond minimum requirements for public legitimacy into a realm of necessity, correctness, and moral obligation. With regard to the agency’s reclamation and global extension of its People’s Department ethos, the symbolic form of self-moralized organizational identity must be interrupted and complicated if legitimacy is to be reconfigured in terms of actual practice of democratic conduct. This case study suggests that the principle of the oxymoron offers one useful device for ethical judgment of humanitarian discourse now widely articulated by organizations, politicians, and entrepreneurs across the globe. The USDA’s organizational rhetoric blurs distinctions between these groups, showing that in some cases, such as that of the post-9/11 support organization, they may operate as a unified actor. This makes sense in a sociopolitical environment in which democracy, freedom, and business are considered synonymous. In this context, scholars would do well to follow Meisenbach and McMillan’s
(2006) call for boundary-blurring study of organizational rhetoric across internal, external, individual, collective, public, and private affairs that span diverse subdisciplines.

To be sure, this chapter begins such an exploration. Drawing upon the work of Burke (1937/1984), I have examined the contemporary government organization as a sociopolitical actor actively contributing to a larger war drama. Although it is common for scholars of organizational identification to reference Burke’s depiction of “the so-called ‘I’” as a “combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s,’” they have usually failed to observe Burke’s follow-up statement that coordination of “corporate identities” sometimes results in “disturbing moral consequences” (p. 264). As for the ethics and rhetoric of oxymoronic identification in the case of the USDA presented here, I propose that the question of exactly who is performing the identity of the moralized politician—the individual or the organization—be answered in Burkean style. Burke was fond of saying “but it’s more complicated than that” and therefore favored “and/both” answers over “either/or” ones. Perhaps a definitive answer is less important than my illustration that there are insights and useful conversations that might emerge through the curious notion of global politics as organizational rhetoric. Taking such a perspective might better prepare us to be ambivalent rather than definite about moralized organizational identities and any attempt by any party to latch onto the motive of humanitarianism. To fully accept is to take for granted and prematurely celebrate but to reject is to reproduce the non-invitational organizational rhetoric that suppresses critical publicity. It follows that an ethic of democratic stakeholder citizenship must temper the need for contingent policy reform with a long-range vision of social justice. One way that scholars and citizens can contribute to such an ethic is by exposing and contesting organizational rhetoric through Burke’s (1950/1969) warning that “the mystic communicates ultimately in terms of the oxymoron” (p. 324).
CHAPTER III:

THE USDA AS ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTABLE IN THE WAR ON BIOTERRORISM

On the cover of the November 2001 cover of *Farm Journal*, the industry’s oldest and most popular nationally-circulated farm magazine, a young-looking white male farmer with his sleeves rolled up looks into the distance from atop a tractor. In the background, a small American flag mounted near the rearview mirror waves in the wind. The cover reads, “Agriculture Stands Guard.” The issue includes the article, “Target Agriculture?: The Agriculture and Food Systems May Be Vulnerable to Terrorism” (Bernick et al., 2001), which offers expert commentary on the new threat of agricultural bioterrorism to the nation’s food supply. The article includes emergency instructions and prevention tips for the farmers and ranchers as well. Other related articles among several in the issue are “Keep a Country Vigilance” (Freiberg, 2001) and “We Will All Secure the Homeland” (Hillgren, 2001). Also included is a space on the editor’s page with the heading, “Agriculture’s Most Wanted,” which offers a photo and demographic description of the only fugitive on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) list of twenty-two “Most Wanted Terrorists” who is “thought to have formal training in agriculture” (FBI, 2001).

After 9/11, American agriculture helped rhetorically constitute a domestic culture of consensus, uncertainty, risk, and fear. Today, the U.S. food supply, the nation’s fundamental source of strength as it has long been dubbed in times of war, remains on terror alert. In fact, the public can find the now-infamous color-coded terror threat alert indicator at USDA.gov, the agency’s official website. In this chapter, I present a case investigation on the USDA’s post-9/11 participation in the war on bioterrorism. In contrast to the international investigation presented in the previous chapter, this chapter traces a domestic organizational rhetoric that, as I will illuminate, is implicated in post-9/11 national security state building. The organizational
perspective I offer adds to existing communication scholarship on the war on bioterrorism that has emerged across several subdisciplines (Aldoory & van Dyke, 2006; Pollard, 2003; Salmon, Park, & Wrigley, 2003; J.B. Scott, 2006; Venette, Veil, & Sellnow, 2005).

Kellman (2007) designates the term “bioviolence” as a general descriptor for “the hostile infliction of disease” that may be used to cause catastrophic consequences and panic (i). Federal efforts to launch a war on bioterrorism emerged as a partial result of the fall 2001 Anthrax mailings collectively known as the “Amerithrax” case, which killed five people and infected at least seventeen others (Lengel & Warrick, 2006, p. A, 1). Soon after, the federal government took on several large-scale, interagency investigations and appropriated major funding toward bioterrorist defense, including protection against agricultural bioterrorism. This type of bioterrorism, also known as agroterrorism, refers to the intentional introduction of contaminating biological agents and disease to plant and animal populations as a nontraditional weapon of war (NRC, 2003).

Like many bioterrorism experts, Kellman (2007) suggests the government is doing too little to prevent bioviolence and suggests, “accelerating advances in bioscience open new threat potential” (i). In contrast, this chapter argues that comic ambivalence is needed to temper the liberal logic of national security state building. I contend that the rapidly growing quantity of symbolic and material resources being devoted to the war on terror may actually be hindering public safety in some ways. With a telos of critical publicity in the distant horizon, this essay continues the previous chapter’s effort to navigate the constitutive functions and forms of the USDA’s rhetoric and ethics of organizational identification. Here, I turn to the second of the USDA’s two post-9/11 roles in the war on terror.

Without denying positive implications of the USDA’s attention to national security
threats, there has been less attention given to problematic implications that may arise from the assumed legitimacy of rhetoric of bioterrorism defense. Biosecurity operations are partially concealed from critical public deliberation a priori and when they are exposed for public discussion, they deflect criticism through the pre-rhetorical ethos of the national defense motive. As one of several increasingly intimate modes of public control that continues to rapidly expand through public-private interorganizational initiatives, there is good reason for critics to keep a watchful eye on the rhetoric of bioterrorism (J.B. Scott, 2006). One of these functions, which I focus on in this chapter, is the symbolic constitution of risk through mechanisms of identification and control. I examine this process using Burke’s (1937/1984) “constabulary function” (p. 139) as a guiding concept for developing new insights. Moreover, my flexible use of the concept allows for induction of additional terms that further extend developed insights. By using an assortment of available resources, I recognize the complexity and contingency of rhetoric, as well as an attempt to make my critical object as intelligible as possible (Gaonkar, 1997)

Building the National Security State

Organizational communication scholarship has not yet come to terms with the role organizations play in inventing, preventing, and regulating a public culture increasingly absorbed by risk discourses. Contributions from Haas (2003) and Knight (2007) illustrate that contemporary organizational ethics may very well rest on presupposing and imagining decisional effects in what Beck (1992, 1999) calls a risk society. According to Beck the risk society refers to conditions that reveal a shift in the public’s focus in the last half century from distribution of goods and wealth to prevention, minimization and general management of the distribution of risk, losses, and threats. Risk represents the side effects of industrial and technological development. Risk has become systemic and globally unbounded, making it less of a matter of
time and place, institutional arrangements, insurance, class-based distribution, and rational
calculation. Society increasingly finds itself in a “state of confrontation,” developing additional
programs for dealing with risk. As a partial result, public discourse ironically becomes more
anxious and fearful (Dean, 1999, p. 135).

Without effective critical publicity made possible by pluralistic forums for informed
citizenship, the concealing effect of government-industry alliance fosters potentially deadly
material consequences (Schwarze, 2003a, 2003b). Thus, organizational communication
scholarship on risk, regulation, and ethics is foremost a project in social responsibility. To be
sure, government and non-profit organizations are not exempt from ethical considerations more
popularly applied to corporate social responsibility (Boyd, 2002; Llewellyn, 2007). Through the
case of the USDA’s biosecurity organizing, which directs attention to the emergence of a civil
defense industry supporting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), I shall explain why. I
shall also illustrate the actualization of President Bush’s announcement that the formation of the
DHS would necessarily “change the culture of many diverse agencies” (Bush, 2002). Hay (2007)
has argued that when Bush made this statement, “he might as well have been describing the
changing culture of citizenship” and the state’s mode of “agency” that assumes the
responsibilities of living with risk (p. 218). Over the last few years, the DHS and the various
organizations contributing to its project have achieved legitimacy through persuasive discourses.
These discourses mark everyday self-defense sponsored by public-private partnership as a new
necessity (Hay, 2006; Hay & Andrejevic, 2006; J.B. Scott, 2006). I posit that public
identification with the notion of a restorable but fragile national identity allows organizations
articulating this myth to move toward their own ends by inventing and managing risk in the
popular public consciousness. Indeed, organizations are society’s primary agents of “everyday
civic pedagogy—citizenship training” (Hay, 2007, p. 219).

Through study of a range of related areas, organizational communication scholars stand to play a significant role in contemplating the implications of organizing for homeland security. In the national security state, the boundary-spanning support organization (Harter & Krone, 2001) assumes an extended role in public and private affairs. By appealing to federalism, these agencies have cast their new cultural identities in terms of public support organizations for regional and local agencies. Agencies situate themselves in a supportive posture through public-private partnerships for risk management and assessment (Hay, 2007). Organizational communication scholars are also equipped to examine the ways that the emergence of new civil defense industries has also legitimized and extended the popular narrative of consumer citizenship. Especially since the 1990s, this (neoliberal) narrative of a new economy has situated market participation as today’s primary and most viable mode of democratic choice and personal freedom (Aune, 2001; Cloud, 2001; Holmer Nadesan, 2001). Recent studies suggests that this discourse has become even more rigorous since 9/11 because its appeal to freedom has been attached to patriotism, national identity, military motives, the commodification of terrorism, and the cultural production of risk (Dickinson, 2005; Heller, 2005; J.B. Scott, 2006).

Particularly insightful for the purpose of the present investigation is J.B. Scott’s (2006) study of the pharmaceutical industry’s response to the war on bioterrorism. Scott shows that industry leaders as well as government officials such as those from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have trumpeted public-private partnership as a national security imperative. The corporation-governed pharmaceutical industry has framed its actions—including volunteering its scientists and donating drugs—as patriotic, caring, and purely philanthropic. Invoking and rethinking classical rhetoric’s notion of kairos through Beck’s (1992, 1999) risk
society concept, Scott (2006) observes that the industry has been far from oblivious to lucrative opportunities for symbolic prestige as well as subsequent political economic advantage presented by the war on bioterrorism. In light of the risk society condition, Scott suggests that the classical meaning of kairos, which refers to “the opportune moment to seize the advantage” (p. 116), does not fully explain the cultural-political connections that lurk beyond economic motive or the unintended consequences of industrial response. This humanist and liberal-modernist orientation toward rhetorical agency prevents a more complex understanding of the multi-directionality of the rhetoric of the war on bioterrorism. The humanist assumes the rhetor is strategically omniscient of the situation and is able to intervene and control risk based on rational-technical calculation.

Scott (2006) resituates kairos not so much as the rhetorical seizing of advantage, but rather as “an attempt at management that, like the risk to which it responds, is itself tenuous and unpredictable” (p. 121). Kairos becomes an “indeterminate response to distributed, transforming, immeasurable, and, to some extent, uncontrollable global risk” (p. 117). Risk and the urgent need for this response are rhetorically constructed. The construction of risk as immediate and ongoing may very well be used to create kairotic action generated by urgent desire to defend against it, control it, and opportunistically benefit from it. As Scott notes, in the case of biosecurity, entire rhetorical and institutional networks have already emerged through this process. Scott’s study allows for understanding risk and the public-private responses to it after 9/11 as a Foucauldian attempt to discursively “discipline the future” in light of the failing modernist motives of prediction and control (Ewald, 1991, p. 199). Although risk means perceived threat, through rhetors’ assemblage of a vast network of risk objects such as terrorists, biological agents, and porous borders, rhetors are able to articulate risk as calculable and material hazard (Hilgartner,
The connection between industry, kairos, and the risk society offers organizational scholars a heuristic way of thinking about the ethics of stakeholder relationships in security state organizing. Following Dean (1999), Scott (2006) calls for further research on the risk society. Dean (1999) observes the importance of future analyses of how risk society rationalities regulate “how we come to know about and act upon different conceptions of risk.” Scholars should consider how these dynamics “give rise to new forms of social and political identity” and how they become connected to particular political programs and “social imaginaries” that articulate them with an ethos (p. 142). Scott’s (2006) follow-up call urges scholars to engage how the risk society’s actors shape rhetorical trajectories, risk conflicts, and power dynamics. He adds, “we might also extend and complicate common understandings of audience, identification, agency, symbolic action, context, and other concepts” (p. 138).

In response to these invitations, an introduction to a new Burkean concept as well as an illustration of its utility for the study of organizational rhetoric in the risk society is in order. Burke’s (1937/1984) “constabulary function” helps organize an apt response to Scott’s (2006) suggestion that scholars ought to extend and complicate the notions of identification and symbolic action in the risk society. Moreover, the concept aids in providing an answer Dean’s (1999) call for research that comes to terms with how rationalities regulate and identities emerge from the invention of risk and the corresponding ways it is acted upon. Following Dean’s suggestion, I locate identity construction in relation to risk as attached to the ethos of political programs and social imaginaries.

The Constabulary Function

Jack (2008) describes the Burkean concept of the “constabulary function” as a resource
for sociorhetorical critique of symbolic and material power (p. 67). By extension, I argue that the concept allows for understanding regulatory power as carried out by an organizational constable—a collective speaker who serves as a kind of officer of the peace and keeper of a fortress of rhetorical communion. This fortress is maintained through ongoing constabulary ordering of bodies, texts, territories, means of defense, and relationships. Envisioned this way, the constabulary function as an organizational matter that is useful for ethical-rhetorical assessment of the USDA’s participation in post-9/11 bioterrorism defense. According to Burke (1937/1984), the capitalist system is a “constabulary order” insofar as it mobilizes symbolic practices to maintain social cohesion and hold down crime while failing to address deep and cultural changes (p. 141). The constabulary order is a “state of misfit” and deep “cultural lag” that functions more prominently in times when the state is “aggravated” (p. 139). Aggravation, which is perceived as normal in contemporary society, provokes more aggressive moves toward sufficient enforcement of the existing social order by administrative officials. The completion of the move from envisioning a restored sense of order to making it a formal program to enforcing it serves the constabulary function of the state.

Particularly in times in which order is threatened and significant change is unfolding, the constabulary function includes but may move beyond the long-entrusted vocabulary of the order’s failing motivational orientation. In these times, new living conditions impair the serviceability of the orientation. Thus, although the constabulary function sometimes mingles with intimate coercion in the realm of law enforcement and regulation, it belongs in the realm of Burke’s rhetoric of identification (Jack, 2008). The constabulary function is a mode of reinforcement that may blur the line between cooperation and coercion by intertwining identification with the use of threat, force, and significant resources to maintain control in a
faltering system of governance.² Importantly, the constabulary function does not unearth the root of social problems or take interest in reforming deviating parties. Instead, it sustains hierarchy of authority and maintains social order by suppression. The constabulary function is therefore a system of rhetorical moves political and economic elites use to uphold a deteriorating social order while deflecting attention away from broader, systemic problems within the order itself.

