

Ironic Crisis Communication?

Reflections on Three Videos by the Swedish Rail Company SJ

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Abstract

Humour and irony are normally not recommended within crisis communication. So when the main Swedish rail company SJ in January 2011 issued three short videos taking an ironical stance on the company and its damaged reputation, it attracted a great deal of attention. But the good will generated by this unexpected irony was apparently never fully understood by the management, and was thus lost or directly undermined by their subsequent communication.

This article addresses the specific case of SJ's crisis communication in early 2011, with particular interest in the question of the use of humour and irony in a crisis situation.

Keywords: rhetoric, crisis communication, irony, humour, PR

Introduction: (Yet another) Winter of Discontent

The Swedish Winter 2009-2010 was long and hard, and SJ, Swedish Rail, suffered. Trains were cancelled or running late by several hours, the information to travellers was lacking, people were stranded for hours either in overcrowded stations or in trains stuck between stations with no refreshments and overflowing toilets. The problems continued for months, but peaked in February 2010, when SJ's CCO Dag Rosander claimed that this was "the worst crisis in railroad history" (Rydergren 2010). The problems included trains breaking down, with no substitute trains being available, but the main problem was snow and ice on the switches causing them to malfunction, and trains thus being forced to stand still because the ATC system was out of function. The responsibility for keeping the rails free from snow and ice, and the switches in operation, belonged to Banverket, the authority that split from the operation of the trains in 2001. Thus, a good deal of SJ's crisis communication consisted of correcting the picture ("this is the problem") and shifting the blame to Banverket (see Benoit 1995 for an overview of apologetic strategies). But most of all, the crisis was explained by referring to the extreme winter weather, and assuring customers that the problems would be solved come next winter – which, by the way, would in all likelihood not be as harsh as the present one (i.e., blaming the circumstances, cf. Benoit 1995). The Swedish Parliament questioned representatives for both SJ and Banverket on 18 February 2010 (SR P4 2010), and on 22 February, the CEO of SJ gave a press conference in which he apologised to both travellers and Parliament that the company was unable to handle the situation in a

satisfactory manner (Hjertén 2010). Even internally, the situation caused problems and made the unions demand action, as angry travellers had begun threatening SJ employees (Karlsson 2010). One union representative said that the worst part was the lack of information from the operative management, and the CCO had to admit that the situation was lamentable. “It’s tough, but this is where we stand, and we will try our best to get us out of this situation as quickly as possible” (Karlsson 2010).

But throughout the summer of 2010, the problems continued. Trains broke down or had to be taken out of service for repair, which led to cancellations and other disturbances. The summer turned out to be hot, and this caused trains to overheat and rails to bend, the worst incident being one where people were left for 8 hours without refreshments in a X2000 train, with windows that could not be opened, in the blazing sun. The temperature reached 40 degrees Celsius, and it was not until the passengers themselves took action that the doors were opened (SR 2010). SJ blamed Banverket for not allowing the train to be evacuated, but an investigative news programme on national television, *Uppdrag granskning*, revealed that it was SJ’s own decision not to evacuate (*Uppdrag granskning* 2011).

And then came the winter of 2010-2011, with the same problems as the previous winter, only worse. The weather was cold, there was plenty of snow, and the train service was, to make a long story short, erratic. People were left without connections, huddled together in late and overcrowded trains, stranded in small stations without any help throughout the night, etcetera.

This summary of the background does not give anything but a weak reflection of the kinds of problems SJ has been facing for a prolonged period, and the criticism voiced by travellers, analysts, and politicians has been severe and persistent. All SJ had really done in terms of communication, up to this point, was to blame external factors and promise that the problems would pass. The public’s trust in SJ diminished, and it was clear to most that the situation was damaging to the company’s reputation and continued services. In a survey from June 2010, SJ fell from being ranked as no. 187 to no. 240 out of 260 companies. In a response to this, the CCO of SJ claimed that “it’s understandable that our reputation has dropped, but we conclude that travellers understand that SJ is not solely responsible for the trains not arriving on time” (SvD 2010). Notwithstanding, a survey in October 2010 showed that only 20% of the population had great or fairly great confidence in SJ (Medieakademin 2010).

