

## PSYCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

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### Abstract

*Our daily lives are dominated by a profusion of organizations. This paper examines the impact of these 'inescapabilities' on our psyche from a sociological perspective. It first constructs a problem to which organizations can be interpreted as a solution, in order to then take a closer look at the construction of that solution. The central thesis is that the modern psyche cannot be understood without reference to this type of social system.*

**Keywords:** organization, psyche, communication, hierarchy, functionally differentiated society

### Preliminary note

This text is obviously not a classic article, but an 'essayistic ventilation' of the difference psyche/organization. An essay is always an attempted synopsis of motives offered microdiversely in the medium of looseness, here guided by the reference to Niklas Luhmann, which in this regard is highly abstract and macroscopic, somewhat dry, and therefore equipped with a humor that acts as a lubricant or, as one might say: as an instrument of distancing that overrides dogmatics. (Which is why we also avoided references in the text, which mark thoughts as someone's property.)

### Introduction

Organizations play an important role in today's society. This was not always the case. The European system of estates only included a few organization-like entities: mercantile families like the German Fuggers, the Hanseatic League, mercenary armies, guilds, towns, the Catholic church. Our contemporary age, in contrast, is characterized by a profusion of this type of social system.

We are not being dramatic when we say that people's survival in the modern age is crucially dependent on the existence of functioning organizations. Without organizations, we, who are in the process of writing this text in

Karachi, Pakistan, would have neither coffee nor electric power for the coffee machine. Moreover, Peter Fuchs would not even have been able to get here without petrol, the German railways, the Emirates airline, road traffic and aviation standards, not to mention money which is also made available to us by organizations.

Just try to imagine what all of this means in detail: without organizations, you would not receive a single cent in your bank account and, even if you received your inheritance in a cardboard box, without organizations there would be nothing that you could buy with it in any kind of worthwhile quantities. Indeed, the cardboard box would probably not have been available to put it in, not to mention printed bank notes or a bank account. And if you had not attended school, you would not be able to count your money. Whether we like it or not, it is organizations that coordinate everything that is possible in terms of the conduct of life in the modern age. For this reason, they are no incidental theme, no casual matter, and it is impossible to conceive of the psychosocial compact complexes we call human beings without them. We are organized from the cradle to the grave. This phenomenon can be understood as the outcome of an immense social evolutionary push. First they were a European phenomenon only, as they rose in reaction to the collapse of the stratified order of the Middle Ages. Today, organizations dominate all of our lives: inescapably so if you want to consult a doctor, need petrol for your car, would like to buy clothes, need to consume energy, would like to vote etc.

Up to now the study of the effects of this fact of 'becoming organized' on the human psyche was left to psychology. In this text, we would like to discuss the significance of organizations for modern society and, particularly, the modern psyche from the perspective of systems theory. What impacts does the fact of being formally 'organized' have on us, or to be more precise, our psyche? Our central thesis is that the modern psyche cannot be understood without reference to organizations.

Despite all the current talk of inter- and transdisciplinarity, when, as in the case of this text, sociology overflows intentionally into a neighbouring discipline like psychology, it must still explain itself; and some people still see this kind of approach as a provocation. Unjustifiably in our view, as, first, our focus of interest in this text is on the social conditions of psychic processes; and, second, we are not entirely convinced that our theory can simply be

classified as sociology. The reason for this is that the terminology we use, which was developed on the basis of the sharpest possible abstractions, cannot adhere to any particular discipline and is not bound to the 'headquarters' of the different scientific disciplines. It is very similar to all of society's communication flows (not just economical but also political, legal and religious communication) in this, which is why from our perspective an organization cannot be exclusively associated with a particular subsection of society. Every organization involves a mix of different system rationalities. Assignment to a particular system always makes sense when a particular system (for example politics) is supported by organizations (e.g. the political parties), without which the system would be unable to attain any kind of order. In this case, we refer to 'organizational certainty'.

### **The function of organizations**

The question relating to the function of organizations can be translated into the question as to which problem is solved by them. Thus, to be able to answer it, we must first construe the problem for which organizations can be then interpreted as the solution.

When the medieval feudal system of classes and estates was eliminated in a crisis-ridden process, it was replaced by a new primary differentiation of society which divides itself into certain functional areas ('systems' as we would define them). These systems assume tasks individually and autonomously that appear to be indispensable for the conduct of human life. But functional systems like the economy, law, politics etc. do not have any social addresses or attributable identity and addressability. All of these systems amount to the pure throughput of increasingly specific communications, which cannot be addressed. Such systems have no representation of their unity. They are not capable of establishing order 'themselves' or capable of being called to order. They do not have any appearance of their own, so to speak.