According to Burke (1937/1984), the constabulary function operates as follows. First, “alienation,” the segregating effect of the absence of identification, produces resistance and social problems, including crime. Alienation is consistent with a condition of cultural lag. Second, in response, the propagandist employs “transcendence,” or “symbolic bridging and merging” through identification (p. 179). Here, the constabulary transcends an ambivalent perspective through a simplified one that appropriates the vocabulary and philosophy of the targeted group. Third, governing agents, with the support of the propagandist, pass laws to fix the cultural lag by eradicating crime and producing obedience through “secular prayer” (p. 321). Secular prayer includes verbal sanctions, decrees, and legislative law that may authoritatively and formally discipline, command conformity, eject or cut off an individual from membership, deprive of rights, and prevent through law. Since secular prayer offers its own definitional account of the situation, it may mask the complexity and depth of problems that lead to the need for legislation in the first place (Jack, 2008, p. 77). Fourth, the constabulary enforces the law, determines if secular prayers have been sufficient, and if not, moves toward more direct and coercive modes of control. Realizing the failures of prayer means witnessing a constabulary order’s move toward “traffic regulation”—or the complex bureaucratization of prayer through technical devices. Increased quantity of laws, police, and regulation represents “faulty praying”

² Burke’s concept of the constabulary function as well as his related concept of efficiency emerge from his employment at the Bureau of Social Hygiene in New York City from 1926 to 1930. At the Bureau was a ghostwriter on a handbook for enforcing the drug problem. See Hawhee (2004) and Jack (2004, 2008).
or the governing agent’s inability to adequately size up and account for key factors in the situation (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 304). The controlling group is no longer able to use secular prayer to maintain authority. As a result, it must step in and mobilize its resources accordingly.

The constabulary function of the state, then, employs a combination of control measures after other individual types or combinations of them seem to be failing. If a previous system relied on responsive control measures, an aggravated administration may integrate preventive measures as well in order to sustain “efficient backing” and an “efficient hierarchy of police” (pp. 292, 139). Achieving social control becomes a matter of threatening force and fines. Burke’s notion of efficiency is pivotal in the constabulary function. The constabulary has to overcome problems of efficiency. Acts of efficiency are practices that overemphasize one aspect of a situation while re-emphasizing other aspects. Efficiency “throws strong light upon something, and in the process casts other things into shadow” with the effect of “stressing certain considerations and omitting others” (pp. 248-249). Efficiency is a byproduct of “bureaucratization of the imaginative”—putting a pure theory or imaginative vision into practice by the necessary addition of imperfect, ambiguous, and foreign elements, as well as “utilitarian routines” (p. 225, v).

The USDA’s Rhetorical “Response” to the Threat of Bioterrorism

The Burkean notion of a constabulary order as a control response to cultural lag is a particularly useful descriptor for the new national security state as well as organization-public interaction that materializes and maintains it. In a statement that can be considered reflective of the risk society and the war on bioterrorism, Burke (1937/1984) observes,

We now take a vast constabulary structure as ‘normal,’ considering only the ways for making it most ‘honest’ and ‘efficient,’ generally unmindful of the fact that the
proliferation of constabulary functions follows the same curve of development as
the proliferation of habits involving a ‘stake in’ capitalism. (pp. 139-140)
The public normalizes and constitutively participates in control programs and government
rhetorics suggesting that the threat of terrorism is always lurking. By doing so, stakeholders
validate and provide resources for building new civil defense industries. Thus, the constabulary
function is a reminder that the USDA’s defense role functions through a capitalist system of
inequitable distribution. The rhetorical production of risk and simultaneous invention of new
public control programs benefits some narratives, programs, and groups more than others.
Without debunking the validity of the national food supply’s risk to bioterrorism, the value of
technical calculation of the risk of attack, and the need to for biosecurity organizing, my purpose
is to offer insights into their rhetorical constitution. The value of these insights is that they
encourage open public deliberation on any and all public-private initiatives toward tightened
state control. I do not disagreed with the notion that government containment of capitalist state
accumulation has become increasingly difficult in the form of a risk society.

I organize my case study into five parts. First, I elaborate on the domestic threat of
bioterrorism going into 9/11. Moreover, I describe the conditions that emerged as topics of
government and scholarly attention in the fall of 2001. Second, moving to a lower level of
analysis, I describe background information on conditions for the USDA’s entry into the war on
bioterrorism as well as a summary of the scope of its tasks. Third, drawing from USDA texts
with context supplemented on occasion by threads of media publicity, I trace and assess the
USDA’s rhetorical construction of a risk vocabulary system. In other words, I build an
organizational rhetoric on the post-9/11 risk of bioterrorism. I explain this rhetoric by organizing
it according to its sources, which are three organizational branches of the USDA participating in
the war on bioterrorism: (1) the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), (2) the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), and (3) the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

Before 9/11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks, the USDA was involved in several existing programs defending against threats to national security, but received no government funding. In response to widespread perception of an increased national threat to bioterrorism in the fall of 2001, the federal government began organizing a radically expanded defense operation. USDA leaders took part in congressional deliberations on the current federal and local level capacity for defending against bioterrorist incidents (Veneman, 2001). After receiving major financial allocations, the USDA began constructing an organizational rhetoric on its new biosecurity operations (Gips, 2003). In coordination with other agencies, the agency reorganized its border security assignments and practices, extended security in its labs, extended and developed food safety education and public outreach programs, and created emergency preparation and management procedures individually customized to each and every party in the industrial-state food system chain. Today, through increasingly large federal allocations of taxpayer dollars, the USDA’s biosecurity practices continue to expand. In 2007 the USDA’s bioterrorism defense program received a record high federal resource budget of $89 million (USDA Newsroom, 2007).

Although national security state building is but one factor in domestic food safety regulation, the two come together in a rhetorically powerful way through widespread commodification of risk. In post-9/11 food safety regulation, an emergent imperative for unity of direction to defend against bioterrorism has arguably helped calm past regulatory controversy implicating the USDA. This has been made possible through expansion of the technical sphere and its further encroachment on the territory of the intertwined public-private sphere and the
domain of the prospect of critical publicity (Habermas, 1989). There can be little doubt that the
Bush administration’s simple and accessible narrative frame for explaining 9/11 supplied the
sphere of technical decision making, including the domain of food safety regulation, rhetorical
equipment for securing public legitimacy. Integrated with technical reasoning, the frame displays
public accessibility, which has long been a rhetorical problem for liberal governance (Goodnight,
1989)

Moats (2007) lists several conditions that make the agriculture industry an attractive
target for biological agroterrorism. Foremost, the industry is a very important part of the U.S.
economy and its disablement could be widely destructive. Additionally, in light of years of
global protests against biotechnology, it is important to recognize that agriculture is one of the
biotechnology industry’s top consumers. Complementing this condition for violence is that fact
that historically violent activist groups have accused the industry of animal cruelty and
environmental destruction. The industry also offers an ideal target for organizations and industry
wanting to show willingness to kill but fearful of retribution for killing people. Internationally,
agroterrorism has been used to reach political ends in the past. Countries such as Germany,
Japan, and the former Soviet Union, as well as others, have used acts of agricultural terrorism.
The industry has several protective weaknesses as well. Inadequate biosecurity measures and
mechanisms of surveillance are in place at agricultural facilities. Personnel shortages outweigh
serious shortages in response equipment. Furthermore, veterinarians remain inadequately trained
in foreign animal disease diagnosis. The problem of inadequate training is worsened by industrial
conditions of large-scale, concentrated animal husbandry. U.S. agriculture is a global enterprise
and thus, animals, plants, and food transported far and wide from diverse agricultural locations in
a long food system chain. Pollan’s (2006) case that U.S. citizens now face the “omnivore’s
dilemma” identifies one consequence (p. 288). The human body’s need for dozens of nutrients is increasingly deprived by a corporate-state food system that continues to expand the number of available food products while, through industry consolidation, it decreases the number of ingredients in them.

Several additional intragovernmental and interorganizational communication weaknesses in food safety regulation remain today from the pre-9/11 era. One of the most notable from an organizational communication perspective is that producer organizations and industry regulators do not trust each other (GC, 2002; Moats, 2007). Another is the problem of coordination across governmental and industry groups. Before 9/11, scholars of bioterrorism identified agroterrorism as a relatively easy and possibly more potent than other Weapons of Mass Destruction that could be used against the U.S. infrastructure (Adams, 1999; Casagrande, 2000; Horn & Breeze, 1999; Rogers, Whitby, & Dando, 1999). Unfortunately, inattention across government branches at various points in federal bureaucratic system prevented USDA action on the matter. In 2000, Casagrande stated of recent USDA bioterrorism funding snubs by the House and Senate, “financial neglect is mirrored by the limited attention given to anti-agriculture terrorism in U.S. law and policy directives.” On APHIS, which would be responsible for such an attack, Casagrande added,

Funding for this service...has recently been dimished, thus reducing the number of plant and animal pathologists who can recognize and react to an outbreak of disease. A large-scale or multi-focal outbreak would likely overwhelm the response capability of this service, allowing for the catastrophic spread of disease.

(p. 93)

A closely related interorganizational problem of coordination with a much longer history
is that of multiple federal and state agencies taking part in food safety regulation, or the lack of a single entity to give primary attention to defense against agroterrorist threats. Nestle (2003) observes that past cases of governmental response to food contamination (e.g., StarLink) reveal “fragmented, overlapping, and confusing distribution of authority and coordination among the federal agencies concerned with food safety” (p. 14). This is fundamentally a problem of overbureaucratization based on distribution of high-tech labor and narrow task responsibilities. Based on technical expertise and corresponding bureaucratic guideliness, responsibility is increasingly articulated in multidirectional terms of the “right” person or agency. One example of this problem is that recovery programs that follow up biodisease outbreaks and attempt to restore a sense of equilibrium for local parties affected are unnecessarily complex. The USDA pays the farmer for the euthanization of infected animals, but payment for disposal of carcasses must follow a disaster declaration using the Robert T. Stafford Disaster and Recovery Act. Local community parties are responsible for documenting the incident and evaluating current laws to determine how costs may be reimbursed (Moats, 2007).

Distribution of authority is not the only problem. Another obstacle in ongoing practices of bureaucratic control (Edwards, 1981) is varying standards and practices across the almost overwhelming number of agencies co-participating in food safety accounting. Tracing the USDA’s responsibilities alone is no easy task. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is responsible for establishing quality and condition standards, and for grading the quality of dairy, egg, fruit, meat, poultry, seafood, and vegetable products. In this process, AMS considers the cleanliness of the product. AMS is largely funded by user fees and carries out its wide array of programs to facilitate the marketing of more than thirty statutes. The USDA’s Agricultural Research Service is responsible for conducting a wide range of research pertaining to the
Department’s mission, including food safety research. APHIS ensures the health and care of animals and plants. Thus, the only obligation APHIS has to public health is through health issues concerning plants and animals. The unit identities research as well as information needs, and coordinates research programs designed to protect the animal industry against pathogens or diseases that are a risk to humans to improve food safety. The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products moving in interstate and foreign commerce are safe, wholesome, and correctly marked, labeled, and packaged. FSIS carries out its meat and poultry inspection tasks under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, as amended, as well as the Poultry Products Inspection Act, as amended. Finally, the agency’s Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) establishes quality standards and provides a national inspection system to facilitate marketing of grain and other related products. GIPSA has food safety-related responsibilities, but regular regulatory operations. Official inspection approval allows the market to determine a product’s value on the basis of compliance with contractual specifications and federal regulation requirements.

Strikingly, other government agencies working with the USDA through their own food safety roles include the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and the U.S. Customs Service in the Department of the Treasury, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration in the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Marine Fisheries Service in the Department of Commerce, and the Environmental Protection Agency (GAO, 1998; Hoffman & Taylor, 1998).

Through the case of the USDA, I shall now show how this historically conflicted food safety regulation system has fostered identification and control after 9/11 in a way that reorganizes, reproduces, and extends the constabulary function. The agency’s organizing for
bioterrorism defense repetitively integrates unobtrusive rhetorics of identification as well as obtrusive bureaucratic and technical modes of organizational control (Edwards, 1981; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Following the loose Burkean reading technique outlined in previous chapters, I construct a representative anecdote that sums up a rhetorical attitude projected by the USDA’s post-9/11 identity. Organizational texts that I bring together include official agency website content, congressional testimony transcripts, public announcements and press releases, posters, education and outreach campaign publications, media interview excerpts from agency officials, and texts including public responses to the organizational rhetoric being studied.

Although the USDA’s reorganization process began immediately after 9/11, its participation in a so-called support role within the new civil defense and public welfare complex unofficially began May 30, 2002. Before a local public gathering, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced that the USDA would release more than $43 million in cooperative agreements and state grants to aid agricultural homeland security. This was only a portion of the $328 million the President and Congress approved the same year to strengthen the USDA’s homeland security operations (OC, 2002). In this instance, one already finds a structural bind in the form of an organizational “paradox of design” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 361). The USDA calls for citizens to volunteer, be self-defensive, and locally adapt, but to do so in ways approved by technical experts and grants from top authorities. This is not to say that this paradox is not potentially productive as much as it to note that institutional containment and distribution of identity positions precedes local action by establishing its conditions.

After this early emergence of this design paradox, the agency began to engage in major biosecurity projects, extending old programs and extending new ones. An organizational rhetoric emerged in relation to the government organization’s expansion of and changes to border
security practices, extension of security in its labs, development of food safety education and outreach programs, and installation of new agricultural policies. From a Burkean perspective on organizational rhetoric, the USDA and other collective actors’ response to the war on bioterrorism is a partial response. These organizations have participated in the persuasion they promote and thus are not merely responding to an outside, extra-rhetorical exigency. Although organizations necessarily respond to change in their environments, they just as often constitute environments by inventively calling them forth. One way rhetorical constitution operates in the war on bioterrorism is by configuring constabulary “traffic regulation” and the need for it (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 304). The constitutive practice of the system of food safety regulation situates the USDA as an organizational constable. Just as the USDA solicits public identification to direct attention to certain problems and alternatives (Cheney, 1983b), it is being subjected to the same narrowing process. In both cases, identification does not work alone and depends on technical and bureaucratic control for enforcement.

Like the case presented in the previous chapter, the USDA’s tactics of identification and control draw from the rules and resources of the structural identity (C.R. Scott et al., 1998) of post-9/11 American culture, a reorganized military-media-industrial complex, and the Bush’s administration’s vocabulary of war motives. This condition offers an interesting macro-level insight to Larson and Tompkins’ (2005) finding that managers are victims of the same system of concertive control that they install. Moreover, it suggests that the USDA’s system of biosecurity is a cyclically repetitious appropriation of multiple overlapping identities (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Cheney, 1991). Identification also allows for legitimation of particularly definitions of sensible organizational action (C.R. Scott et al., 1998). The system of control articulated through identity work is as systematically distorted as it is strategically intentional (Lyon, 2007),
resulting in only semi-conscious political programming of organizational conduct. The USDA’s war on bioterrorism identity is encompassed by the covering narrative structure of the Bush administration but does so with special zest through partial consciousness of kairotic opportunity for self-improvement. To this end, the USDA appreciatively participates in the war’s acceleration of the risk society in and through organizational mechanisms of control. Below, I demonstrate that this complex rhetorical process steers attention away from the pre-9/11 regulation problems I have identified to reproduce the constabulary order.