SJ’s Crisis Communication in January and February 2011

When 2011 began, the situation for SJ, as briefly described above, was very bad. One could say, using Bitzer’s terms (Bitzer 1968), that there was a strong exigence in this rhetorical situation: SJ simply had to communicate in some way. Two of the ways in which they communicated during the first two months of 2011 were an editorial in their in-flight magazine, and a folder informing about the launching of a website dedicated to the measures taken to counter the problems. Here I will present a short analysis of these two texts to use as a background for my analysis of three subsequent videos released by SJ.

In the January/February 2011 issue of the in-transit magazine *Kupé*, pages 4-5 were filled with an open letter from Ulf Adelsohn, Chairman of the Board for SJ AB, and Jan

Forsberg, the CEO. The left page contains the actual letter, with the heading “Don’t just shoot at the piano player...” but without an addressee, and the right page has a short summary plus thumbnail photos of the two senders. The summary reads as follows:

The conditions for railway traffic have changed dramatically during recent years. We therefore see a need to describe this in a few words. We do not in any way wish to flee from our responsibility, but at the same time we want to create an understanding for today’s complex and complicated situation. Many operators must now contribute if the train service is to function.

The senders want this to be seen as a factual description of the situation, with an explanation of why problems arise and who can be blamed, but it is very clear from the beginning that the whole text is an attempt at shifting the blame. SJ feels they have been unjustly accused of causing problems for travellers, while the real reason must be found in other places. The letter begins with the following passage:

To the people of Sweden, SJ is once and for all just SJ, solely responsible for all train traffic. But that is not the case today. Already in 1988, Banverket was created and given responsibility for the ownership and maintenance of tracks, platforms, switches, signals, and all information outside of the major city areas.

In other words, the people of Sweden are guided by a misconception when it comes to placing responsibility for the train service, and the following paragraphs describe the situation that has developed during the past 20 years as one of a division of responsibilities, increased (and unfair) competition, and an immense increase in the intensity of railway traffic. All of this is the result of political decisions, and politicians are also responsible for the fact that train service is disappearing in certain areas, as SJ no longer has the duty to provide service on all lines. Furthermore, SJ has to produce an annual return on its own capital of 10%, which is characterized as “a tough demand”. The result of these changes is a mismatch between the actual possibilities of SJ and the public’s demands:

Before all this, people could demand that SJ take full responsibility. You cannot do this in the same way today. But in spite of this, criticism is most often directed at us, we are in the line of fire because we are the ones who meet the, often dissatisfied, customers.

The following paragraph describes the measures taken to improve service and reliability, ending with a short passage about the Government having the last say on some of this, no matter what SJ decides to do. The letter ends with the following paragraph:

There is no use in blaming others. The customers want to arrive in comfort – and on time – with good service in all areas. Therefore, co-operation across the mentioned borders between businesses and authorities is a must. But we feel it is our duty to explain why it is sometimes difficult to give passengers the service they have a right to demand. And it is not always easy to face criticism when we often are innocent.

To summarize, what Adelsohn and Forsberg do in their open letter is to say that they will not try to blame others or dodge their responsibility, while at the same time using

most of the letter to present facts that shift the blame away from SJ. Accusing others in order to free oneself, turning to counterattack, is generally not recommended as a strategy. This behaviour resembles to a child's standard defence – "it wasn't me, it was him!" – and being caught doing so can seriously damage the reputation of the accused who turns accuser. Adelsohn and Forsberg are actually engaged in what could be described as hedging, claiming that "we do not want to run away from our responsibility", and then continuing to do just this by describing why they are not to blame. In terms of classical rhetoric (*Ad Herrenium*), the two representatives present a very superficial *concessio*, while actually delivering both a *remotio criminis* and a *translatio criminis*, i.e. claims that SJ's problems are due to external circumstances, mostly political decisions, and that others are to blame, mostly politicians for underfunding, overexploiting, and diminishing the possibilities for SJ to improve the situation.