This lack is resolved through the differentiation of the world of organizations. To put it bluntly: the functionally differentiated society phenomenalizes itself in this type of social entity or system. Based on a quite specific understanding and taking a 'Luhmannesque' turn, it signals itself through organizations that are addressable. For this reason, like psychic systems, they can be treated as a relevant communication environment – as entities that are capable of being announced.

The functional dimension of this is that organizations can be interpreted as a solution to the problem as to how society's chaotic communication flows and their functional systems can be provided with binding effects. Or to put it in more traditional terms: organizations replace what authority did for pre-modern society.

Like the functional areas, modern society is not ruled by anybody. There is no comprehensive hierarchy, accordingly we refer to heterarchy in this context. Many schools of thought and programmes may still exist which claim that society is ruled by capital, the economy, power and powerful people. But it is obvious that THE society, THE Economy, THE law, THE art, THE education do not have any supreme leaders or chiefs who stipulate what must be done. This way of thinking is only possible if one is under an optical illusion and confuses organizations with society or the functional areas – a confusion that is actually very common as it provides points of accountability through which responsibility can be assigned for things we do not like about the social world. And, of course, attacking anonymous systems that cannot be reached through communication is easy and has no consequences. Something that has no address or identity is incapable of defending itself or fighting back.

Accordingly, criticism is not precluded, it would just have to name names. And in relation to social phenomena, these can be found on the level of organizations which, as addressable systems, facilitate attribution. One cannot address capitalism - but Apple, or Google, or Ikea. This happens by virtue of the fact that organizations regulate communication flows, in that they revitalize the class-based hierarchy of the Middle Ages in segmentary entities. But how do these highly improbable binding effects arise in organizations?

### **The communicative operation of organizations or: Decision Machines**

To answer this question, we must first clarify what 'in organizations' means. This question concerns the system's border. It is very important here that when we refer to borders while 'organizing' our object, we mean 'borders of meaning' and on no account are we referring to spatially conceived inside-outside differences. You do not enter Viacom when you go into the skyscraper on Times Square. Spatial associations make theories much more accessible, as spatiality is simply obvious to our way of perceiving contact

with the world and constantly confirms it. We assume that borders of meaning are borders in time, not in space. We become aware of these borders when changes can be observed in the continuation capacity of meaning-based operations.

These borders of meaning are also found to a certain extent in our psyche where everything that was ever deemed as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour can be recorded. This goes as far as habitualizations which even play a role in shaping physical behaviour, for example when you arrive inadvertently at a classical concert that has already started or you meet the Pope in the corridor. Another possible discussion relates to the problem as to whether psychic systems create and maintain their own (traditionally: internal) borders of meaning.

The border of meaning of organizations is characterized by the difference between membership and non-membership. You are either 'in', that is a member and part of the organization, or you are 'out'. (However, intermediate forms of membership like the team form also exist.) Membership is linked with the recognition of the system of rules applicable within organizations – the reward is the payment of income, which is referred to as 'compensation' by some employees. Admittedly this is a very formal perspective, but this is precisely where its usefulness lies. Moreover, membership only exists formally – this is the only reason why it is possible to resign internally. Whoever formally and verifiably affiliates with an organization is a member of it. (A prominent exception to this rule exists: the organization of the Catholic church. You are 'made a member' through baptism. Interestingly, on a strictly legal basis, you can leave the church of your own accord on attaining religious maturity – the age of 14 in Germany. In addition, the sacrament of confirmation is a kind of public declaration of consent for membership of the church.)

The border we are talking about here arises from the declaration of membership, after which communications are subject to different conditions of continuation, exactly because organization is involved. These different conditions arise when the continuation capacity of communication is subject to the medium of decisions. In other words: organizations are social systems whose form of reproduction can be observed as the autopoiesis (self-reproduction) of decisions. They are 'decision machines' (although we should not over-extend the machine metaphor here, as an

organization cannot break) and reproduce their own unity through continuous decision-making and further decision-making.