The Agricultural Research Service

In April 2002, an ARS administrator sent a memorandum to laboratory employees across the USDA’s geographically dispersed structure on the implementation of a new policy. The policy discontinued the traditional USDA practice of applying for visas for foreign scientists and students to work in its laboratories. At the time of the announcement, two hundred foreign scientists and students worked in the USDA’s ARS labs, with most of them employed under H1-B visas designated specifically for such individuals. Under the new policy, these researchers are able to remain working at the USDA until their visas expired, and thereafter cannot apply for extensions. No exceptions are granted to employees of countries of origin or research interests that appear to pose little risk. Policy change came in the wake of findings produced through an investigation by the Department of Justice of seven pending visa applications sponsored by the USDA. Three scientists were labeled potential security risks. The change also followed a government decision to make it more difficult for foreign physicians to remain in the country. According to a spokesperson for the Secretary of Agriculture, the Department has neither the authority nor the funds to conduct background checks. On the new policy, the spokesperson added, “It’s just easier for us to do this across the board” (Enserink, 2002, p. 996).
Beyond the administrators who made the decision, the USDA’s decisional account was unsettling in the bioscience community. In May 2002, *Science* writer Martin Enserink observed, “the policy…is prompting an outcry from critics, who say it is an overreaction to legitimate concerns about national security that could weaken U.S. agricultural science.” Enserink points out that the policy counters the Bush administration’s statements about the importance of international scientific cooperation. In agreement, USDA research team leader James Tulminson noted that the policy makes it more difficult to get good researchers. Washington State University researcher James Cook added, “This is a throwback to a very conservative approach, and it sends the wrong message.” Observing an organizational paradox of control at work (Stohl & Cheney, 2001), researchers argued the international scientific exchange may actually prevent terrorism rather than cause it (Enserink, 2002). As such, the USDA’s exercise of state power through a democratic system of governance toward the protection of democracy and freedom actually results in less democracy, freedom, and individual rights. Altheide (2006) deftly describes this institutional rhetoric of domesticity on the necessity of national security state building. He notes, “all those fighting to protect actual and potential victims should be permitted to do their work, unimpeded by any concerns about civil liberties or adding context and complexity to the simple analysis that was offered” (p. 432).

In this instance, organizational identification with espoused “us” meanings, commitments, and beliefs provokes the organizational constable to enact what Burke (1945/1969) calls “purification” of identity through excommunication. Purification depends on the invention of a “scapegoat mechanism,” which allows for unloading a “concentration of power” through “moral indignation” so that unification by “vicarious atonement” may restore order (pp. 406-407). The decisional account, then, speaks into being what Stohl and Cheney
(2001) call an organizational “paradox of commitment.” Finally, moving back to the formulation of the decision and the invention of the USDA’s decisional account, a final ethical dilemma emerges in the USDA’s rhetoric of identification. As indicated by the agency’s public justification, the decision-making process itself actualizes a structural “paradox of punctuation” that subverts processes proven to be ethical, efficient, and effective on the ironic premise that these processes are inefficient. This paradox in stakeholder participation occurs when organizations punctuate perceived causal patterns in particular process and events: “The punctuation paradox refers to attempts to bypass or short-circuit steps in the participation process, largely in the interest of efficiency, in ways that ultimately undermine satisfaction with the process and the system itself” (pp. 360, 366).

My careful reading of this instance of organizational rhetoric shows the insights of comic ambivalence as a Burkean approach to organizational criticism. Moreover, my reading implicitly gives organizational identification a primary ethical role in the prevention of unjust rhetorical paradoxes. In this instance, identification appears through recognition that the policy itself reconstitutes the very identity of actual and potential stakeholder publics. Ironically, identification proves binding even for the USDA administrators who made the decision, for they alone cannot be given full blame for this ethical lapse. To reiterate, systematically distorted communication pervades the national security state’s constabulary alliance, which governs external publics and itself through a multiplicity of obtrusive and unobtrusive control mechanisms. Yet, the state has been able to evade and deflect critical publicity through its ability to define the post-9/11 moment in American history and give stakeholders subject positions in relation to it. The result is that rather than the public turning a suspicion eye toward new mechanism of state control, government agency employee-defenders and “self-defensive
citizen-consumers” direct suspicion toward their neighbors in order to self-preserve the homeland (Hay, 2007, pp. 217-218).

In present case, through what Burke (1937/1984) calls the constabulary order’s regulatory practice of legislative secular prayer, USDA employees are hierarchically ordered and potentially eliminated in order to preserve the constabulary fortress against bioterrorism. The mystery inherent in division of labor enables the constable’s rhetorical move of transcendence through a simple binary frame that establishes categories for ordering and securing the world it defines. In this case, the by-product is alienation and segregation through a move of identification by common enemy or anti-thesis (Cheney, 1983b). This notion of identification with one group is not, also known as “disidentification” (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Pratt, 2001, p. 20), results in these effects of broken identification. Additionally, through two rhetorical manuevers, the USDA’s public justification for its new visa policy served what Deetz (1992) calls “discursive closure,” which refers to the suppression of potential conflict (p. 187). First, the “It’s just easier” response neutralized the decision as if it was value-free. Second, insofar as the justification appealed to a higher-order explanation that prevented critical discussion of the value premises that guided it, it constituted an act of legitimation. The decision rejects what Connolly (1993) has described as the democratic need for “productive ambiguity” that fosters “politics of agonistic respect among multiple constituencies who respond differentially to mysteries of being” but are joined in this condition (pp. 264-266).

To understand the cultural climate leading to this arguably undemocratic USDA decision, one must return to the fall 2001 Amerithrax anthrax spore mailings, or the source of public fear of bioterrorism. The case represents the first bioterrorist attack deaths on U.S. soil and remains unsolved. The original fear was that the bacterial strain found in letters sent to media
professionals and government officials had been “weaponized” and perhaps originated from a U.S. army lab. Fort Detrick, Maryland army scientist Steven Hatfill was originally named a “person of interest” and has since filed suit against federal authorities for invasion of privacy (Gerstein, 2007b). Hatfill settled for $10 in another suit against Vanity Fair and Reader’s Digest on charges of liberal and defamation (Gerstein, 2007a). Today, the FBI is investigating other scientists at Fort Detrick (Herridge & McCaleb, 2008). Hatfill’s lawsuits are fueled by the fact that the government’s initial theory has proven no more convincing than any other alternative possibilities, with some officials even admitting that the theory was wrong. The initial theory was held up by a small group of scientists and government officials for years, rarely subjected to critical public debate. The anthrax turned out to be a common rather than highly sophisticated form that could have originated almost anywhere. Scientists have found there is little about the anthrax used in the mailings that narrows it to a domestic source, a government scientist, or anyone else with access to a U.S. biodefense lab.

Since 2006, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has expanded its view beyond its original theory by assigning fresh leadership to the case. The Bureau has done so, however, without leaving deep concern about the threat of government scientists behind. Senator Charles E. Grassley has expressed a distinctly Burkean attitude on this unsolved case: “I’m concerned that the FBI may have spent too much time focusing on one theory of what happened and too little effort on other possibilities” (Lengel & Warrick, 2006). Here, Burke’s suspicion of bureaucratic efficiency, which he often calls a type of psychosis, offers explanation and future warning to agents of a culture of fear and a risk society. Too much faith in a single secular prayer may very well reproduce existing conditions of uncritical public acceptance that help configure a state of misfit.
Beyond the fact that the policy decision seems to have re-conceived the identities of the USDA’s own employees as mysterious others, the agency’s decisional account is also rhetorically insightful because it signals the power of fear generated by risk rhetoric, its liberal motives of identification, and related short-term speculation in the post-9/11 constabulary order. Given that the USDA’s decision is accounted for as a partial condition of the effects of funding as well as the judgment of another government agency, the USDA’s account is in a strategic formulation derived through systematic, interagency distortion. To be sure, the USDA’s decision is a product of identification with the war on terror’s narrative structure, which invites identification through the historically persuasive American frame of good versus evil (Ivie, 2005).

In the USDA’s visa decision, identification and control are certainly involved in more than the projection of this war frame, for identification rarely comes in one form and seldom works alone. In addition to USDA appeals to national identity and the logic of the larger Bush administration, the decisional account articulates a common ground identification tactic (Cheney, 1983b) having to do with the culturally accepted legitimacy of the liberal virtues of technical reasoning, efficiency, and objectivism. Discursive closure through neutralization and legitimizing appeals to a higher order simultaneously identify the USDA with the rationality of bureaucratic control. A necessity of control invented through bureaucratic logic appears through a liberal humanist, albeit “realist style” (Hariman, 1995, p. 4), move of definitional dissociation by negation of rational decision making from people, politics, and the possibility of critical debate (Edwards, 1981). The truth is shown forth as an unfortunate result of strict criteria, rules, and procedures derived through impersonal and objective fairness.

In a vast and geographically dispersed organizational structure such as the USDA,
technological issues also prove important for biosecurity decision-making. The account given for the USDA’s change in lab policy stresses bureaucratic efficiency but also implicates the limits of technical organizational control (Edwards, 1981). That is, governing security technologies functioning within the organizational structure enable and constrain decisional choices and regulatory effectiveness. By situating the USDA’s visa decision in the larger national security state’s complex’s fight against bioterrorism, a paradoxical byproduct of technical control in employee screening practices and laboratory surveillance becomes clear. In addition to seventy-five USDA labs registered through and supervised by APHIS, approximately three hundred thirty-five labs across the country that are federally registered to handle deadly biological agent such as anthrax. Over one hundred additional university labs report possession of live anthrax. In total, more than seven thousand two hundred lab workers are approved to work with anthrax. Thus, the boomerang effect of modernist technologies in the risk society helps constitute the paradox of constabulary control in the USDA and other agencies collective response to post-9/11 lab defense. On this point, Jonathon Tucker, a senior research fellow at the Monterey Institute for Nonproliferation Studies notes, “The huge U.S. investment in biodefense research, including dozens of new high-security labs and thousands of additional researchers, has actually made the biosecurity problem worse” (AP, 2006).

Together, the intertwined presence of identification, and bureaucratic and technical control in the USDA’s decisional account support Edwards’ (1981) contention that in a bureaucratic system, control may very well value compliance and productivity relatively equally. Moreover, in a constabulary order, a temporary solution to one aspect of the problem subverts attention to the root of the problem. In the post-9/11 risk society, bioterrorism risk represents the side effects of industrial and technological development. Risk is less of a matter of a time, place,
an institution arrangement, or a rational calculation. Since high technology is now governing technology, technological risk is increasingly pervasive and unbounded. As society continues to develop more programs for dealing with risk, fear increases but safety may not. Here, one finds support for Scott’s (2006) post-humanist conceptualization of kairos not as rhetorical seizing of advantage but rather as “an attempt at management that, like the risk to which it responds, is itself tenuous and unpredictable” (p. 121).

The Food Safety Inspection Service

The FSIS is “responsible for ensuring that the nation’s commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged” (FSISa, 2008). More than seven thousand five-hundred FSIS inspectors regulate meat and poultry plants in the U.S. Whereas the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for overseeing food already in the market, the USDA is responsible for inspecting meat, poultry, and egg products before they reach the market (Frist, 2002). Part of the FSIS’s work in this area is assessment of foreign country inspection systems to ensure food safety standards are being met and that operations are equivalent to the U.S. inspection system.

According to the USDA, the FSIS made several moves after the fall of 2001 to enhance protection of the food supply from intentional threats. Moreover, the division expanded its efforts after a particularly historic event took place on December 23, 2003. On this day, decades of worry about the risk of mad cow disease appearing the U.S. reached a tipping point. In a national public announcement, Secretary Veneman (2003b) announced the first confirmed U.S. case of mad cow disease, also known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Meat from single cow that had been imported among a herd from Canada to Idaho in 2003 was found contaminated with the fatal brain-wasting disease. Cattle usually obtain BSE through
contaminated feed. Officials traced beef from the diagnosed cow to a slaughterhouse in Washington state to two processing plants in Oregon to its points of distribution in Alaska, Montana, Hawaii, Idaho, California, Nevada and the U.S. territory of Guam.

In response to the USDA’s announcement of contamination, over two dozen countries temporarily banned U.S. beef imports. Consistent with the ARS’s decisional account of its visa policy change, the USDA appealed to identification with bureaucratic rationality. In this case, however, a rhetoric of bureaucracy illuminated the theme of containment of risk in emergency rather than preventive terms. Given immediacy and urgency of the situation and the need to sooth the public as forcefully as possible, it makes sense that an appeal to bureaucratic procedure would be reinforced through appeals to identification with science and the military. These identifications offer the American public its most prized modernist mechanisms for constabulary control, including the temporary suppression of nature.

Appeals to the vices of science and military aid came in equally heavy rhetorical doses. FSIS spokesperson Kenneth Peterson quickly assured the nation’s citizens that their scientifically calculated risk of obtaining the disease was “virtually zero.” Peterson added that the parts most likely to carry the infection—the brain, spinal cord, and lower intestine, were removed before the meat from the infected cow was cut and processed for consumption. Dr. Ron DeHaven, chief USDA veterinarian noted that science has shown that certain meat cuts are fairly safe from infection, including cuts without bones such as beef steaks, roast, liver, and group beef from labeled cuts like round or chuck. Dehaven denounced the trade restrictions set by foreign countries, suggesting they “are not well-founded in science” (“Meat,” 2003).

In addition to expert testimony, Secretary Veneman (2003b) brought her ethos of

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3 Beginning in 1986, BSE broke out in large numbers in Great Britain and peaked there in 1993. Millions of cattle were slaughtered. By 2003, over one hundred people had died worldwide from its human variant (see “Meat,” 2003).
authority to the matter by militarizing the market. Reminiscent of President Bush’s call for vigilant business-as-usual after 9/11, Veneman moved to restore consumer confidence through a nationally publicized press conference message. The Secretary assured the public that the market had been secured and would stay open. She stated that the USDA was working in alliance with military and Homeland Security officials, including director Tom Ridge. On the single diagnosed cow, Veneman iterated, “[a] sample from this animal is being flown on a military aircraft to the central veterinary laboratory in Weybridge, England” and “based on the information available, this incident is not terrorist related nor is it related in any way to our nation’s heightened alert status.” Near the end of her remarks, Veneman iterated, “We see no need for people to alter those plans or their eating habits or do anything but have a happy and healthy holiday season. I plan to serve beef for my Christmas dinner.”

This event certainly deserved to a major concern for federal agencies and the public. It would be naïve to suggest that this event is one of many past meat contamination outbreaks that happened to receive special attention. Yet, it seems that it would also be a mistake to suggest a particular type of organizational rhetoric did not function in an asymmetrical way with the public. Given that the tradition function of public relations is express cohesive agreement with the public to put issues to rest from critical public debate, one is able to understand why a rhetorical response of containment would be put to work. The FSIS’s response is constitutive of risk and the national security state insofar as it appeals to identification by anti-thesis (Cheney, 1983b) by citing the threat of bioterrorism. This move reminds the public it is in a new era and that the government recognizes this through practical and socially responsible action. Military appeals also prove useful by reinforcing liberal-expert governance by containing and eliminating antagonisms that threaten the republic in its Enlightenment projects of freedom and
development. The symbolic form of this liberal rhetoric is therefore epic, progressive, and syllogistic because exigency forces a sequence of action toward a necessary response and anticipated conclusion (Burke, 1931/1968). Given the ingrained logic of liberal governance in the public sphere, pronounced standards for the quality of an organization’s response to crisis partially invokes that action, often in the form of scripted public relations. Ingrained liberalism fosters the expectation in the public mind that the crisis will be contained and equilibrium will be restored.