This attempt at balancing the scales by claiming responsibility while actually shifting the blame is mirrored in the somewhat cryptic heading of the letter. The original quote goes "Don't shoot the piano player, he's doing the best he can!" (Wikipedia 2011), but it was later changed to "Don't shoot me, I'm only the piano player" (e.g., by Elton John on his 1973 album). This is the intertextuality referred to by the headline, signalled by the use of quotation marks, but there is an important change in content. While the original quote claims innocence for the piano player who is just doing his job, this version actually sanctions the piano player being shot (at), but calls for a fair distribution of bullets to other people as well. The only coherent way to read this (distorted) quote is to see it as an expression of both *concessio* and *remotio criminis*: "Okay, shoot the piano player who's doing a terrible job, but then you should also shoot the rowdy guests disturbing him and making it hard for him to do his job!" A somewhat bizarre way of conducting crisis communication, one might say.

The folder entitled "Now we're taking our most wide-reaching measures ever!" can both be seen as a summary of the measures taken by SJ to enhance service, and as a means of engaging customers by encouraging them to contribute their points of view on the company's new homepage devoted to this (now showing the results of the campaign, <http://forbattringsprogrammet.sj.client.nu/genomforda-atgarder/>). The text starts with a description of the situation, which unfortunately has been one of delays, cancellations, and lack of information. Then the focus shifts to the measures planned by SJ: minimization of disturbances due to technical problems, better preparation for harsh winters, more personnel and better information, an improved system of "in time or your money back", and investments in new trains. Only one small paragraph deals with what was the main focus of the open letter analysed above:

SJ is not the master of everything that influences train services

Not only has our personnel undergone further education and our trains been improved – we have even produced new routines together with our subcontractors and partners. We have signed new agreements with companies performing substitute transport and the garages with whom we co-operate have extended their capacity. We have put more pressure on Trafikverket and demanded, e.g., more fences for deer and moose, better snow removal, and a more stable signalling system.

So, where the open letter was a more aggressive defence through accusation, the aggression has been toned down in the folder and the focus is on the positive side: the work

undertaken by SJ to improve service. One could say that the text exclusively focuses on the promise to “perform appropriate corrective action” (Hearit 2006:69). The same applies to the accompanying website, which is now devoted to explaining the results of the campaign:

We at SJ are fully engaged in turning our improvement programme into reality. We take it step by step. Here you can see some of the things we have already done. Some things we are working on continuously, like the training of our staff. We hope you will see the difference. Welcome on board!

Thus, we see two very different types of crisis communication coming from the same company during the same period of time. Without jumping to conclusions, one cannot help but feel that the editorial was the work of the Chairman of the Board and the CEO alone, without asking the communications department for advice, while the folder and website bear all the trademarks of a communications department. The lack of “one company, one voice” here could be caused by the communications people being overruled by management.

The Videos

During the last week of February 2011, SJ launched three videos made by the famous director Felix Herngren and the bureau King in Stockholm. The videos were shown at national cinemas and on the commercial channels TV4, Kanal 5, TV3, and TV6. The videos show people who are visibly uncomfortable when asked about where they work, doing their best not to answer the question:

The date: A young woman and a young man on what clearly is their first date in a café. She talks about having been to Barcelona, and asks if he has ever been there. “Not physically”, he answers, and goes on to explain that of course it feels like one has been there a lot, what with the football and all. She then asks where he works, and he evades the question by countering it with “isn’t that kind of ... private”, and “isn’t this a bit early to ask that kind of questions?” He then continues with vague terms, saying that later on, if they get to know each other better, then of course they can move on to the question of work. The caption after 36 seconds reads “He works for SJ”, followed (after 39 seconds) by “We are now initiating the greatest measures ever to improve our service.”