To be clear, we do not understand decision-making as a psychic act. Social systems, hence organizations too, do not reproduce anything psychic but are the reproduction of communications which are not identitary units at their points in time, but arise in the mode of a constantly appended definition. This is no different in the context of psychic operations: cognitions are also only what they were through connections. In short: communicative events in organizations are only decisions *when they are observed as decisions*; as certainties in the retrospective fading in of alternatives or sets of alternatives, within which fixations can be understood as selections with binding effect.

At the same time they facilitate something that we had mentioned in the previous paragraph: the addressability of social sectors. Because they are expected to deal with the internal representation and the managing of the difference between doing something and everything else, they are often understood as 'selves', albeit ones that are difficult to understand and therefore all the more mysterious. This analogy has proved useful in terms of everyday application. As helpful as such analogies may be, scientific analysis must proceed with greater precision here.

First, organizations reproduce themselves communicatively, which means that these communicative operations must be broken down so that they can be recognized as belonging to the organization. This happens through their translation: they are flagged as communicative or 'message actions'. Secondly, each communicative act that takes place within this demarcation must be capable of being observed as a decision; that is as an action that has certain consequences.

It is above all important that this decision appears as a choice between alternatives, that is the possibility of deciding, for example, for or against sustainability, nuclear power, war etc. The decision is presented in the form of two sides. This means that everything that happens in an organization is under pressure from alternative possibilities. Yes or no, this way or that: not this way *and* that. This decision-making in turn is linked to chains of command that were also formed through decision-making and thus ultimately presuppose arbitrariness. Due to this chain of command or

hierarchy and its enormous binding effects, it becomes possible to state, with Luhmann: *in organizations what applies applies – unlike what happens otherwise in society*.

The history of companies' selectivity in relation to decisions is understandable in most cases, as the decisions are documented and memorized. Anyone who has been a member of an organization knows exactly why this is the case: so that they can be held liable. This is why many company members exercise extreme caution regarding the information they record in writing.

Decision-making operations can be twice observed; alternatives to the alternatives identified. Each decision, for example in favour of an exhaust-gas software that can identify a test situation, can be considered in relation to many other possible decisions. It appears interchangeable or contingent. This is why many decision-makers try to communicate the existence of a lack of alternatives to their decisions from the outset. German chancellor Angela Merkel expressed this lack of alternatives in characteristically prosaic and blunt terms in one of her key statements: "*Es gibt keine Alternative*." ("There is no alternative.")

To repeat: an organization is a decision-making machine, a reaction to the de-hierarchization of society. In Greek, the word hierarchy means something akin to sacred origin, sacred source, sacred ground, or even: most sacred ground. In essence it is a religious pathos formula. Hierarchy is always based on something or originates from something that defies contestability. Typically it involves the metaphysical instances, the gods, or the one and only god. Of course it cannot be said that organizations like Facebook, BP or Stanford University have sacred grounds, even if many mission statements claim to provide asylum for utopias in a utopia-free society. (Such statements use a concept of *communio* that is supposed to motivate employees or members to perform better. Some organizations even refer to themselves as families, for example the 'Ikea Family'. The central effect is the *enforceability of performances that are not actually enforceable*, a process that also arises in families. This model will be familiar to theologians. It is that of the *supererogatory* performance, or to put it in more modern terms: the demand for and obligation to provide unpaid supplementary services – in the case of theology, an additional commitment that cannot be rewarded on this Earth. It is not enough that everyone does the job for which

they are paid, it is not enough that the butcher butchers, the teacher teaches, the administration attends to its duties, and surgeons remove gall bladders: enthused and intoxicated by the common future, enthused and intoxicated by community, they should all do this as a matter of course. Very few employees have any difficulty in seeing right through this intention on the part of the organization to obtain unremunerated services.) But we can look for functional equivalents of such 'sacred grounds'. First by assuming that there are ultimate grounds for hierarchy that are not made sacred by reference to a 'numinosum', are not covered by assumptions about the quasi ultimate grounding of the world in metaphysical instances, but through a kind of simple adoption of the form of sacredness, which can be found in the groundless groundedness of the sacred. In other words, grounds are described as sacred when they are withdrawn from all discussion and are deployed as non-negotiable and establish an 'inviolable level'.

What are the possible impacts on the psyche that can be deduced from this definition of the function and structure of organizations?