I argue that the function of the FSIS’s socially appropriate response was that by showing the USDA’s readiness for these new times of risk, it helped stem the tide for food safety policy reform. That is, the agency framed the event through a familiar move in recent organizational crises accounts and by doing so, directed attention away from the long history of industry and state conflict of interest manifested by past food safety regulation failures. The move employed, known as “anti-patterning” (Ibarra & Kitsuse, 1993) or “‘bad apples’ discourse” (Conrad, 2003b, p. 553), was characteristic of that articulated in the Enron meltdown just before the mad cow episode. The maneuver isolates the contaminant from public experience by defining it as a unique instance and an episodic gliche in an otherwise well-functioning system. Since the 2003 mad cow incident, the bad apples approach has of course appeared in the Bush administration and conservative commentators’ (six) “rotten soldiers’ thesis” on the torture case of the Abu Ghraib prison (Hartnett & Stengrim, 2006, p. 20). In each of these cases, organizational use of this approach reflects is unique ability to shift responsibility, sustain current practices and policies, contain an issue from infecting the the ethos of the speaking organization. It is powerful device for deflecting the possibility of critical publicity because it serves the purpose of non-deliberative legitimation.
Thus, in the USDA’s mad cow incident, the Burkean constabulary function directs attention to the possibility that the privatization of decisions through technical containment may very well protect the private sphere of freedom more than public good. Moreover, it allows for explication of the identification within a larger system of control. Here, the identification function of Veneman’s reference to the terrorists should not be underestimated. As Cheney (1983b) notes, efforts of identification by antithesis emphasize threats from “outsiders” and the “misguided,” implicitly stressing identification with “insiders,” which are the stakeholders of the organization. This move is one “toward achieving unity and collective acceptance of organizational values” (p. 148, emphasis in original).

Especially since the discovery mad cow disease in the U.S., the FSIS has strengthened its controls to protect ports from entry of contaminated products from abroad. The USDA branch has also added surveillance liaison inspectors to its staff at U.S. ports of entry. These inspectors conduct a broader range of surveillance activities than traditional import inspectors and work to improve coordination with other food safety agencies. In 2003, the FSIS reformed its national surveillance system for monitoring and tracking food-related consumer complaints by expanding its electronic coverage to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. “The Consumer Complaint Monitoring System” (CCMS) serves as a real-time early warning system for potential terrorist attacks on the food supply. Public concerns and complaints can now be entered at FSIS field offices and accessed at headquarters to provide a response closer to real-time emergency functioning (Lambert, 2003).

Additionally, the FSIS provides training for industry as well as state-level departments of agriculture. Supplementary guidance materials available online offer recommendations on food safety practices for industry and the home (FSIS, 2008b). Through the FSIS education and
outreach online shell, industry visitors can also download and print any of three food safety posters—which were published in September 2002—designed for “processors,” “producers,” and “meal providers.” The meal providers poster refers to restaurants. Designed in a way that is artistically the same as the other two posters, it offers an A through F list of steps “to prevent or respond to threats to our food supply.” The title of all of the posters is “Keep America’s Food and Agriculture Safe: What Can You Do? The bottom of each poster provides a space for writing in local emergency numbers. FSIS’s website also offers thirty-second TV and radio spots that repeat basic food safety practices to a upbeat chorus. The rhetoric appearing in each of these mediums is remarkably consistent, simple, and even mundane. Moreover, campaign texts are closely tailored to each group and even available in Spanish (FSIS, 2007a).

Most recently, the FSIS has also developed food defense guidance information for processors, transporters, and distributors of meat, poultry, and egg products. FSIS provides instructional materials for developing “food defense plans” for warehouses and distribution centers. The FSIS’s rhetoric of food defense offers one example of the USDA’s targeting of specific audiences with specific persuasive appeals for action. An FSIS (2008c) brochure on developing a food defense plan within the industry notes, “In today’s environment, many customers want their suppliers to have a Food Defense Plan.” Interestingly, the term you, which I emphasize in the following excerpts, is abound. It adds that a Food Defense Plan, “will help you provide a safe product to your customers, maintain a secure working environment for your employees, and protect your business.” It warns the business operator to be alert to possible attacks and that “Anyone is capable or hurting or disrupting it.” The brochure elaborates, An attack can originate from within or outside your warehouse or distribution center. An attacker could even pose as one of the following: customer or potential
customer, truck driver making deliveries, salesperson visiting your business, utility representative, contractor doing repairs or performing services. Keep in mind that a former employee who has a grudge against you or your business also could pose a danger.

The use of you is in several ways an invitation to identification. First, it is helpful to recall that the famous political adage of “you, people” is foremost a device for constructing the possibility of democratic and personal empowerment, particularly in troubled times. In this case, the simultaneous presence of an antagonist (an “attacker”) indicates that you constitutes the audiences as under immediate threat before the completion of each sentence presenting a persuasive appeal to action. With risk constituted, perceived threat or fear may very well complete the symbolic form of the text as a threat-response logical sequence is itself persuasive. Perhaps the most interesting function of you in this FSIS rhetoric is that it attempts to cover both ethical and pragmatic bases. The agency unit expresses commonality or shared values through an identification move of expressing concern for the individual. In several examples offered by Cheney (1983b), organizations directly uses the phrase “the people” through this move of identification. In this case, unlike in internal communication between management and employees, the use of you invokes a sense of support and cooperation rather than belonging. In this text’s national security state situation, the concept’s function is telling because it locates the locus of regulatory responsibility in the self-defensive consumer-citizen rather by defining the organizations as a supportive educator. You, then, may very well function as identity armor for USDA legitimacy.

FSIS food safety campaigns offer another clear example of a post-9/11 USDA invitation to organizational identification. In addition to biosecurity aid for industry, FSIS’s post-9/11
consumer food safety education and outreach targets home food preparation more aggressively than in the past. In light of the historical tensions I have outlined in food safety regulation, FSIS is able to appeal to multiple stakeholder groups. Major food companies have long called for food safety regulation to turn toward consumer education rather than government intervention or additional industry responsibilities (Nestle, 2003). In the midst of a surplus of recent food contamination outbreaks, the public and the mass media typically approach USDA consumer education with a friendly frame of acceptance as well. On top of these conditions, the FSIS’s public presentation of the program defines the risk as part of a new era that must be integrated into one’s lifestyle. Whether, risk is perceived as real or not, the FSIS’s rhetoric of identification presents its programs as meeting a legitimate standard of practical utility and social responsibility (Brummer, 1991). Therefore, potential identifications immediately reproduce organizational legitimacy. The rhetorical constitution of public food safety education a basic humanitarian need certainly resembles the USDA’s move of self-moralization in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan. In both cases, the organization tapped into the structural pre-rhetoric and transcendent persuasiveness of human rights advocacy. Given these considerations, it should come as little surprise that FSIS food safety education and outreach has received little public attention.

As is case the with FSIS rhetoric of food defense directed toward industry, FSIS food safety campaigns directed toward the consumer shift the locus of regulatory responsibility to the self-defensive consumer-citizen by defining the organizations as a supportive educator. Take, for example, the FSIS Food Safety Education project shell’s description of the “Be Food Safe” campaign as a cooperative project between the USDA, the Partnership for Food Safety Education, the FDA, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). A children’s education-based
Food Safety Mobile Coloring Book teaches basic steps to food protection and states that the campaign is “designed to educate consumers about preventing foodborne illnesses through the four easy lessons of Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill” (FSIS, 2007b).

In 2003, the FSIS launched an especially ambitious and non-traditional campaign component within its Food Safety Education project—the “Food Safety Mobile,” a large, nationally touring traveling bus painted with colored cartoon characters promoting the campaign “We Can Fight BAC! (bacteria).” The bus offers food safety education children’s games, an array of educational media publications, as well as the chance to talk one-on-one with a FSIS expert at each stop. As part of the agency’s post-9/11 commitment to public outreach, the Mobile’s tour organizes its discourse through a theory-based social marketing scheme—what the FSIS calls “selling” public health behaviors through a new age consumer advertising approach called “experiential marketing” (FSIS, 2004). The Mobile’s tour overlaps with and integrates several other campaigns such as the “Thermy campaign”—after a cartoon figure and thermometer-chef whose messages “encourage customers to use food thermometers when they cook, meat, poultry, or egg products” (in mobile coloring book). This interactive campaign technique’s focus on immediacy and entertaining experience not only identifies the organization with popular commodity culture but by doing so, is able to create a vehicle for public appeal to what could easily become an unappealing and dry educational campaign. As in other instances, the USDA’s program toward identification and legitimacy benefits from symbolic form alone, which in this case offers a ways of experiencing and implicitly responding to the threat of bioterrorism as well as unintentional contamination in the food system.

Through its touring show, the Food Safety Mobile Campaign touts its identity as a geographically vast program consisting of intimate interpersonal interactions. The campaign’s
print publications articulate what DiSanza and Bullis (1999) refer to as the organizational identification move of “bragging,” which is a version of what Burke (2007) calls dramatistic “social pageantry” (p. 303). DiSanza and Bullis’s (1999) study of the USDA’s Forest Service found this common ground tactic to be highly pervasive and taking various forms across identification inducements. They note that newsletters emphasized the USFS’s “dedication to competence and accomplishment by bragging about the completion of various projects” (p. 361). The “bragging” tactic “boasts about the amount of time, money, or effort a group puts into a task” (p. 386).

Take the following information provided in FSIS Food Safety Mobile print pullouts distributed to the public as an example of this move of identification through bragging. One of two pullouts that I examined explains that in the first year of the campaign, the Mobile made stops in 64 cities in 28 states, holding 87 events. The pullout complements these numbers with visual images of Secretary of Veneman reading a book to children and playing a food safety game near the Mobile. Another image shows the Mobile taking part in a town parade, self-constructing what Burke (1937/1984) calls an “epically heroic” frame of acceptance for its audiences (p. 36). Through this frame, rhetorical magnification frames the organizational constable as almost as great as the larger threat to the food system that it confronts. The pullout also includes a cluster of local newspaper articles positively describing the Mobile’s visits at around the country (FSIS, 2004). The agency estimates it made 179,000 face-to-to face contacts, distributed 225,000 publications, made 64.4 million non-internet media impressions, and received 3,188 calls to its hotline. In the second year, estimated face-to-face contacts rose to 658,001, distributed publications rose to 387,054, the number of cities rose to 76, estimated that non-internet media impressions reached 35.2 million, and the number of events rose to 100
across 25 states. An interesting addition to the second pullout is that it even more explicitly alludes to its own self-proven effectiveness by citing FSIS research on the Mobile campaign. The brochure reports that according to the FSIS study, participants in the Mobile experience said their experience increased or reinforced their awareness of food safety. Participants also reported that the most useful sources of information at the Mobile were the FSIS and local educators with whom they personally interacted about their concerns or questions (FSIS, 2005).

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

The APHIS has played a major role in post-9/11 organizing for biosecurity. The USDA division has fought bioterrorism threats by securing borders from non-permitted fruits, plants, and meat brought in by international travelers, establishing emergency response procedures, and monitoring livestock diseases across the country. Border security operations are in order at twenty-one international airports, selected U.S. mail facilities, and along the Mexican border. On March 1, 2003, Homeland Security legislation transferred 2,000 APHIS employees to work under the auspices of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP). In this transfer, APHIS’s “Beagle Brigade,” a band of over one hundred scent-tracing canines dressed in green USDA jackets emblazoned with the slogan “Protecting American Agriculture” (APHIS Factsheet, 2003; Phillips, 2003). In 2003, when the director of APHIS was asked by Farm Journal to comment on its post-9/11 operations, he noted, “almost like a military mission” (Phillips, 2003).

In 2003, APHIS began promoting what quickly became its highly controversial National Animal Identification System (NAIS). The program calls for installment of individual identification technologies—from ear tags to injected transponders for information as simple as birth date and as complex as DNA profiles—on all of the country’s livestock population. The USDA has urged domestic farmers and ranchers to invest significant amounts of time and money
to fit ID tags for or inject transponders into the more than twenty-nine species and two billion animals in the U.S. agricultural system (Gumpert & Pentland, 2007). Illustrating the constabulary function’s blend of unobtrusive and obtrusive control mechanisms, the USDA once again couches stakeholder consent as a national security imperative. The USDA’s official NAIS website (APHIS, 2008) describes the system in terms of three vital needs. Health officials need to know which animals are involved in a disease outbreak, where the infected animals are currently located, and what other animals might have been exposed to the disease.

The NAIS website includes appeals to identification in other ways as well. The site’s organizational rhetoric manifests common ground expressions toward farmers and ranchers through appeals resembling those that the FSIS’s circulates to industry stakeholders in its food defense discourse. Although APHIS does not go as far as targeting specific stakeholders who may be attackers, unlike the FSIS, it appeals to the momentous popularity of a national movement to adopt its NAIS technology. By doing so, the agency constitutes the program as legitimate and thus, demands consideration. APHIS articulates the common ground identification tactic of advocating benefits and activities (Cheney, 1983b) of NAIS in the following way: “By choosing to participate in NAIS, you will join a national disease response network built to protect your animals, your neighbors, and your economic livelihood against the devastation of a foreign animal disease outbreak.” The NAIS site even allows visitors to select and view their state websites and offers a ticker and national map of the total number of premises registered as of a particular date. Again, the term you repetitiously personalizes the invitation through immediate appeal to empowerment as well as the expression of personal benefits, while placing the locus of regulatory responsibility and cost on self-defensive farmers and ranchers.

For more than a decade, leading corporations in the food industry have pushed the policy
supporting the NAIS, finally winning over the USDA shortly after the installation of the Bush administration in 2001 (Gumpert & Pentland, 2007). In the wake of widespread resistance to NAIS, the USDA backed off its original plan to make NAIS mandatory and fully operational by 2009. Just as the agency has done many times before in food safety policy decisional accounts (Nestle, 2003), it has followed a three-step constabulary procedure that rhetorically defines the situation and bridges social division. First, the agency defined its moves as “regulatory” changes. Second, the USDA defined the new NAIS program as “voluntary.” Third, with the encouragement of federal funding incentives, the agency has urged state agents to mandate it. Here, terminological inducements to identification are eventually enforced by exercise of the organizational constable’s application of further resources to temporarily suppress noncompliance.

Gumpert and Pentland’s (2007) description of NAIS controversy reveals the USDA’s display of liberal rationality in a way that alienates stakeholders, closes off critical debate, and reproduced a constabulary order:

The controversy stems primarily from the backhanded way the government has imposed a deeply unpopular policy. By introducing NAIS as regulatory changes, the USDA has short-circuited the democratic process designed to protect the public from government overreaching. Congress had never debated NAIS, and few elected officials have been held accountable for its consequences.