The reunion: A banner in a school gymnastics hall reads “9A The Eken School 1991 20 years”. An (over)enthusiastic lady claps her hands and bids everybody welcome, saying she thinks it would be fun to hear what has become of everybody. She then passes the floor to a woman, Eva, and asks her to tell for instance where she is working. She is extremely vague, saying that it’s a bit... not that she has to cover up anything, but... and claiming that she “works like everybody else, daytime, in Sweden”. The caption reads “She works for SJ”.

The bar: Four men in a bar have just been served their first beer, one asks the “new-comer” (standing a bit away from the rest, like he does not really belong) “so, where do you work, then?” He looks a bit confused and ill at ease, saying “wow, isn’t that

kinda... Swedish? I mean, like, old fashioned, 1940ish?" He goes on to talk about the Swedish need for classification of people, e.g. through work, and claims that when he visited China, nobody asked him about his job. He goes on, while the others look more and more troubled by this. The caption reads: "He works for SJ."

The videos were accompanied by adverts in print media with basically the same message as that of the above-mentioned folder and website. Maria Höglund, market communications manager at SJ, explained that "The videos are emotional. Through humour, we want to create an interest in the spectators to read on in the more rational, fact-based adverts, where we tell about the kinds of measures we have taken to improve our service" (Samimi 2011). When asked why SJ had kept silent for so long, Höglund answered: "We have felt that it is not until now, when we have completed a number of measures, that we can go public and tell people. We are not asking for forgiveness or trying to whitewash, we are just telling in our own words what we have done and are doing to get better."

The Question of Irony and Humour

Comments from both the public and SJ representatives show that the videos were intended to be, and were received as, humorous and/or ironic, judging from the comments on Youtube and in a number of blogs. But both humour and irony are elusive concepts; most people use the concepts and have some basic understanding of what they mean, but when asked to be more precise in their definitions, even scholars have difficulties. In a letter to the editor of the newspaper Göteborgs-Posten (Engström, Hansson & Ossiansson 2011), three professionals launch a severe attack on SJ for blaming their employees and not standing up for them, without even reflecting on the fact that the videos are intended to be ironic.

At the same time, many practitioners point to humour and irony as crucial concepts when understanding and communicating with people from other cultures (like the British to an American, see Davies 2011). Thus, in order to better explain what the people at SJ are doing in their videos, a theoretical clarification is necessary.

A short definition of irony can be found in, e.g., Silva Rhetoricæ (<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>):

Speaking in such a way as to imply the contrary of what one says, often for the purpose of derision, mockery, or jest.

Irony is thus a figure of style, where the speaker feels so confident in her ability to persuade the public that she permits herself use of the opponent's voice, either in content or in tone (Eide 2004:82). The speaker knows her public, knows that they are familiar with her points of view, and she is thus able to use the opponent's voice to mock the opponent while still getting her message across. This polyphonic play demands a pre-established understanding between speaker and public, and works mostly as an enhancement of this already existing bond. In order to better understand what is at stake in the videos, I will attempt the difficult task of explaining what happens in the interplay between sender and public.

What Happens?

All three videos portray situations that are recognizable to all of us, namely when you find yourself in a social situation where you are asked a question, and face a dilemma: not answering the question would be considered rude, a breach of the social norms, and lead to your exclusion from some sort of group, and answering the question would provide the others with some information that you are yourself ashamed of, and would thus cause face damage to yourself (Goffman 1959). Both answering and not answering the question would thus be damaging, so instead you attempt to evade the dilemma by questioning the question and its relevance, while trying to maintain positive relations with the person asking the question and those expecting an answer.