### **Hierarchy effects**

First, these massive insulated areas of stratified order no longer coincide with the form of this society. A strong aversion to hierarchies has emerged in the upper reaches of functional differentiation. They are being stripped of social plausibility, a process to which Hollywood and the mass media in general contribute. In countries of the so-called 'Third World', hierarchies still represent a valuable asset, which is why they are accepted and sometimes almost welcomed. In other words: servility is not a very serious issue in a region still characterized by caste mentality, feudalism and colonialism like Pakistan. Hierarchies in organizations tend to be accepted here, and this acceptance is expected by organizations like Habib University or MQM.

Thus an initial socialization effect of organizations is the experience and establishment of corresponding structures of difference, of groundlessly valid hierarchy and the hierarchy-free society with its functional areas: psychic systems are inserted into the gap between baseless contingency and necessity, between 'anything goes' and "all that is possible is what is possible".



The 'always-possible-in-a-different-way' of the social realm, which characterizes the modern era, is simply not possible within an organization. There is only one aim there: the concatenation of decisions. Unlike in the communication of alternatives as practised, for example, by the court jesters of the Middle Ages, which blocked any alternative to the stratification, this blockade has been removed in the modern age. Modern society can only produce descriptions of itself as contingent; every description could also be different and none can claim 'this is the way it is' status, not even - or to be more precise: especially not - scientific descriptions. Although an organization is a social form that processes alternatives there are no alternatives to this form itself.

This decision-based order enabled what we would like to refer to as 'teleologization'; a kind of simplifying self-binding, this teleologization requires that organizations be punctuated by (internal) representation loci that do not compete with each other – with people, if you like or, to be more precise, with persons. They represent the unity of the system but always coupled with the idea of a telos – a goal to be attained, a binding, shared purpose that assumes form in the above mentioned mission statements. Mainly conveyed in past ages by flags, it is expressed today in logos and mottos and, still, in buildings.

In the Middle Ages, however, an organization was basically just a kind of 'mini me' of the stratified social form: a stratification within the stratification. Not so the organizations of the modern age, which, as we know, are located in a functionally differentiated environment, that is in an environment that has long taken its leave of stratification, hierarchy and binding general objectives.

Although or, perhaps precisely because, stratification is no longer compelling on a general social level, it is compelling on a local one: within organizations. For this very reason it is extremely difficult to present this form of communication within society as positive, necessary, and lacking in alternatives. Hence organizations are at cross purposes with modern society. They orchestrate an image of indisputability within that can no longer be convincingly orchestrated on the outside. The hierarchy of an organization cannot be eradicated – irrespective of how steep or flat it is. Moreover, it cannot desist from being addressable. And irrespective of how diffusely it reproduces itself in times of globalization, it must define a representation of

its own entity in itself. Decisions can only be determined in the form of a self-description cast as a 'mission statement,' which represents a kind of statute for all decisions about decisions, irrespective of how many descriptions of the organization circulate internally on an informal basis. Stanford University does not describe itself as a marriage market for the recruitment and reproduction of the members of well-resourced classes – but this would also be possible. The organized production of Nutella chocolate spread is unlikely to allow a parallel self-description to operate that refers to the damage it causes to dental health and, accordingly, its contribution to the prosperity of dentists.

As we see, under the conditions of indisputability and a lack of alternatives to a social order, the communication of alternatives *can*, in fact, be practised but it does not have to be. Precisely because of this, it can act as an attractor for structural formations, something that happens when social systems like universities, companies, political parties, which present these characteristics of 'authentic stratification', enjoy an evolutionary advantage.

Because the self-description presents a kind of statute for all decisions about decisions, irrespective of how many descriptions of an organization are processed informally within it, organizational consultancy describes itself as working on the self-description of the organization and not as work on the replacement of the system ontology or teleology, the conceptions of being maintained by organizations. Just like the aforementioned court jesters, organization consultants must also be able to communicate disturbing and unexpected information, and oscillate between naming and withholding, between respect and a lack of respect. This lack of respect must be appropriate, that means consultants need to organize acceptance for this lack of respect. For this reason, the use of humour is not entirely without risks here.

The organization must not fall prey to the belief that it can fulfill this consultancy function itself, as it would then make sense to abstain from availing of this external advice. This can be achieved through the adoption of theoretical idioms; sometimes all it takes is the use of a certain theoretical jargon that is not spoken in organizations. The consultant translates the specialist jargon for the organization and can establish thereby himself as an expert. Thus consultancy cannot affect the fundamental aspects of an organization – its 'authenticity'. In this way, consultancy resembles the role

of the court jester. It operates on a parasitic basis. The plant on which this parasite thrives cannot be a matter of contingency. It is a prerequisite. The possibility of its functioning is conditional on the existence of the plant. That is the very condition for the possibility of its function.