NAIS was actually designed to serve as a marketing program for domestic and international consumer confidence. Thus, it is foremost a technology for the self-defensive citizen-consumer more than it is farmers and ranchers. The system is therefore consistent with free market rationality, specifically the military-industrial consolidation, as the best path to preservation of
public interest. As Judith McGeary, founder of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance in Austin, Texas notes, the real problems remain, for the policy does not change industry practices that have created this lack of confidence. Moreover, although corporate governance of large, urban livestock facilities and the transfer of animals long distances increases chances of disease and the need for vaccination, the rhetoric of NAIS as a “tracking system” helps constitute risk only to manage perceived threat. As the NAIS extends U.S. agricultural market power, the program is at work deflecting consumer concerns about the offspring of cloned animals. The latter effect should not be taken lightly. As a possible sign of the future, on December 19, 2007, a leading group of cloned livestock producers announced they would use NAIS to monitor meat and milk products from cloned animals as they move far and wide through the food chain.

Large-scale ranchers as well as organic and Amish farmers have voiced dissent against the APHIS program. The USDA expected this dissent from the start and planned accordingly. However, it seems that few critics initially realized how aggressively the agency would pursue the program’s installation by shifting from one blocked tactic to another. This resilience appears in the rather dismissive remarks from Agriculture Undersecretary Bruce Knight:

Folks tend to make it more complicated than it really is…The important thing is to have a system whereby in the event of a catastrophic animal disease, we can identify everyone in the community and let them know what’s going on, and do it within forty-eight hours. It builds off a long tradition of cooperation between American farmers and the federal government.

Knight’s statement is a powerful example of the intermingling of control and identification. Specifically, it allows for understanding how a post-9/11 agent of the constabulary function is able to move toward suppression with the help of moralized appeals.
Allow me to diagram how the constabulary function works in this instance of organizational rhetoric. First, the USDA speaker’s rhetorical style is once again that of the realist who, by dissociational definition, displays a unique ability to cut through the politics to the simpler realm of the real where the situation is clear and accessible to rational explanation (Hariman, 1995). Second, Knight’s realist persuasion confirms that the NAIS is simply a response to a basic and vital community need in a time of terror. Through legitimate appeal to this higher principle, Knight’s iteration functions toward discursive closure (Deetz, 1992). As the organization restores control of the situation through Knights words, these words ironically function toward identification. Toggling in the constitutional dialectic of organizational identification appears as Knight dissociates the USDA from dissenting stakeholders exhibiting a lower level of rationality, but does so through words that bridge division through appeal to common ground identification. Third, Knight’s expression of concern (Cheney, 1983b) for USDA stakeholders in the face of risk to bioterrorism too great to ignore constitutes the NAIS as legitimately useful and socially responsible. Here’s Knight’s hypothetical situation of terror functions to justify the legitimacy of the organization’s program. Fourth, by softly appealing to a historical pre-rhetoric of organizational identification, the last sentence of the iteration reconfirms faith in cooperation in the organization-stakeholder relationship.

Coordination between kairos, identification, and capitalist cultural lag is this instance of constabulary organizational rhetoric should not be taken lightly. The rhetorical constitution of a bioterrorism risk situation offer kairos to the NAIS campaign. Frames of immediate threat aid farmers and ranchers’ mobilization through rhetoric of identification, which ultimately allows for reproducing existing problems in the food system with free market globalization of food. Through the NAIS, the risk of bioterrorism would seem to be almost obsessively managed.
However, this obsession is only possible through deeper unsettled problems in the food safety regulation system. Perhaps most notable is the USDA’s co-enactment of identification and control, or the paradox of simultaneously promoting and regulating the agriculture industry.

The USDA’s Rhetoric and Ethics of Identification and Control

This case analysis has provided a necessary measure of comic ambivalence to the USDA and other organizations’ already legitimate pre-rhetoric for national security state expansion toward increased organizational control of stakeholder citizenship. By situating the USDA’s war on bioterrorism identity as that of an organizational constable, I have projected some useful contributions to the literature on organizational communication. First, I have demonstrated the utility of Burke’s constabulary function for studies on the intersection of organizational identification, control, and ethics. The constabulary function offers a continuum of control practices ranging from very unobtrusive to very obtrusive. As shown in this chapter, facing a shortage of persuasive charge, the organizational constable’s tendency is to bring in more coercive modes of influence (Cloud, 2005) and implement mechanisms of discursive closure that disrupt a project of critical publicity (Deetz, 1992).

Moreover, Burke’s (1937/1984) constabulary function allows for critical consideration of paradox and irony as rhetorical matters with the benefit being that the critic is able to read control as an ethical or distorted process as well as a productive or counterproductive measure for deep, long-term organizational success. Second, in the realm of identification, I have shown that it should be studied as intertextually integrated into a system of dialectically constitutive organizational action rather than limited to a typology of humanist strategies. The USDA has mobilized education and outreach programs, announced its concern for and allegiance to the public against the terrorists, and induced food system stakeholders to participate in its new
biosecurity programs. In the process of doing so, the agency has relied on several moves of organizational rhetoric of identification ranging from bragging about its accomplishments to speaking of the humanitarian needs of its stakeholders, to appealing to its own identifications with the objective principles of bureaucratic rationality, scientific authority, and military defense.

In the context of food safety regulation, identification with the national security state’s self-defense needs offers an instance of Burke’s (2007a) “principle of perfection”—an attempt to come to complete terms with a constitutive outside by stretching a symbol of authority as far as it can go. Burke defines regulation as a “sheerly formalistic aim to carry the resources of a given medium to their ultimate conclusion,” often resulting in perverse effects (p. 302). In the post-9/11 constabulary order, regulatory perfectionism is a nationalist drama of almost obsessive containment made possible through historical identification with the American war narrative of “good” (us) versus “evil” (them). As shown by failings in the food safety regulation rhetoric, this pure post-9/11 vision or theory of the war on terror world is loaded with contradiction once it is given an inherently imperfect bureaucratic program for action. In the risk society, regulation necessarily works in and through a risk society filled with undesirable byproducts of modernist progress. In the case of the USDA, deep change toward the productive management of historical conflicts continues to be prevented by both modernist accumulation of corporate power, intertwined cultural lag in the public sphere of critical debate, as well as related structural conflicts between political and economic motives.

For the USDA, constabulary order provides the appearance of deep change and structural transformation. Burke’s description of the constabulary function suggests that the multiplicity of government secular prayers detailed in this chapter and the number of agencies participating in them is enough to speculate on the relative inaccuracy of these prayers and that they are being
backed up with extensive monetary resources and more obtrusive measures. Through the case of the USDA, I have validated Burke’s proposition and show that the expansion of the constabulary functions makes problems worse in some ways. Indeed, post-9/11 reorganization of the federal government, including the reconfiguration of the APHIS, has actually fostered the corporate-state consolidation and market globalization that has long plagued food safety. Moves of identification and control mask this reality by inventing the USDA’s situation as new and as one of immediate risk. With this definition in order, the agency then proceeds to legitimize organizational programs by appealing identification with its definition of the situation. In this chapter, a repetitively cited you-they distinction often served as the USDA’s constitutive pre-rhetoric. This pre-rhetoric gave specific targeted stakeholders subject positions directly in the path of risk and then moved to empower these positions toward self-defensive action, often in the name of their own personal interests.

Given the widely varying interests comprising the food system, food safety and bioterrorism prevention may never be the goals. Even the USDA, which is held responsible for regulation, experiences conflict of interest with the industry it serves. Nestle (2003) observes that “Congress created the USDA in 1862 for one purpose: to make sure that enough food was available at all times to feed the population” (p. 63). Companies in the highly consolidated meat and poultry industry financially support both political parties, form close political ties with members of Congress and regulatory agency officials in the USDA. Nestle points out that industry leaders “often use the so-called revolving door to exchange their executive’s positions for those in government and vice versa” (p. 62). Since at least 1974, corporate food employees, in areas ranging from grain to meat to dairy, have become USDA officials or USDA officials have left the agency to work for food corporations (Davidson, 1996; Nestle, 2003). During the
G.W. Bush administration, corporate-state agricultural alliance has clearly become more intimate than in previous presidencies. According to the Center for Responsive Politics (2007), agribusiness increased its federal-level political campaign contributions from about $21 million in the 1990 election cycle to about $59 million in the 2000 cycle. In 2000, 75 percent of the sector’s contribution went to Republicans. Until the material conditions for food safety regulation change, effective food defense will likely continue to struggle through the temporary solutions of constabulary control. Since today’s corporate food system globalizes far more than it localizes food, it travels farther, and its source, which includes that of contamination, is more difficult to trace.

The case of the USDA clearly manifests the constitution of post-humanist kairos in the war on bioterrorism. This study offers support, then, for the notion that risk and the urgent need for a response to it are rhetorically co-constructed. In the national security state’s almost obsessive confrontation with risk, the organizational constable attempts to hold down an indeterminate, unbounded, and fragmented risk of bioterrorism. The USDA’s constabulary function articulates itself through the Burkean efficiency by emphasizing its new programs and their value only to de-emphasizing the continuing presence of historically problematic conditions and interorganizational failures. Most notable are problems of accountability, globalization, and consolidation that appear across the food safety regulation system well before the consumer interacts with a product. The construction of risk as immediate and ongoing helps create a kairotic symbolic form marked urgent desire to defend against and benefit from risk. The constabulary order of the post-9/11 era has functioned as a rare opportunity for the USDA to alleviate tensions with various organizational links in commercial side of the food system. This opportunity has allowed the agency to make a rhetorical return to its democratic image as the
People’s Department. Unfortunately, this return has appropriated a rhetoric of bipartisanship that privileges self-defense and the preservation of a corporate-state constabulary order as a path to stakeholder citizenship. Yet, as I showed in the previous case study, if liberal public culture defines organizational legitimacy as the appearance of consensus with public expectations of action and values (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995), then the absence of conflict is understandably appealing.
CHAPTER IV:

TOWARD A RHETORICAL ETHIC OF STAKEHOLDER CITIZENSHIP

Nowadays, society is most visibly exemplified by huge corporations and massive government agencies. We are as responsible for their behavior as they seem to be preoccupied with ours. We, too, are implicated in, and responsible for, the metaconversation. (J.R. Taylor, 2006, p. 140, emphasis in original)

In the two previous chapters, I have drawn upon the ideas of Kenneth Burke to inform theory and enrich public critique of contemporary organizational identity. I have done so through close examination of the case of the USDA as a significant organizational speaker in the war on terror. Combined, these case studies offer a nostalgic return to the agency’s mobilization of the agricultural home front during World War II, which I detailed in the introductory chapter. To be sure, one also finds the “good” versus “evil” frame of the Cold War as well as its national security state culture of containment. In the USDA’s post-9/11 organizational rhetoric, America is called upon to renew constabulary order at home and to lead the reconstruction of a brave agrarian democratic frontier abroad. From the corporate leader to the small town consumer, virtually all stakeholders are invited to join in. Virtue and vice as well as collectivism and individuality appear on this rhetorical frontier, with perhaps no better industry to stand in as a proud symbol for American identity than agriculture and its People’s Department. The nation’s oldest industry and its forward-looking modernist constable make for a balanced humanitarian vision of pastoral peace and capitalist freedom.

In this chapter, I elaborate upon, clarify, and recap insights generated in past chapters. In
the first section of this final chapter, I offer some comparisons, clarifications, and extensions
drawn from the case studies I have presented. I give special attention to the theoretical utility of
key rhetorical distinctions drawn between the USDA’s two war on terror identities. In addition, I
wrestle with the pathological constraints and ethical limits of organizational rhetoric of
identification, and explicate some major contributions to the literature. Throughout this section, I
offer some caveats and directions for future organizational scholarship. Having heavily focused
on the ethical limits of identification in the first section, the second section offers productive
directions for advancement of agricultural publicity in the contemporary liberal national security
state. Additionally, I outline some future measures for government policy reform and critical
public practice for positive social change. I consider the general political, economic, and cultural
status of agriculture on domestic and global scales. Finally, in the third section, extending some
of my earlier propositions toward an organizational ethic of agonistic rhetorical action, I re-
characterize this study as a rhetoric of ethical stakeholder citizenship. I close the chapter by
outlining several general assumptions validated by the present study toward an ethical model of
rhetorical organizational criticism.

Comparing and Contrasting the USDA’s War Identities

The USDA’s participation in the war on terror has been complex, geographically
dispersed, and most often concealed from the view of the mainstream public sphere. In the
opening chapter, I noted that my concern in this study is not for the government organization’s
intentions for speaking, nor is it the degree of instrumental effectiveness of this speech with its
audiences. I also made it clear that I despite my interest in the ethics of identification, I would
not be testing organizational discourses against a generalizable standard that seeks to move
beyond the necessity and productivity of the “us-them” distinction in rhetorical action. Taking a
Burkean approach as an alternative, I have worked from the assumption that grammatical elements and their movement in organizational rhetoric is not inherent, predictable, or testable, but rather partially emergent in the critic’s organizing interaction with it. Yet, as the case studies I have presented reveal, particular sets of features appear repetitiously over time, fostering the formation of expectations and rules to be held up in organization-public relationships. Some of these features have included realist style, self-moralization, appeal to rational-technical authority, establishment of common ground, and dramatization of progressive symbolic form.

The case studies that I have offered and the arguments put forth intentionally provoke and cooperatively meditate upon a spirit of political critique. The details are complex but the starting point of what Burkean theory calls the dramatistic human condition of logos, or the unique ability to learn language and reflect on that language through symbols, is simple. My argument on the prospect of an ethical framework for the organizational identification through the case of the USDA has been this: from Aristotle to Burke, humans have been persuasively theorized as inherently political animals who best rationalize their symbolic action through (1) an ethical dimension of language, which always includes conduct (ethics) and character (ethos), and emerges from (2) the invention of “the Negative”—an essential distinction that allows for symbolic abstraction (Thames, 2007). I propose, then, that an ethic of organizational rhetoric begins, then, with what Burke (1961) calls “logology”—study of the Negative in the drama of inherently political beings (p. 1). I have further argued that repetitiously dramatized distinction toward abstraction generates constitutive organizational rhetoric that is always ideological. In both case studies, in order to establish organizational action as useful and socially responsible, stakeholders had to be given identities. A key function of public organizational identity is therefore the invention of an embedded location, which depends on the enactment of a
sociopolitical cartography through repetitious acts of “boundary specification” (Finet, 2001, p. 271). It is only through the constitution of a rhetorical map that organizations and their members are able to establish where they are before they act. Domestically as well as abroad, progressive symbolic form supplied appeal by validating the appropriateness of the sequence of events taking place. Humanitarian rebuilding and organizing for self-defense put the USDA in a strong rhetorical position validated by norms of liberal culture and historically appropriate responses to war acts. Allow me to briefly review, clarify, and extend some insights generated by these case studies.