In these videos, people are reluctant to tell others that they work for SJ, but they are even, we are led to understand, decent people who do not want to lie to others. For this to work, the videos presuppose that we, the public, know why people might (or should) be ashamed of working for SJ. Of course, the reason is the unsatisfactory service the company has provided its customers for some time. The protagonists are ashamed to reveal their company affiliation, as they fear that the critique against SJ will be directed at them. One might conclude that the persons identify themselves to a strong degree with the company, but find it difficult to argue that the company is worthy of this loyalty. This, too, is a situation that we as spectators are invited to recognize: strong loyalty to one's employer, paired with shame about the current state of affairs.

So, what is the sender saying with these videos? Basically, SJ is expressing its sympathy with its employees, who are in a difficult situation, saying that although we know the company is a good company, there are reasons to be ashamed now. But we know this, and we are doing our best to restore the public's faith and thus once again making our employees proud to be part of the company.

But, one must ask, where is the irony in this? It is definitely not on the level of expression, of figures, as there is no expression of opinions contrary to what is intended by the sender. To fully understand the ironic function, one must approach this from a pragmatic point of view.

A Pragmatic View on Irony

One of the most interesting reflections on the function of irony was presented by Linda Hutcheon, in her paper "The Complex Functions of Irony" (Hutcheon 1992). Here she presents an alternative to the focus on expression generally favoured in studies of irony:

Instead of seeing irony as setting up a literal meaning which is to be discarded in favour of what is called the "ironic" one, what would happen if we thought of irony in terms of a dynamic relationship, a communicative process? What if we saw irony as the interaction not only between ironist and interpreter but between different meanings, where both the said and the unsaid must play off against each other (and with some critical edge) in order for such a process even to be recognized as ironic? Irony would then be a mixture of the pragmatic (in semi-otic terms) and the semantic, where the semantic space is a space "in between," comprising both the spoken and the unspoken. Such a space, however, would always be affectively charged; it would never be without its evaluative "edge."

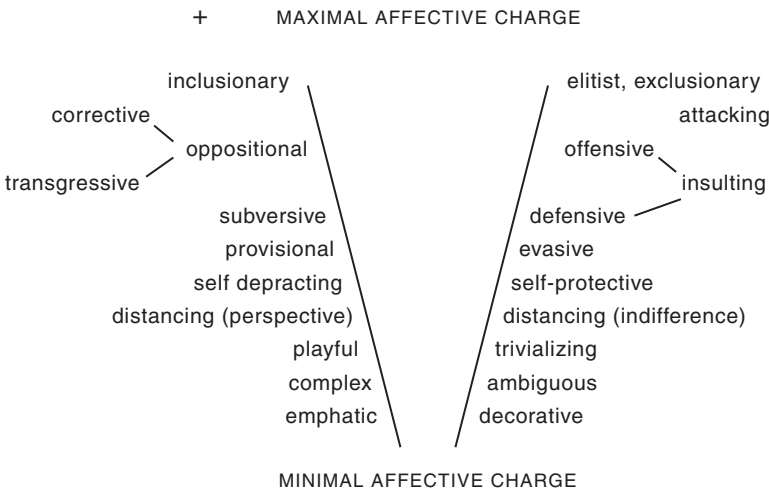
In other words, in spite of certain structural similarities, irony would not be the same as metaphor, allegory, or even lying, and one major difference would lie in this critical edge. (Hutcheon 1992:220).

Irony is a question of co-operation between the sender (the ironist) and the public, building on the inferences made by the public, and thus moving the attention of the analyst away from the sender:

My premise is a simple one: that different attitudes generate different reasons for seeing (interpreting) irony or using (encoding) it , and that the lack of distinction between these different functions is one of the causes of the confusion and disagreement about the appropriateness and even the value of the trope. It may well be true, as Henri Morier argues, that the range of irony depends on the ironist’s temperament – from oppositional to conciliatory – but it seems to me that it takes two to ironize (even if ironists are the only ones to get their own ironies). For this reason, I have chosen to take a different pragmatic tack from that of most other work in this area: given that I have defined “function” as inferred operative motivation, irony’s functions would have to be theorized primarily from the point of view of the decoding and inferring interpreter of irony, not from the more usual perspective of the ironist. In other words, any assumptions about intention and even shared knowledge would be seen as inferences by the interpreter. (Hutcheon 1992: 220).