### **Inclusion effects**

Other possible impacts of organizations on the psyche relate to the function of inclusion. As we all know, dissolution of membership is even possible in marriage. Irrespective of the fact that – with the exception of civil servants, employees with many years of service and disabled employees – it is actually possible for them to dismiss people, organizations can also avail of ‘formal warnings’. The threat or warning rarely circulates explicitly in the system but in the form of insinuations. It is important to remember here that many people’s livelihoods are dependent on their work in organizations. Their fates and those of their families are at risk if this up-dating of the membership in the form of dismissal is threatened or actually occurs. Unemployment (freedom to work) can itself be understood here as an area of exclusion.

It immobilizes and imprisons – *macht unfrei* (‘makes you unfree’). It damages the social address. And even though localized economic miracles and temporary booms are frequent occurrences, this kind of damage arises everywhere on a massive scale today. That unemployment in Europe is not the same thing as unemployment in Pakistan or Brazil is undisputed. However, fragile it may seem, the European social safety-net functions here – still. Thus one of the special features of organizations is their power of exclusion. An important conclusion can be drawn here from the perspective of psychotherapy; that is that the risk-danger distinction comes into play on a massive scale in the contact with organizations.

Risk and danger are not the same thing. The possibility of rain is normal in England. Getting wet is a danger because you are exposed to this possibility. With the invention of the umbrella, the danger becomes a risk because it is now possible to decide whether to accept this danger or not. It is the invention of an alternative that enables the choice. This mechanism is heightened on a vast scale in organizations, as all behaviour in organizations can be observed as selection between alternatives, in other words as decision-making.

In this way, psychic systems are exposed to the experience of permanent risk which, as we know, can also consume free time, that is time that is not dedicated to the organization, if conduct appropriate to the organization in question is expected. A simple example: membership of a Catholic organization is not necessarily compatible with the intention to divorce. There is an identifiable point, at which this risk arises – it begins with the signing of the membership agreement or contract of work, which signals general agreement with the rules and behaviour applicable within the organization.

Regarding the psychic consequences of this permanent risk, the structure we have just outlined forces each participating consciousness to produce top performances in terms of the refining of the consciousness. (Unfortunately, we are unable to deal with the psychic consequences of freelance work here.) It would therefore, perhaps, be conceivable to speak of a special kind of socialization associated with organizations. It kicks in later than the process we usually describe as socialization. And it does not stop when we finally become nursing home residents. It is important to keep in mind here that socialization does the 'preliminary work' for the organization structures in the difficult system of the family. It is precisely here, in this system, that we learn the risks of speech and silence at first hand.

To repeat, again, an organization is a kind of decision-making machine and we would now like to add that a matter of increasing interest to research in relation to this machine is the background noise – the informal sounds produced by it. Decisions are passed 'down' from one level of the hierarchy to the next, irrespective of what those 'below' think of those 'above'. It appears that people are suitably remunerated. (We think that the issue of payment should have its own system-theory-inspired research programme from the perspective of organizations.)

When an orchestral player sneezes during a grand pause, this involuntary behaviour can be interpreted as a decision against the suppression of sound or as a decision against technical measures to prevent sneezing. Although all behaviour can be interpreted as a decision, logically it is not interpreted in this way on a continuous basis. Most of the communication that is processed in organizations does not even register on the monitor of these systems. It happens - but from a formal perspective it does not exist. Thus it is quasi latent.

Technically speaking, this is *informal communication*, therefore the opposite would be *formal communication*. Informal communication would include, for example, the numerous accounts of the way in which decisions really come into being in contrast to the accounts provided in the system's officious self-description. In other words, the world of chat and gossip, but conversations about sport, television programmes, holiday experiences etc. are also informal. The internal world of the organization is, so to speak, pervaded by noise, a noise that becomes information for the organization, if some element of this noise is selected and is considered a decision. One secretary tells another while watering the office plants that the real reason behind an important decision made by the boss was her husband's relationship with a bookkeeper (note the word's etymology: secretary comes from 'secretus'). The boss hears the conversation over the intercom ... It's not difficult to imagine what happens next. This consideration also explains the typically widespread need in organizations for discretion, caution and being attentive as to whom one can trust and not, in other words the formation of informal cultures of communication. Again, this is only possible through the extreme refinement of psychic systems which must question and classify undertones and background noise even – and particularly – in the context of formal conversation. Why does the professor speak to the pretty student for so long, despite the fact that the assignment involved is a very simple one?