In the first case study, organizational rhetoric of identification supplied power not through appeal to an anti-thesis but rather through a common ground rhetoric of almost universally shared values (Cheney, 1983b). The presence and uplifting function of the Burkean principle of the oxymoron helps explain why an enemy-other remained largely absent from war narration of the agency’s frame of acceptance. As Boyd (2004) has shown, this principle is only effective if it functions in an ascending form. Various paradoxes of organizational communication (Stohl & Cheney, 2001) proved insightful here as well and bring to the literature new consideration of the principle as an ethically questionable function of stakeholder control and identity armor from public scrutiny. Thus, the case offers a supplement to Boyd’s (2004) study of the principle’s instrumental effectiveness as a tool of corporate advocacy. I show that even if the organizational rhetor is perceived as genuine and is effective in securing identification, the principle may remain ethically problematic. Although this is not always the case and transcendent rhetoric is certainly useful in many cases, the principle’s deft ability to close off the conversation as well as critical self-reflection must be accounted for. As I have suggested, an ethic of Burkean comedy equipped with its variants of perspective by incongruity
provide some help.

Like the first case study, the second makes a valuable contribution to the literature reviewed on organizational identification, control, and ethics. This investigation, too, takes hard look at the arrangement and functions of rhetorical elements as partial effects of a structural system of resources and rules as a constitutive background or pre-rhetoric (Charland, 1987; Scott et al., 1998). In combination with the former, the case shows that organizational pre-rhetoric deserves additional attention in future scholarship. Thus, historical conditions noted by past scholars such as the importance of an audiences’ past experience with the targeted organization in the prospect of identification (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999) must be looked into more carefully. The cases I have presented suggest the rhetor’s strategic consideration of this history as well as the possibility of being subjected to its normalized systematic distortion enable and constrain the formulation of appeals to identification. In both cases, the dominant appeal to identification was that of common ground through a rhetoric of humanitarian support and self-defensive empowerment. Despite this appeal’s claims, the actions it attached itself to did not function as empathetically or benevolently as suggested. These findings support the argument that identification appeals drawing from an organizational pre-rhetoric do not need to be consciously accepted by a targeted audience in order to be real and powerful in their effects. Pre-rhetoric is always in the background and shapes the structure of everyday life through ritualized repetition.

Both cases of the USDA’s war on terror identities presented here indicate that in the short-term, government organizations pragmatically benefit from ethically contestable measures that prevent audiences from reflectively realizing their internalization of strategic pre-rhetoric. By drawing from already-persuasive structural elements, the organization is able to easily latch onto already-moving institutional inertia, secure legitimacy, and by extension foster
identification toward relative freedom from critical publicity. To be sure, this sequence’s befriending of discursive closure means that rhetoric of organizational identification is always in the vicinity of public appeasement and engineering of consent. These observations are certainly akin and complementary to Papa et al.’s (1997) micro-level finding that identification significantly shapes the potentially negative effects of organizational control participants are likely to perceive. These case studies show support for past observations on the masking power of identification, but add the proposition that invitations to potential organizational identification may mask control mechanisms and prevent participants’ from weighing costs and benefits of complicity. In other words, in the case of public organizational rhetoric, citizens need not perceive great benefits such as economic empowerment for the masking power of identification to effectively work.

In the second case, a post-9/11 pre-rhetoric of a national security imperative toward responsive action supplied legitimacy to invitations to organizational identification. A homogenized culture of unobtrusive governance offered ideal conditions for inducement of stakeholder participation in kairotic organizational action. Under immediate risk, conditions for identification improved as the USDA assumed a position resembling that of political campaign organization during prime election season. This finding validates Bullis and Tompkins’ (1989) suggestion that there may be a “strong urge to identify” that precedes the organizational invitation to identification (p. 304). As the USDA rolled out new programs and extended old ones, virtually all the organizational constable’s decisions and policies for food safety regulation were fueled by concentration of power against an agreed upon exigency. This observation complements J.B. Scott’s (2006) finding that “the drug industry’s (and government’s) rhetoric of patriotic partnership depended…on the (constructed) risk of bioterrorism as a national
emergency and looming national catastrophe” (p. 131). Building on Scott’s case, I propose that the constitution of risk depends on at least two conditions allowed by rhetoric of identification. First, the constitution of risk is not artistically persuasive as much as it is a function of “repetitive form,” or the “maintaining of a principle under new guises” (Burke, 1931/1968, p. 125). Second, as shown by the case of the USDA in the war on bioterrorism as well, the constitution of risk is a function of the rhetor’s ability to make an image vivid and immediate. By extension, the case of the USDA in the war on bioterrorism supports the contention that organizational rhetoric of identification does not occur in a world of risk without enemies or one in which everyone is affected equally by attempts to control risk.

Allow me to take this curious concept of risk constitution further into the rhetoric of identification. Specifically, I want to return to the assumption that the case study that I have constructed offers evidence to the literature that Burke’s (1937/1984) constabulary function is a useful mechanism for study of the risk society. The value of doing so is that retrospect, if allowed, has the comic effect of calling forth the caveat—and that is just what I offer here. This caveat is that in organizational scholarship or application anywhere else, the constabulary order must not be considered synonymous with the risk society. As a state of misfit and cultural lag, the constabulary order is a generic concept rather than one of modernization, Westernization, risk, or war. This is of course common to followers of Burke who either damn, dizzy, or delight his breadth. A key distinction is that unlike the theory of the risk society, that of the constabulary order does not suggest that any attempt to contain or control risk will end up increasing it and causing it to spin further out of control. Rather, the constabulary order does not observe a self-motored capitalist society that like the myth of the free market uncovers a realist calculus of natural law. The constabulary function is a semi-consciously preserved politics of control with a
human program of action for social correction. Thus, scholars who deploy the concept should be careful not to move beyond a post-humanist sensibility of partial agency into a full-blown “perversity thesis” in which any attempt at policy change moves policy, but always in the wrong direction (Hirschman, 1991, p. 11). In the present study of the USDA, this point is especially important because agents of the perversity thesis have long offered big agriculture a (1) justification for deregulatory free market policy and the demise of necessary government programs, and (2) a method of persuasive attack for any reference to agriculture as a once-humane and legitimately moral enterprise. Attacks typically leverage the perversity thesis to dismiss skeptics of new age agriculture as romantic, paranoid, and non-cosmopolitan (Aune, 2001).

Having briefly discussed and compared each case study’s contributions to larger conversations in organizational studies, it makes sense to take a closer look at why significant rhetorical differences emerged between them. Given the dominance of a single rhetorical move in the former case study and the relative breadth of moves the same government organization employed in the second case study, one question that seems worth asking is why such a difference? I argue that the difference comes down to the degree of agency and space for rhetorical invention that historical conditions allow. That is, two overlapping questions for the USDA’s public relations team across these two war on terror roles would seem to have been the following: (1) What rhetorical norms, legitimate appeals, and identifications are already in order? and (2) What are the kairotic opportunities of these rhetorical situations relative to their symbolic and material contingencies? As I elaborate upon below, these are questions on the nature of structural constraint in the world agricultural system in relation to political, economic, and cultural pathologies.
It should be clear from the first case that the USDA’s rhetorical reconstruction efforts abroad demanded a delicate approach in which the agency could protect itself from critics of American imperialism. However, structural constraints on rhetorical invention and kairos have probably been less problematic than those the agency has experienced in its biosecurity role. History lessons from the failures of culturally relative discourses of U.S. international propaganda programs advanced in the early Cold War have no doubt helped to improve the diplomatic framing of American intervention and its motive of capitalist democratization (Parry Giles, 2001). The historical precedent and rhetorical lessons from the food safety industry are less clear and structural conflicts are more evident. Strikingly, documented cases of threat and violence subjected to domestic USDA meat inspectors (Nestle, 2003) outnumber those on USDA employees in Iraq and Afghanistan. Given that the USDA’s primary historical task has been to promote the U.S. agricultural industry and increase food production to help feed the world, there are fewer structural difficulties in international agricultural development than in domestic food safety regulation. International programs include developing trade contracts, corporate contracting with U.S. agribusiness, and setting up programs for humanitarian aid and infrastructure development. Although it is true that farmers may want contracts that benefit them more than big agriculture, export markets ultimately appear that were not previously there.

Perhaps the second case study most clearly illuminates the notion that in the face of paradox and historical conditions outside of their own making, the government regulatory organization is left with limited agency in the invention of kairos through pre-rhetorics of identification. From one angle, the USDA continually resituates itself as a support agency, delivering the almost purely beneficial resources typical of the “boundary-spanning” or “backbone” organization (Harter & Krone, 2001). From a second angle, the USDA’s situation is
conflicted rather than benevolent because it must shift responsibility and allocate resources while fulfilling multiple roles. Thus, the USDA shows that in boundary-spanning organizations, a primary threat may be that of getting lost in translation. Like Harter and Krone (2001), I have observed that that a key obstacle in the boundary-spanning organization revolves around the organizational “paradox of stability and change” (p. 256; Berg & Smith, 1990), which refers to maintaining stability and a measure of sameness while guiding change and introducing difference. The present study suggests that this tense space between these poles may very well the locus of the prospect of industrial democracy, or the USDA’s constitution of interorganizational symmetry of respect, agony, participation, and accountability. For the USDA, a “paradox of agency” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 360) emerges in the attempt to foster democratic cooperation while maintaining sufficient authority for enforcement of industry regulations. Following Cheney et al. (1998) and Harter and Krone (2001), this study suggests that more research is needed on the boundary-spanning function of organizational democracy between and within organizations.

The USDA is clearly not the only government agency to by absorbed and systematically distorted by consolidation processes of modern industry and the national security state. The agency is arguably among the strongest strong examples of this trend, but not the only example (e.g., Food and Drug Administration). Recall from the opening chapter that capture theory has explained USDA decision-making since at least World War II (Hooks, 1990). In light of the observations made in this study, I propose that capture theory, or the notion that the political laws and regulations that regulate organizations are often shaped by these organizations either by input or control (Llewellyn, 2007) deserves the attention of organizational communication scholars. Furthermore, I am in position to offer another caveat: any comic correction to an
organizational ethics conundrum having to do with a current U.S. organization must come to terms with the reality that the constabulary state of misfit is largely under corporate rather than state governance. In the wake of deregulation made possible corporate colonization, the so-called invisible hand of the free market is increasingly in charge. In free market globalization, government powers are weakened in their ability to support and impose the inclusion of social values into the commercial system (Deetz, 2003). This is not to suggest that the USDA’s past and current administrators are not partially responsible for its current regulatory deficits. Even if the regulatory organization is not a captured agency, it is likely to be a politically distorted one. Government organizations should be but are not the ethical standard for the private organizations they once governed. In many organizations, decisions emerge and are accounted for under conditions that are far less than ideal by people under pressure who are not worried about upholding a democratic ethic.

Under everyday conditions of systematically distorted and manipulative communication in a deregulated and captured environment, there are several ways by which rhetoric of organizational identification can get itself into ethical trouble. Association is by nature dissociation and one definition is by nature not another. A world made by rhetorical invention and mediation of division always risks exclusion, alienation, and violence. Since the distinction of what is not preferred allows for shaping a preferred identity and organizations are inescapably self-interested, ethics come often emerge with a grimace and are given secondary priority in the pursuit of material ends. All of this has come to life in the past two chapters. Organizational rhetoric of ethics presents itself as the kind and personal face of organization and bodies organize in step allow the path of its persuasion. As shown by the first case study, organizational rhetors may exaggerate, present themselves as heroic, appeal to universal morality, and do so in a
symbolic form that offers a dramatic and satisfying experience. Still, even Burke’s (1950/1969) principle of oxymoron depends on division to invent a seductive sense of unity and vicarious excellence. The USDA’s articulation of the principle, which heavily draws upon the pre-rhetorical resources of American war mythology, shows that the principle actually functions to cement a wide social division. That is, the agency’s heroic frame of acceptance in relation to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq reveals that particularly uplifting appeals to identification may very well close off critical public deliberation and stakeholders’ personal self-reflection on participating in it. A vicarious organizational identification oxymoronically actualizes without the organization entering into reciprocal exchange marked by listening, adaptive response to stakeholder needs, critical contestation of truth claims. In this sense, by constituting a frame of congruence and consensus, the principle of the oxymoron offers an effective mechanism for the rhetorical reproduction of an asymmetrical organization-public relationship.

The function of the principle of the oxymoron in the USDA’s rhetoric of identification in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan is consistent with the noted trend in organizational communication toward deflection of criticism by moral transcendence (Deetz, 1992; Vibbert & Bostdorff, 1993). My case examples have shown that moralization is one path to the legitimacy and identification that the USDA repetitiously took. In both cases, moralization most often emerged through constitutive pre-rhetoric of the already-persuasive and legitimate authority of humanitarianism. Intertwined rhetorics of identification and legitimacy created sufficient conditions for each other’s success. This process makes sense given Dowling and Pfeffer’s (1975) proposition that organizational legitimacy is typically achieved through one or more of these three moves: adapting to existing norms, attempting to change norms, or identifying with
socially legitimate symbols, values, or institutions. However, another path that the USDA took toward legitimacy was adapting to existing norms. Here, the case of the USDA’s role in biosecurity is especially lucid in that it shows that pre-existing relationships in the corporate-state food system were not radically altered through appeal to a higher national security state imperative. Instead, the USDA fulfilled corporate food’s long history of hope for the installment of NAIS and consumer food safety education, disseminated non-binding expert advice on food safety and defense to some industry actors, and aggressively enforced the compliance of farmers, ranchers, and consumers.

A common problem facing business organizations as well as individuals on the employment market is that of trying to gain attention (Lair et al., 2005). I have shown that this is most often not the case with the government organization. This is especially true in situations having to do with being absorbed into industry, critical publicity, and media scrutiny. The government organization is left with two choices. First, the organization can proactively formulation and circulate an organizational rhetoric of transparency—as in the popular trend of environmental corporate social reporting. Second, the organization can work in silence as a way to slip under the public radar while holding onto the hope that it is not later put in a subject position that demands a persuasive public account for doing so. In both cases, the organization attempts to rhetorically portray its abidance to an ethic of consensus as an existing rhetorical norm of liberal public culture. This culture of consensus works well for the government organization’s attempt to sustain legitimate autonomy.

As demonstrated by the case study of the USDA in the war on bioterrorism, the constabulary order’s appearance of consensus in today’s crowded and face-paced world of organizational rhetoric effectively stems tide of public demand for policy reform. Without
exposure of the target, testing of organizational legitimacy, like possibility of organizational identification, is almost impossible. Yet, in a culture that positions citizens as consumers, the government entity is not unlike the business world in its message to stakeholders that they are responsible for charting their own futures. Moreover, the case of the USDA shows a federal government organization’s self-presentation largely before the public sphere rather than within it (Habermas, 1989). As such, the USDA validates Christensen and Cheney’s (2000) observation that most expressions of organizational identity today are both one-way and self-referential. That is, particularly as shown by the instance of the USDA’s rhetoric in the war on bioterrorism, organizations speak to and become absorbed in themselves. By themselves, I refer not only to internal employees but also to other government divisions and (non-consumer) food industry actors. This is especially true from the USDA’s position within a vast national security state bureaucracy. In the instance of agricultural reconstruction abroad, here are several examples as well. Take for instance Secretary Veneman’s repetitious narration of her trip to the region to captive agricultural audiences as well as the USDA’s talking points in which the agency stressed the economic benefits of reconstruction for U.S. farmers. Among others, these are clear instances of rhetoric of organizational identification as self-absorption.