Irony has a built-in capacity for duality, i.e. it can perform both a positive and a negative function, and be affectively charged in relation to the addressee. Hutcheon presents the following schematic image of the different functions and their respective positions in relation to both affective charge and positive or negative polarity:

Figure 1. The Functions of Irony



Source: Hutcheon 1992: 221.

Using these distinctions, the videos by SJ are clearly to be placed on the left-hand side, the positive side: they are inclusionary, as we are invited to recognize the awkwardness of the situations; they are self-deprecating, as they portray the sender as having problems; they are distancing, as they move the focus from the company to the employees; and they are playful in an emphatic way, as we actually feel sorry for the protagonists while at the same time smiling at the absurdity of their attempts at evading the questions.

The ironic function of the videos lies in the relation between the sender and the addressee, with the protagonists working as in-betweenies, being both part of the company and similar to us, the public. It is humorous, because it uses hyperbole in the depiction of how far the persons are willing to go to avoid answering, while at the same time saying that there is a reason for this. There is certainly a great deal of self-deprecation at stake, as SJ portrays itself as a company with huge problems and employees who are ashamed of it, but by doing this in a humorous way, there are other voices beneath the surface saying “hang on, it’s not THAT bad”.

The irony used by SJ is thus of a kind referred to as “self-irony” in some languages (e.g., Danish and Swedish), but which in classic rhetoric is termed *ironia urbana*. One of the functions of this self-deprecating irony is to produce the simultaneous pictures of “it’s bad” and “it’s not THAT bad”, paired with the ethos-building accreditation of the sender’s willingness to portray herself as a failure, a loser, etc. In the case of the SJ videos, the results would be goodwill on the part of the public, based on the following aspects:

1. Acknowledgment of the fact that SJ is in trouble.
2. Understanding of the reluctance of employees to reveal their connection to SJ.
3. Acceptance of the humorous hyperbole in their reactions.
4. Acknowledgment of the self-deprecation performed by SJ and thus their willingness to take the blame.

This, not at all exhaustive, attempt at describing the irony at stake leads to two main conclusions: that we are dealing with a very complex interaction between sender and public, and that the use of humour and irony works on a deep level to produce goodwill towards the company, based on the recognition that the company is willing to take the blame – and all of this is carried by an attitude of inclusion and empathy.

The Possibilities of Irony and Humour in Crisis Communication

As far as I have been able to see, no textbook in crisis communication recommends the use of humour or irony. This is quite understandable when you are dealing with a crisis situation where lives are lost or people injured, as humour and irony would most certainly damage the ethos of the sender and make the company stand out as lacking empathy. But in a case like the one analysed here, with a company whose reputation is damaged due to poor service during a prolonged period of time, humour and irony actually may work as a first step towards restoring the public’s faith in the good intentions of the company. When irony is used as in this case, the result could well be an improved image of the company as benevolent in relation to both customers and employees, as reproachful to itself, as not having any impression of itself as being above the public, and as sincere in its obligations to do something about the problems.

Judging from comments, especially on the Internet, this was to some extent the case with SJ's videos. The number of showings on Youtube quickly rose to tens of thousands, and the comments were generally positive: "Damned good, SJ! This shows that you recognize the problems and wish to do something about them. Respect!", "hahahahaah", "Brilliant! I went to the cinema yesterday and saw this for the first time. The audience was laughing a lot, in the right way. Thumbs up! :-D" A large number of blogs linked to the videos and praised them, e.g. "JB's Blogg" (jbsaint.wordpress.com/2011/02/27/sj-humor/):

At least, SJ's got humour. Their latest TV ad campaign is really funny and I like it. Really nice and great irony directed at themselves [*självironi*]. It doesn't make SJ less of a crap company with a gang of goofs at the top, but it's clever and good advertising. Keep an eye out for this on a commercial channel near to you."