### **Accountability**

We defined the organization as the autopoiesis or self-reproduction of decisions and noted that their binding pressure arises through the way that the organization can observe all behavior as decisions.

This is precisely what requires the participating systems to be able to be understood as deciders – come hell or high water. To put it in somewhat strange terms: they must have the possibility of self-domesticated self-reference. Or again, as already mentioned, they are conceived, strangely, as accountable. For this reason, any limitation of this capacity, for example due to a mental or psychic disorder, poses a huge problem for most organizations. This also means that cutting them down to size or tailoring them to suit requirements must presuppose the freedom to do so.

We note that there is a particularity at play when we focus on the 'simultaneity' of societal heterarchy and this vast dispersal of hierarchical systems. Despite the fact that society is undermining the validity of 'holy grounds', psychic systems must learn to deal with hierarchies. And organizations are coming under pressure from the introjection or importation of this deplausibilization – by their own members, through informal communication at least. But even if it is intensified or heightened, the older model of the hierarchically ordered psyche remains on the agenda – although it must be taken into account here that this model is not necessarily historically rehearsed in other cultural contexts.

Through hierarchy organizations constantly communicate the image of autonomous people who, in terms of their own self-reference, are armed with freedom and thus responsible and accountable. In this way, they confirm the very imagination of psychic systems that are self-ordered on a hierarchical basis. The fact that this is reminiscent of certain basic tenets of Christianity is no coincidence. A series of evolutionary advances, preadaptive advances, actually exists, in particular the imagination of a profound freedom that even God cannot suppress because it is indispensable to the capacity of human beings to commit sin and to be punished or rewarded. This makes the story of Adam and Eve all the more fascinating. Computers (determined automatons) are not such gifted sinners. If one rejects the theology associated with this idea, it is sufficient to note that without the supposition of freedom, communication would be unnecessary and also impossible.

It would be too simple here to overlook the fact that the condition for the possibility of organizational hierarchies, or steep ones at least, is the repeated *destruction of information*, from the bottom up and top down and at every level in the hierarchy. To this is added the eradication of information on the borders of the system, essentially therefore the sharp reduction of world observation by the organization to what can be dealt with in the form of the decision and can, therefore, become relevant.

To explain in sequence: if it were to collapse under the burden of information, the organization's leadership would not be capable of making decisions. This would be the case if absolutely everything that happens were to reach the top echelons in the form of information. For this reason, information absorbers or filters are installed on every level of the hierarchy,

for example in the form of intermediate bosses who decide on what can be reported and what cannot. The best example of this is the infamous 'official channels' in which provision is made for the fact that information does not simply make its way from the bottom to the top but is read in between and discarded. It is equally clear that the information about the reasoning behind decisions is not conveyed from top to bottom on a one-to-one basis. It is obvious that information is absorbed on the different levels of the hierarchy itself.

Hence organizations are not democratic systems. They are hierarchical systems which preclude the all-round transparency of decisions. They do not have all-channel communication and their decisions are only rarely made through voting by all members. Thus here we have another area of societal communication that is fundamentally undemocratic.

The aforementioned destruction of information is – not entirely coincidentally – reminiscent of the relationship of the neural system to the psyche. For the psychic system to function, in particular the consciousness, it relies on the repression of information. Neither one of us has ever felt how our neural systems 'fire'. Of course, Freud's psychic model and its many successors and modifications are also connected with the fact that psychic events arise in vast numbers that do not feature in the register of the consciousness. Indeed, in the case of repression they are not allowed to feature in it.

To compare this mechanism to organizations: as we have seen, numerous communications circulate in them that do not register on the monitor of the formal hierarchy or are not supposed to register there. What becomes expressible is highly selective. Accordingly, the psychic system is socialized not only in families but also in organizations for the purpose of mastering the difference between speech and silence, the measured conveying of information. What results is a 'world of restraint', in which it is possible to experience that the hierarchy is both located an informal, withholding and non-hierarchical world, which co-conditions the formal decisions in different ways – behind the scenes but powerful. In short: The organization is not just hierarchy, it is also heterarchy.

As we have seen, organizations are the socialization agents of the modern age through which psychic systems are heterarchized – not only but mainly.