Indeed, all of this comes back to organizational politics of definition extracted across both case studies. By the politics of definition I mean an organizational rhetor’s ability to artistically maneuver existing us-them divisions and invent new ones to make pragmatic of advantageous social distinctions. To return to the opening chapter, the politics of definition is of course the single condition that has fostered human realization of the limits of liberal humanism. As elucidated by the second chapter’s reading of major Burkean assumptions, the politics of definition references the invitation to identification, the hubris of universal claims, and the
necessity of comic ambivalence. In the past two chapters, I hope to have shown that a viable motive for the activation of a counter-statement to organizational politics of definition is the Burkean principle of freedom, which realizes interpretation as the origin of history and in need of constant revision (Lentricchia, 1983). An ethical revision process extracts the comedy of perfectionism in order to help protect the public from its human impulse to achieve perfect symbolic and material control over her constitutive outside. The politics of definition is not synonymous with the USDA’s ideology, but goes back further to the second-order capacity of human agency and the ability of human to feel, learn, and position themselves in society through communication. Understood as such, the USDA’s war on terror ideology has been presented in this study as an orientation developed through multidirectional symbolism within a particular sociohistorical field.

There can be little doubt that the case of the USDA shows the impressive definitional capacity of rhetoric of organizational identification in the war on terror. As political program of world definition, the agency configures itself as a networked set of geographically dispersed rhetorical portals of a post-9/11 ethic of care, support, and national renewal. The coordinated complexity of the operation is made possible by at least four observed conditions. First, the USDA’s has contributed the larger post-9/11 constitutive rhetoric of the war on terror though a centrally deployed multiplicity of fragments of organizational rhetoric. Second, the agency’s consistency has depended on a series of multidirectional and in some cases high-technology channels with overlapping content themes and shared symbolic form. Third, thanks to the availability of these and seemingly unending resources, the USDA has been able to quickly respond, intervene, and self-present in relation to multiple opportunities across space and time. Fourth, as highlighted, these opportunities are intertextual insofar as they almost always span
multiple identifications across various structural levels and geographical borders. These identification have included identification between the USDA and its implied universal audience, state-corporation identification, identification across collaborating USDA divisions, identifications between the USDA and the larger Bush administration, identification between the USDA and specifically targeted stakeholder audiences, and identification between the USDA and the dominant constitutive rhetoric of the war on terror and post-9/11 American political culture.

Changing Organizations, Identifications, and Agriculture

What can organizational practitioners learn from this study? As is the case in the larger liberal state, democratization of the identity work of public and private organizations depends on the development of reciprocal appreciation of partisan interests. By discussing voice, conflict, and whose voice does and should count, practitioners begin to contemplate the role of symmetrical respect in organizational practice. Additionally, the present study illustrates that organizations must be able to critically reflect on their own complicity in popular discourses and larger enthymematic control systems, as well as the implications of denying the same opportunity to their stakeholders. This investigation shows that ethical problems emerge from projects focused too heavily on short-term rhetorical success that departs from long-term needs of a sustainable democratic culture. One key question is how can the organization speak in a way that negotiates public expectations while reforming these expectations so that they do not resent partisan commitments? I argue that envisioning the organization’s rhetorical situation as both responsive and inventive offers jump-off.

Organizational rhetoricians will only be able to contribute to a rhetorical ethic of stakeholder citizenship if they are able to demonstrate how publics as well as organizations are
to perform its democratic attitude. This study contributes to this task by contesting the popular conception of effective communication and the organizational motive of rational perfection. I show that quality communication begins by tempering one’s own as well as others’ identifications, and by helping to cure distorted identifications by bringing them to the surface. As Burke (1937/1984) puts it, “the psychoanalyst ‘cures’ his patient of a faulty identification only insofar as he smuggles in an alternative identification” (p. 264, emphasis in original). Indeed, the democratization of organizational identifications means getting the organization and its stakeholders to critically listen to each other.

How do these lessons transfer to the USDA and the agricultural system? As a partial distortion of liberal state governance, the USDA and its industry must actually listen to stakeholders rather than maintaining a condition of asymmetry. As exemplified by the images of Secretary Veneman during her 2003 reconstruction tour, the USDA has promoted its own connection with an impressively diverse array of groups that are likely to vary significantly in their opinions on American intervention. The problem, of course, is that it has not invited or taken the more preferable move of seeking out and accommodating the voice of stakeholders who have the ability to contest its actions. Fostering such participation moves organization-public interaction closer to mutual accountability through debate as well as dialogic co-construction of meaning and understanding. Yet, even if conditions are moved closer to actual dialogic representation, representation of diverse interests cannot be limited to a self-report conception of local approval. Stakeholders are not always in positions that allow for understanding their own best interests (Deetz, 1992) and even if they were, organizations may be manipulating and placating without even knowing it (Heath et al., 2006) This is not to say that organizational rhetoricians or the USDA should be able to speak for these publics and tell them
what their best interests are. Rather, it is to locate possible manipulations and hidden moves of advantage to foster diverse views on how organizational programs work toward the ends of affected groups. Here, I am again referring to a Burkean rhetorical ethic of rounding out the situation in order to come closer to mutual coordination and various truths.

Policy reform is vital both for fairly negotiating with international agricultural parties such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan and for actually resolving structural problems in food safety regulation. The reality that corporate interests have long captured the agency by direct control is a problem because input is important from all stakeholders and should be weighed democratically. In international affairs, global advocacy organizations, whistleblowers, and media watchdogs are needed to inform publics and empower growing agricultural economies to fight co-optation by foreign corporate interests. Some of this kind of work proved imperative to developing the rhetoric of exposure I have offered in this study. For example, a well-documented report (FGS, 2004) released and revised by a joint partnership between activist network organizations Focus on the Global South and Against the Grains (GRAIN) has proven to be a definitive statement on Order 81 in Iraq, influencing further inquiry and deliberation across the Internet. This deliberation has contributed to an ongoing international discussion on the ethics of biotechnology and the meaning of regulation in U.S. agribusiness. Ironically, both of these issues circle back to the war on bioterrorism and the implications of the risk society.

In the USDA’s role in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan and the war on bioterrorism, structural conflict bridged by moralized rhetoric should be primary future interest for organizational critics. In the war on bioterrorism, scholars must help develop a healthy level of skepticism toward appeals to consensus and symmetrical win-win stakeholder benefits through a third way political system of public-private partnerships. The case of the war on
bioterrorism in which the pharmaceutical and agricultural industries have moralized kairos through co-optation of an ethic of public-private care therefore offers a valuable lesson. This lesson, I argue, is a thorough demonstration of the need to channel identification into an ethic of humane disagreement. The food system needs improved regulation through better mechanisms of accountability. Scholarly assistance would help put in place better models for enacting organizational partnerships. These partnerships must maintain an ethic of tension within decision making in organizations as well as between organizations, between organizations and regulatory agencies, and between regulatory agencies and multiple stakeholders groups.

I have highlighted the primary reformatory conditions that must be in order before such models can be put to work. As Nestle (2002) suggests, the USDA and other federal regulatory parties responsible for protecting the food system must do more and be made to do more to break free of “working hand in glove” with the industry it regulates. Nestle points to the core of the problem by observing,

As we have seen the USDA’s conflicting missions—to promote agribusiness and to advise the public about diet and health—cause not end of trouble; such problems are unlikely to be resolved until the USDA’s education functions are transferred to an agency less intimately tied to industry interests. (p. 368)

Since advocates’ past call for a single food safety regulation agency appears nowhere in site thanks to political expedience (Nestle, 2002) and a controlling corporate lobby, I argue it will be up to non-institutional democracy, albeit movement toward critical publicity through non-traditional channels of political action, that must make a difference. At a time in which citizens seem to be increasingly cognizant of and serious about organic food as well as the nutrient and safety value of fresh local food, there is reason for hope. As the epidemic of
adolescent obesity and the price of oil rises, new citizen publics continue to form with the overdue realization there is no industry in the world more important to public well-being than that of agriculture. Thanks to emerging global movements toward “slow food,” “food justice,” safe food, and healthy food, as well as the good scholar-advocate work of Eric Schlosser, Marion Nestle, Michael Pollan, Brian Halweil, and others a project in critical public deliberation on food, power, and globalization is well underway.

Of course, in good comedy, there is always reason to be ambivalent before declaring a benevolent future. One of the first books to get me thinking about agriculture as a collection of publics and as a citizen-industry in the public sphere was Pawlick’s (2001) *The Invisible Farm*. Within the context of the argument advanced in this study, Pawlick’s timely case, I think, offers an interesting space for comparing what agriculture was like just before 9/11 to what it is now. For the most part, Pawlick’s observations remain true today. The trend toward all U.S. citizens moving to one percent of all available land continues, as does the dearth in agricultural journalism training, the decline of rural-based and rural-minded journalists, the withdrawal of media resources devoted to rural and agricultural issues, and the public’s general ignorance of these issues. In addition, rural audiences are still written off by advertisers. In the case of newspapers, circulation to unprofitable readers continues to be been cut off to some areas in the interest of shareholder value. Finally, perhaps even more so than in 2001, media consumers are more likely to known more about the private lives of Hollywood stars than the quality and stability of their food supply, and their stake in what is happening in the agricultural system. When food safety contamination stories appear on the mainstream news, the product, the labeling, and consumer health are the dominant concerns. Little is said about the conditions of production, distribution, and regulation, or the relationship between American capitalist interests
and unethical food system practices at home and abroad.

Finally, although it is important to be hopeful and fully acknowledge the emergence of a more conscious citizen in the realm of healthy eating, local buying, and environmentalism, much of the hype that has come with all of this is being commodified by the same companies that helped bring forth the risk society and corporate consolidation of the agriculture industry. The economics are hard to ignore. Especially in the last two years or so, agriculture has become a friend of the common investor. An economic imperative sparked by a fear of dependence on foreign oil after the fall of Saddam Hussein coupled with the global tipping impact of Noble Peace Prize winning environmental advocate Al Gore are only two factors supporting the industry’s development toward a new era. Under the guises of free trade and humanitarianism, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the USDA continues to flood commodity export markets, including those of the Middle East. The forecast for the 2007 agriculture exports is a record $79 billion, $10.3 billion higher than 2006 (ERS, 2007). Several major crop prices are near record highs. China continues to leverage the low value of the dollar to eat up U.S. commodities for its economic hyper-expansion and bulging population. Ethanol plants are popping up across the country, creating high demand for corn. Investors with no past serious interest in the commodity markets have literally taken it over, leading the New York Times to recently observe, “Wall Street is Betting on the Farm” (Barrionuevo & Anderson, 2007). Indeed, the liberal state is not an ambivalent state. It is a state that desires perfection, often through dramatic highs that reaffirm the greatness of the American spirit and its principles of capitalism, freedom, and democracy. The curious nature of agricultural markets—doing well only to do poorly thanks to demand—and the mystery of weather disasters, among other factors, make for an industry that is warn tired of extreme highs and lows.
Perhaps more than ever before, agriculture needs the USDA to help invent and manage multiple projects of sustainability. Agricultural publics will first need to reclaim control over the agency’s exercise of state power. This might begin by focusing on the USDA’s self-referential identity work, which as this study has shown has recently taken a relatively unquestioned form of self-authored rhetorical moralization. An agency that calls itself the People’s Department carries no small load of social responsibility. In 2007, through a “welcome video,” then-Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns reminded stakeholders that Lincoln called the agency The People’s Department. In almost the same words as those used by USDA employee and historian Wayne Rasmussen in 1990, Johanns then offered reassurance that although the agency has changed, it remains a department that serves all U.S. citizens (USDA, 2007). Perhaps it is time for the people to decide for themselves.

Thus far in this chapter, I have discussed, clarified, and extended some of the major insights that this study brings to the literature and to contemporary public practice toward critical publicity. I am therefore in good position to offer several ways in which the case studies that I have presented manifest democratic and undemocratic functions of the “curative value” of organizational rhetoric of identification (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 43). These functions should provide future assistance for situated investigation of the ethics of organizational identification. First, organizational rhetoric is curative in the sense that a text’s symbolic form may supply a stimulant for pleasant experience and a liberal inoculant against public self-reflection and distempered dissent. Second, organizational rhetoric is curative in the sense that it invites targets to transcendently escape their relative smallness, lack of a sense of belonging, or personal imperfections. Third, organizational rhetoric is curative insofar as it blurs geographical borders, transcends conflicts in areas such as beliefs, values, and social class position, and symbolically
merges levels of social structure. Fourth, organizational rhetoric is curative in that through legitimation and other moves of discursive closure (Deetz, 1992), it ends the conversation and steers attention elsewhere. Fifth, organizational rhetoric is curative insofar as its regulatory function controls systemic deviations and stakeholder dissent through a combination of unobtrusive and obtrusive measures. Sixth, organizational rhetoric is curative insofar as it allows for scapegoating—inventing an enemy in order to moralize and purify the quality of the speaking organization. Seventh, organizational rhetoric is curative insofar as it offers a path for comic correction, critical publicity, and the general promotion of positive social change.

**Toward a Model of Rhetorical Organizational Criticism**

Through developments that have come to bear in the previous chapters, I am in good position to extend my argument on the project of rhetorical action advocated at the outset of this investigation. Through case studies of the USDA-public relationship, I hope to have shown that the attention to the local constitution of asymmetrical respect ought to be given serious scholarly attention before any consideration of the moral-universal asymmetrical content of claims. The achievement of symmetrical respect in organization-public interaction is realistic and certainly of a different kind of rhetorical thread than symmetry of motives, sacrifice, and authority (Roper, 2005). In contemporary public relations-style organizational rhetoric, special interests are hardly ever put aside, negotiations are seldom truly collaboratively formed through democratic principles of open debate. Even these conditions were granted, there is no empirically sound standard for judgment, a speaker’s ethos and self-understanding may override argumentation including approximate statements (Aune, 2007; Huspek, 2007), and rhetoric may remain unintentionally distorted insofar as parties believe they are working toward dialogic consensus or positive ends when really placating and performing manipulative action (Deetz, 1992; Heath et
I propose that if organizational rhetoricians return to Burke’s (1937/1984) basic conjecture that “getting along with people is one devil of a difficult task” (p. i), then ethical organizational rhetoric must be imagined, theorized, understood, and practiced as pure agony. In the realm of organizational rhetoric, a loose and agonistic orientation, and a contingent practice of “reasonable disagreement” in which individuals can work together in tension but do not have to reach unanimity and agreement supplies a viable ethical model (Rehg & Bohmann, 2002, p. 50). Since no clear line exists between dialogue and debate, as well as public relations and advocacy, there are clear limits to approaches that deny intertextual intermingling. Here, I agree with Pearce who suggests, “discerning counterfeits of dialogue comes best from a trained judgment based on experience than from a list of discriminating features.” A critical practice of working against the use of dialogue to legitimate and manipulate advantage begins with envisioning ethical judgment as “Managing tensions across various motives, sorting out the multiple meanings of specific actions, and acting into situations so as to prefigure desirable outcomes” (Heath et al., 2006, p. 348).