As this comment shows, some members of the public were not ready to change their fundamental attitude towards SJ that easily, but the videos apparently made even SJ's harshest critics soften up a bit.

One factor that definitely has to be taken into consideration here is the situation at the onset of the communication. One could see the use of irony as "the last resort" for SJ: they had been under attack for several years, the problems had persisted, and the official communication from the heads of the company had been an attempt at shifting the blame in a quite crude way, indirectly accusing the public of not being able to distinguish between the different areas of responsibility and the politicians of creating the problems – something that Adelson repeated in different media, talking about the "incompetent" politicians using SJ as a "playground" (*Gomorron Sverige* 2011), until he was fired on 7 April 2011 (Hoppe 2011).

The Fate of the Videos in SJ's Communication

So, what happened after the release of the three videos by SJ? Did the company use the positive attitudes created in the public in their communication? Sadly, one has to conclude that there was no follow-up and no use of the change created. Apparently, no one understood the potentials of the *ironia urbana*; e.g. in the highly critical news program *Uppdrag granskning* in April 2011, the CEO comments on the videos as an attempt to "make a little fun" ("skojar lite grann"), and continues: "a little *självironi* [i.e. irony directed against oneself] is a good way to make people listen".

Apparently, the management of SJ considered the irony used to be only a figure on the plane of expression, a means to catch the attention of the public, while the "communication proper" was of a different kind. And looking at the subsequent communication from SJ regarding the handling of the crisis situation, it is clear that the irony used in the videos has had no follow-up or spin-off. It remains a one-shot, a singular instance, with no implications for the rest of the company's communication.

One possible explanation of this was given by one of the people responsible for the videos, Jens Englund from King, in a personal interview in July 2011. According to him, King was contracted to create a series of adverts with the purpose of creating a positive image of SJ as a company which "understands and acts". This was considered a first step towards opening the communication of facts – the programme of improvements

(*förbättringsprogrammet*) – in the following phase, i.e. encouraging people to listen to a content already established and communicated in different forms. The videos were seen as a separate campaign and not as an incorporated part of a crisis communication. As a matter of fact, there was at no point in the process any communication between King and the public relations bureau used by SJ; in other words, the videos were seen as an attention catcher, and not as an integral part of the strategic communication.

When King came up with the idea of using irony and humour, there was some discussion as to how suitable this was, but one point was to not only address (dissatisfied) customers, but also possibly frustrated employees. From the point of view of King, the campaign was apparently considered a response to the crisis, and directed to both external and internal stakeholders, but from the point of view of SJ, the campaign was seen as an advertising campaign, with the sole purpose of arousing the public's attention to expose them to the planned communication. According to Englund, the general public's view of SJ was at this point so negative that "pulling down their pants" was the only way to make people believe that the company was actually willing to listen to its customers and take their criticism seriously.

Concluding Remarks

Although the present case study deals with a rather unique situation, I believe two general conclusions can be drawn from it:

The first conclusion is that irony and humour may be applicable within a crisis communication situation, when the crisis is not one involving serious damage to or loss of lives, but has to do with the reputation of a company. But the choice to use such an approach should be based on a thorough analysis of the context of the communication, the "rhetorical situation" (Bitzer 1968) or the "rhetorical arena" (Johansen & Frandsen 2007).

The second conclusion is that it is vital that there be general planning on the managerial level when a company enters into a crisis communication. In the case of SJ, apparently the public relations bureau and the advertising bureau did not communicate with each other, and the choice to use irony made by the advertising bureau was not shared by the management, nor by the people working with the company's PR.

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The Videos

The Date: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_profilepage&v=QHeNzLyRLKg

The Class Reunion: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INeL8nzGcTw&feature=player_profilepage

The Bar: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-YXsjOk3gs&feature=player_profilepage