Hence it does not make much sense to conceive psychic systems on the basis of the hierarchical model. Nor does it help much to assume many selves or 'I's rather than one: this merely pluralizes the figure of the one 'I' or self, which does not change as a result. Hence we have something akin to an inner auditorium in which one 'I', one self, resides along with other 'Is' or other selves. This a truly strange idea. Applied to organizations, it would involve a plurality of leadership entities.

As is so often the case, the problem is due to the fact that we imagine the psychic system in spatial terms, as a 'container' in which these entities reside and work simultaneously. Space ultimately facilitates the simultaneity of separate and co-existence. It is the body and its motility that suggests the 'accommodativeness' of the psychic system – be it only by virtue of the fact that, leaving more esoteric registers of thinking aside, it always carries the psyche or psychic with it. Or to put it more simply: perception.

This gives rise to the impression or experience that the system is localized and centred around an entity that the body in turn carries with it as its own flesh. This 'carrying' effect is supercoded in socio-cultural evolution and in semantically relevant general states of affairs with the idea that an I (as long-term figure: a self) resides in this 'carried-along carrier', which can assume responsibility and is therefore an 'it'. This idea is not eliminated across the board in the society of the modern age, that is in the context of functional differentiation, as otherwise the everyday would not function. Instead it is broken up in the broadest sense – intellectually, poetically, artistically, philosophically and also psychotherapeutically. (There are any number of examples of this, but you need only read the last chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom's monologue, to witness it. There is no longer any 'centredness' there, no I, no self, just pure operativity.)

### **Life-games**

We saw that - when there are no disastrous disassociations at work - addressable systems usually have self-descriptions. Why use the plural here? First because what is always involved here is self-descriptions that are embedded in a scroll of unofficial, informal self-descriptions; second, it is important to accept that competing officious self-descriptions exist. Hence the use of the plural is justified here.



Must something akin to a self be presupposed for us to be able to refer to its description? Something that will be able to be described must somehow exist in an opposite. But precisely this is not presupposed, although a 'self' system can arise in the course of the processing of self-descriptions. The premise for further consideration, however, is merely the existence of an addressable system of meaning.

We can start by saying that we regard self-descriptions of such systems – very approximately – as an attempt to produce images of the self within the self. A key reason for this is that addressability becomes necessary through communication, at least on the level of interaction and the organization. And that appears to lead automatically to the development, or spatial formulation, of something akin to a retainer or counterholder for the social address – an internal image, an internal reflection.

However, a problem arises here regarding the impossibility of the complete imaging of the self *in actu*, in the moment of its current happening. Because we are speaking here of systems of meaning, which always only realize their current existential form as operative systems, all attempts at their self-description are also incomplete. They are always strictly selective, it is impossible for them to do anything but exclude and for this very reason, they are not harmless.

This is why the excluded residues have always been of far greater interest to psychotherapists than the officially presented self-description of the patient. This also applies to organizations. We noted another noxious aspect in relation to the mission statements – the binding effects that arise through self-descriptions. You must always be the way the self-description states, which itself is always only a presentation or production. The 'unperson' represents the compendium of internal defensive and resistance reactions in response to such assumptions (and it is no coincidence that it signifies a non-person, as from our perspective the term 'person' is a collage or arrangement of expectations of who we are, based on who we have been up to this point; having to be the person we have been thus far can be a hard task, as we are not supposed to change too much).

Let us return first to the exclusions by focusing on the difference between manifest and latent. This is almost unavoidable in the context of psychotherapeutic work and also for the observation of organizations, in

which communication blockades etc. are typical phenomena. As we have already said, in this regard the members of organizations have a highly refined consciousness, or to be more precise: they are socialized correspondingly through organizations.

Reference to conscious/unconscious and family-like concepts is standard in the psychic system of reference. However, a clear designation of the phenomenon is lacking for organizations. We then refer to latency areas and structural protection, which can hardly be discussed without relinquishing its function. Again what is significant here is that these distinctions only make sense for addressable systems that have the possibility of self-observation or self-description.

The formal organization offers something that is rarely still found in the modern age: it can decide between incorrect and correct decisions. Whoever decides incorrectly is taken to task. This idea also shows that people in organization-based societies oscillate between decidable worlds, between what is right and what is wrong, and between absolutely undecidable worlds.