The possibility of reasonable disagreement, which is akin to what Connolly (2004) calls an “ethic of cultivation” and a “politics of becoming” (p. 179), must begin with securing rhetorical forums for the regular participation of multiple stakeholders. In my research on the USDA’s recent relationship with its stakeholders, it has become clear that this relationship is largely one-way in nature and limited by very few and very weakly connected channels for deliberative interaction with the cabinet agency. Unlinked channel environments such as blogs, the occasional presence of official USDA website comment boxes, farm media polls, and a periodic question-and-answer sessions with the Secretary of Agriculture will not suffice. I argue
that there are least two necessary conditions that must be met in order to begin to move toward a symmetrical politics of respect. These conditions can be understood as normative but empirically observable requirements in organizational rhetoric. First, governmental policies must be in place to allow all media-produced voices with a fair hearing in the public sphere (Huspek, 2007). Second, governmental policies must guarantee that all stakeholders, regardless of their positions, are provided with multiple forum venues for critical public deliberation with other USDA stakeholders and agricultural officials. Existing failure to meet these needs beyond the assurance of rights-based means continues to prevent the public’s exposure of diverse viewpoints. In the case of agriculture and the USDA, without attention from the mainstream media the public is left to search out organization’s self-packaged and preferred public identity or continue to be unexposed of its actions that affect their lives in significant ways.

Through two related case studies, I set out to articulate variations and functions of the theme of Burkean identification in organizational rhetoric. More specifically, I have shown that Burke’s concepts of the principle of the oxymoron and the constabulary function are powerful devices for constructing a rhetorical understanding of organizational identifications and their effects. These concepts help explain the process by which the USDA has been able to construct a new identity by building on previous ones—notably, that of a People’s Department. As Burke (1938) suggests, identity construction does not necessarily invoke the ejecting of old identities and may just as often adds to its multiplicity of “corporate we’s” (pp. 243-244). Yet, this is not merely a matter of addition to or revision of the past, for the shared values rhetoric of identification circulated by this identity is made possible by a multidirectional network of rhetorical articulations. The articulations are not constitutive of a single vertical duality but rather interact dialectically from all angles while maintaining the hierarchy of order that Burke suggests
is natural to human society. The presence of a governing system of logic has always marked American culture and the case of the USDA’s post-9/11 marks the presence of geographically dispersed coordination of a dominant war on terror narrative. Moreover, if situated as a partial effect of the risk society, the invention of a war on bioterrorism is suggestive of significant changes how hierarchy gets practiced toward control ends.

In my illustration of the moves and implications of organizational identification in the case of the post-9/11 USDA, I have been able to offer insights on a set of elements consistently appearing the USDA’s gestures of public identity as well as relationships between these gestures. As the critic attempting to encompass the rhetorical situation of the government agency, these observations demanded drawing texts from dispersed programs and then linking together their various connections across stakeholder groups and speaking organizational beings. In retrospect, this approach placed me in the role an organizational detective of sorts and led me to experience a rather tedious hunt for clues and connections not in immediate or clear view. The research process was more difficult than anticipated because in the case of concealment from the mainstream public sphere, the critic is left with only rhetorical fragments. Importantly, the final product shows that if recombined and reconnected to other fragments, symbolic debris may eventually prove more important than it was once thought to be (McGee, 1997). Thus, while trying to thoroughly comprehend an organization’s rhetorical attitude toward history, one may also have to work against the history itself that has worked to suppress that attitude in scholarly and public discussion. Indeed, I performed much of my own work in this study around locations of contradiction where juxtaposition of an incongruent perspective could operate as a device of exposure (Schwarze, 2003b).

With these general observations in order on the complexities of the practice of criticism,
it is possible to re-characterize the present study as a rhetoric of stakeholder citizenship in itself with general properties relevant to the analysis of other organizational texts and a message of advocacy toward a particular ethical model of organizational and public practice. Indeed, I am suggesting that this study stands as more than an investigation of the variations and functions of organizational identification with insights for organizational communication theory. I argue that it is just as important to consider its contributions to the practice of organizational criticism. Allow me to describe five emergent insights or propositions on the nature of organizational criticism.

My first point is that as a way of knowing the USDA and speaking of its character, this study and all studies of organizational rhetoric are themselves constitutive rhetorics of freedom. Proposing that rhetorical organizational criticism is the constitution of productive social change means that ironically, studies in organizational rhetoric partially reify humanist logic by projecting the myth of rational conduct from an autonomous origin of knowledge. This is of course an inescapable necessity. In order to advance a post-humanist sensibility on organizational rhetoric, it is a political necessity to judge and critique. The choice of how to do so depends on whether or not one is willing to adopt a rhetorical politics of transparent bias as I have. From a Burkean perspective, transparent bias moves toward transparent understanding. For Burke, there is good reason to set out for freedom from relativism as well as universalism, despite the fact that the critic’s symbols outwork and outwit her. Freedom is worth pursuing because interpretation is the origin of history caught up in contradiction, conflict, and confusion. Knowledge production and critique does not actualize in a perfect escape route, but it has and does offer a way to perform these qualities more productively. Thus, Burke does not deny the function of the intellectual in solitude. Instead, he assumes an uncoerced and ahistorical space of
freedom is the universal human motive from which the critic works and the space toward which all critics’ interpretations aim. The irony of this study, then, is that it is strategically oxymoronic in a Burkean sense.

This brings me to my second point that contradiction in organizational rhetoric calls forth criticism that is flexible and thus of Burkean comedy. That is, rhetorical organizational criticism is comic correction. Through my case studies, I have tried to illustrate what Burke refers to as a non-theological practice of transcendence that works toward the bridging of conflict in society through an agonistic ethic. My presentation of narrative reasoning in the form of an organizational rhetoric configures criticism as a dialectically constitutive act insofar as it is both a description and a comic corrective. Moreover, I have demonstrated and advocated a way of practicing organizational conversation, which I understand as the practice of describing the world in terms of what it is not so that it might become what it is not. The practice of comic attitude is absent not only in the USDA’s post-9/11 identity, but in the performances of many organizational identities.

Comic correction offers one way that organizational communication scholars can actively work against their own participation in the reproduction of the myth of independent criticism. As I have illustrated, organizational scholars perform good comedy by practicing and teaching humility. The comic attitude toward history is marked by complete recognition that there is no privilege on knowledge and there is no particular point of view that shall reign free (Lenttrichia, 1983, p. 58). In this exercise into the ethics and rhetoric of organizational identification, I have juxtaposed some rather friendly counter-statements with some nearly polemical ones. I have stressed the need for prudent character rather than replicable technique and favor for a contingent attitude while maintaining a hopeful attitude in search of path potentially productive for wide
audiences. In addition to trying to show the hermeneutic power of a particular kind of organizational reading approach, I have tried to underscore the need for continuous expansion of a critical vocabulary. Organizational scholars must continue to search for new ways to encompass new, shifting, and increasingly complex situations facing us today. Work in this general area is of course also imperative to complicating our own critical self-reflection and working against our own reductionist predilections and paradigmatic rigidities.

Without a third proposition that *rhetorical organizational criticism is inherently value-laden*, the general notions that research should make the world a better place and that it should not privilege any particular worldview risks reproducing a liberal humanist, albeit social scientific, logic of criticism. The case studies I offer show that performing critical invention of situated and actually existing organizational texts is unavoidably both evidentiary interpretation and open ethical judgment. If this rhetorical action is made transparently biased, then it remains open to the same measure of ethically offered criticism it projects (Huspek, 2007). No critic has a privilege on knowledge because one act typically closes off another, promoting partially conscious distortions, manipulations, and conflicted meanings divided by blurry and shifting boundaries. The practice of criticism as openly value-laden must be complemented by a comic attitude as a well as a self-reflective telos. That is, organizational criticism is delicate because it is an attempt to be filled with care without caring too much, to look for ideology without overemphasizing the term, and to enact a playful attitude toward meaning without suggesting the irony of meaning is open to free choice and without implications for peoples’ lives. By privileging the values of ethical responsibility, open communication, and pluralism, Burkean organizational criticism-as-critical publicity meets the need for ambivalence over heroics. Burke offers a counter-statement, then, to scholars who question whether theory can or should such an
explicit attitude. Putting a Burkean sensibility to work, the present study shows the productive utility of practicing criticism as value-laden. It has done so by activating these assumptions: (1) theory is socially constructed (thus, interpretively imbued with values), (2) theory is a way of being and thus leads to the constitution of a particular world, and (3) theory best envisions the kind of world one wants to create and the kind of person one wants to be (Deetz, 2005).

The case studies I have presented as well as these three propositions on the practice of organizational criticism supported by these studies co-construct a loose orientation toward a comic frame of acceptance. From a Burkean perspective, action demands a program, which in turn demands a vocabulary by which the critic can adopt a role in relation to a textual situation. I argue that encompassing any given organizational situation as ethically as possible begins with a rhetorical ethic of stakeholder citizenship—or by envisioning organizational criticism as responsible public practice. Foremost, such an ethic promotes Nilsen’s (1974) ethic of significant choice, within which a telos of critical publicity and other aims such as whistle-blowing fall. It makes sense, then, to extend my initial characterization of this study by recasting it as a rhetoric of stakeholder citizenship contributing to a larger rhetorical ethic for critical practice. As illustrated, any rhetoric working toward productive social change begins with coming to terms with the conditions that constitutively enable and constrain rhetorical judgment of organizations. By demonstrating the practice of organizational criticism-as-critical publicity, I have also proven the empirical utility of a telos of agonistic rhetorical action for the study of organizational identification. This concept contributes to a metavocabulary or a loose assemblage of grammatical terms for enriching organizational criticism as responsible public practice. It is useful because the critic must always adjust to shifts toward new societies, new metaphors, and new grammars.
Understood as a rhetoric of stakeholder citizenship, this study becomes a set of descriptive interpretations and ethical judgments on organizational identity work that appear through the critic’s interaction with the text(s). Re-characterizing this study promotes future practice of criticism as active and constitutive participation in organizational texts. In other words, it allows for working against and further considering the effects of the one-way, instrumental ideology of humanist rhetoric and the post-political, socially correct rhetoric of the liberal organization. A rhetorical ethic of stakeholder citizenship like that I have performed through the case of the USDA is an intervention into the relational identities articulated between the organization and the individual. This intervention informs the ethical and situated practice of organizational criticism by illustrating that with the demise of the organization-as-container and rhetoric-an-instrumentation metaphors, hermeneutic movement across multiple levels of action becomes less of a matter of choice than an ethical imperative. Organizational rhetoricians are now obliged to work in and through the grammar of the market culture, the risk society, and the liberal national security state. Nevertheless, the future of powerful organizations such as the USDA is not predetermined and thus, criticism has a role in society.

This study suggests that one way that organizational communication scholars must continually adjust to societal changes is by constantly rethinking the traditional meaning of the stakeholder. I hope to have shown that the still-dominant view of the stakeholder as an individual or organization somehow affected by the decision of organizational rhetor will no longer suffice. A participatory and active notion of stakeholder citizenship is now required in which the citizen becomes the critic. The case of the USDA after 9/11 sharply indicates that if repositioned, the meaning of holding organizational stakes in the post-9/11 may supply a mode of empowerment. This is true for both targets of identification and the organizational beings attempting to install
control by inducing participating in textual motives. With the present study as a case-in-point, a grammar of stakeholder citizenship is a worthwhile project. If enriched, this grammar may very well supply a much needed reading strategy toward a rhetoric of organizations—that is, post-humanist rhetoric that turns against the rhetoric-as-persuasion camp’s commitment to the Rhetoric. Although Burke’s system must be understood as only one potential post-humanist system, it is arguably among the most viable of dialectical vehicles. As such, Burke stands in only to guide and motor a coherent critical act. The key moment unfolds when the critic once again reappears out of his shadow with a new world in store.

Indeed, this vision for the practice of organizational criticism is consistent with the Burkean contention that every living thing is a critic. The idea of organizational criticism as responsible public practice speaks to not only the academic and lay critic’s subject position as a stakeholder-citizen, but in addition, names a practice through which the meaning of this position is always shifting. In this study, I can therefore rethink the insights I have generated by expanding beyond the realm of identification into the more general practice of citizenship with wider implications for rhetorical reading of a wide range of organizational texts. The textual properties I have located and arranged into an organizational rhetoric through Burke (2007a) are productive “puns” on symbolic action. The lay citizen is invited to participate in the pun because as Burke suggests, it is methodologically difficult to see just how far punning can go, for a critics puns are not necessarily identical with those that the reader may notice and appreciate as overtones. Close analysis of key words, events, and their relationships is an act punning because it is act of rhetorical dramatizing that covers an area wider than often expected. Stakeholder-citizens possess various skills that may be useful for various types of insightful dramatizing. The method of the Burkean organizational critic is not procedural but imaginative.
The stakeholder citizen’s job as critical publicist, then, is not to replicate but just the opposite—that is, to offer a new pair of glasses for seeing the organization differently than it has been seen before.

If organizational criticism is responsible public practice, then a variant of this practice is public intellectualism. In my review of organizational communication literature in the second chapter, I observed growing recognition of the importance of study on the organization-society relationship. A recent forum article by Cheney (2007) titled, “Organizational Communication Comes Out” celebrates the subdiscipline’s move beyond internal organizational affairs to socially significant public affairs such as poverty and environmentalism and boundary-crossing organizational issues such as work-family life and labor organizing. Offering a moment of contrast, Cheney argues that the area is still largely talking to itself and can do more in the realm of civic engagement. I agree with this sentiment as well as those expressed by Krone and Harter (2007) that there are various meanings organizational communication scholars give to the performance of civic engagement and public intellectualism. Several organizational communication scholars have redirected the subdiscipline’s traditional industry orientation and physically headed back out to conducted applied research for social change in the field. For an area with a historical predilection for collaboration, consultation, and applied social research, it makes sense that organizational communication scholars would be highly skilled and have a very positive impact on peoples’ lives through this type of work (p. 78).

The problem with this trend is that so few scholars have explored other means available to those of us who do other types of work. There is great risk in this because it replicates a liberal-humanist mentality in which particular ways of knowing and changing organizations are privileged over others. Discussion on the meaning of public intellectualism and social change in
rhetorical studies may very well help organizational communication scholars to democratize a project in civic engagement. Before the recent *Management Communication Quarterly* forum in which Cheney (2007) as well as Krone and Harter’s (2007) forum pieces appeared, rhetoricians had already given attention to these matters (Clark, 1996; Ivie, 2001; Kuypers, 2000; McKeerrow & St. John, 2006; Swartz, 1997, 2005). There is room, too, for historians and philosophers in public intellectualism. Cheney (2007) does well to observe that one way a few organizational communication scholars have engaged in public intellectualism is by writing for popular venues. Through a spirit of partisan advocacy rather than the subdiscipline’s more popular trend of cooperative partnership, I have begun to take this public path with my own research (Singer, 2005). As this study has shown, by preventing publics and organizations from getting too close to the ethical and pragmatic limits of identification, a partisan spirit supplies the necessary comedy to cooperative communication. In its original form, the present study may very well, as Cheney (2007) might put it, speak to “myself” of democracy and ethics. However, by moving beyond the dominant meaning of civic engagement in organizational communication studies, organizational rhetoricians stand to become “critical servants” (Clark, 1996, emphasis in original) to a rhetorical ethic of stakeholder citizenship. Organizational communication studies must continue to expand upon its existing venues and privileged meanings for public intellectualism. If organizational communication has really “come out” as Cheney (2007) suggests it has, then it has yet to come to terms with the ethics of the dramatistic background that has motivated it to do so. In an organizational society made in the image of heroes and villains, and war and peace, the limits of identification and the fragments of comedy are everywhere, waiting to be pieced together.
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