Another idea relates to the fact that, particularly when they have pronounced hierarchies that offer negative and positive career opportunities, organizations develop something akin to a 'medium', that is competition for better paid and more reputable positions in the organization. To put it in classical terms: organizations fuel ambition. One effect of this is the *de-solidarization* of competitors. The organization must want this if it relies on this competition; on the other hand it cannot want it precisely because of the resulting de-solidarization. We have been discussing familiar attempts at finding a solution to this, whose helplessness and naivety are touching, especially the bizarre *communio* concept and the idea of organization as family. But again, all of these forms are very transparent on an informal level.

As a result of this, psychic systems end up playing a 'life game' that promotes de-solidarization at the price of the lie concerning individual competitive ambitions. Preadaptive advances for this can also be found in the family system, which enforces a solidarity that can only be put on as an act – one need only think of pubescent adolescents.

**Summary**

We would now like to summarize the insights we have gained here. One of the central theses of this text was that the modern psyche cannot be understood without reference to the type of social system that we refer to as organization. For this reason we started by taking a more detailed look at the structure and function of the organization in the modern age and consequently construed a problem, the answer to which can be interpreted as organizations. We then turned our attention to the construction of the solution.

We identified precisely the functional differentiation on which organizations simultaneously parasitize as the problem to which organizations react or respond, which they transpose into social order. They succeed in producing this order in that they 'dearbitrarize' the aimless and unbridled flows of communication in society and trim them down to the peculiar form of decision. And seeing that we're already indulging in a water-based metaphor, we could also say that they 'channel' the flows of communication. Just as is the case with straightened rivers, the result is that communication becomes, first, increasingly rapid (and time pressure provides a wonderful way of forcing rapid decisions in organizations) and, second, it sometimes bursts its banks - in the sense that, as we have seen, what cannot be clarified formally happens informally. This has different impacts on the socialization of psyches which we defined in relation to two key factors of organizations: a) hierarchy and b) inclusion.

An initial socialization effect arising from organizations is the experience and establishment of corresponding structures of difference between groundlessly valid hierarchy and the hierarchy-free society together with its functional areas, whereby we observed that there are clear cultural differences with regard to the usual aversion to hierarchies in 'the West' and the attitude towards them in 'the East'. Although modern society deplausibilizes the validity of sacred grounds, Western psyches must learn to deal with hierarchies. And organizations come under pressure through the introjections or importation of this deplausibilization – both from their members, at least in the context of informal communication, and from outside through 'public opinion'.

We drew a psychotherapeutically important conclusion from the exclusion power of organizations, namely that the risk/danger distinction comes into

play on a huge scale in the contact with organizations, because all behavior in them can be observed as selection in the context of alternatives, that is as decision-making. Psyches are exposed to the experience of permanent risk, which can also consume free time, that is time that is not dedicated to the organization, particularly if conduct appropriate to the organization in question is expected.

At the same time, the structure of the organization forces each participating consciousness to provide top performances in terms of the refining of the consciousness, which is why we referred to special kind of socialization associated with organizations, which kicks in later than the process we usually refer to as socialization.

This refinement is above all one of the key prerequisites of so-called middle management. The consolidation of a position of influence in two directions - that is in the area of middle management as 'intermediate superiors' or top down/bottom up-interfaces - requires considerable skill, complex morality and above all the capacity for differentiated, contradictory behavior. The main difficulty lies in keeping the level of requirement constant: not to 'spoil' the superiors and subordinates. Any upward or downward deviation from the defined formal expectations is dangerous. Despite all contradictions in behaviour, the intermediate superior must allow a consistent line to emerge. For this reason, a particular capacity for self-representation is important. The organization must provide the middle-manager with institutional protection in this regard and facilitate him in maintaining ambivalent perspectives on situations and keeping information secret.

Another effect associated with this structure is the de-solidarization of competitors which the organizations want, on the one hand, and do not want, on the other, due to desolidarization, which is why they develop futile community concepts like organization culture, the organization as family, home etc. Through this, psyches become involved in a 'life game' that promotes de-solidarization at the price of the lie concerning individual competitive ambitions.

This is precisely where our aspiration to examine in greater detail the consequences of the increase in the importance of organizations for our psyches ends. Observers generally agree that they have gained in significance and we examined the effects of this - not in relation to an

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increasingly acute inequality in industrialized countries or in relation to market and competition questions but in relation to what we think and feel. Where this could all possibly lead is something we would prefer to leave to others; oracular pronouncements are not part of our repertoire. In our view, the question as to the extent to which the negative portrayal of organizations could have impacts on their self-presentation is a more interesting one. However, this would have to be examined elsewhere.