

# DRAGON

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so that it will deal mainly with the subject of Organisation Symbolism. It will give priority to articles – case-studies or theoretical expositions – which consider the organisation as a human and social group within which we see the development of phenomena outside the precincts of classical systems analysis; beliefs, myths, rites, heroes, sagas, and so on. These new concepts usually coincide with the introduction to organisation study of disciplines formerly remote from it: linguistics, history, psychoanalysis, anthropology, etc.

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SPECIAL ISSUE: CONTRIBUTIONS PRESENTED AT THE ANTIBES WORKSHOP ON:  
CORPORATE IMAGE

ORGANISED BY SCOS AND THE CENTRE DE RECHERCHE EN GESTION OF THE ECOLE  
POLYTECHNIQUE (PARIS, FRANCE) AT SOPHIA-ANTIPOLIS THE 26-29 JUNE 1985  
: CONTRIBUTIONS PRESENTED AT THE TRENTO WORKSHOP ON

SKILL

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CONFERENCE ON ORGANISATIONAL SYMBOLISM AND CORPORATE CULTURE ORGANISED  
BY SCOS AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LUND (LUND, SWEDEN), THE 26-30 JUNE 1984  
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# EDITORIAL

Vincent Dégot

At the last meeting of the SCOS executive board, on 13th and 14th December in London, the Committee's officers evaluated the outcomes of the Antibes and Trento conferences. As concerned the material organisation and the atmosphere, as well as the intrinsic quality of the papers put forward, it was generally agreed that the objectives had been attained. On the qualitative side, even, there had been an improvement from one conference to the next, confirming that the standard of the work being done in our field was rising and that the SCOS symposiums themselves are attracting the most significant contributions to it.

The only slightly discordant note, initially remarked upon by only one of the members of the executive, was that the papers might be thought still too theoretical in tone, with not enough case work for a field now reaching maturity. This implies the assumption that a new angle of research, like the one supported by SCOS and its journal, has as its primary requirement something of a concept-oriented approach. In the discussion of this point, many participants observed that, on the contrary, a high proportion of the papers dealt with case studies and were based on findings extracted from within organisations: General Motors, AT & T, breweries, shipyards, and so on. The final conclusion was that the impression of "not enough beef in the hamburger" derived from an over-wide discrepancy, often within a single paper, between the observation data presented and the theoretical considerations which the author was anxious to stress. All in all, the field of studying the organisation seen as a cultural entity generating its own symbols had not thus far secreted that new methodological approach needed for the theory to be sustained by its own specific observation findings.

In this connection, it is necessary to say what we mean by a new methodology and specific observation data. To explain the point in rough terms, we can imagine a five-level progression to illustrate the break-away that can be made from a traditional research approach (but still within the bounds of common sense - all praise to Saints Kuhn and Feyerabend !). Some of these levels are applicable to all disciplines, whereas others are more especially relevant to the social sciences.

- 1 - reinterpretation of existing case-study material with a view to putting a fresh complexion on the findings (remaining within established paradigms, by contrast with level 4 below)
- 2 - retrieval of new types of data, using the traditional means of investigation
- 3 - retrieval of new types of data, but using new means of investigation
- 4 - constitution of a new basis of interpretation, such as by calling on disciplines hitherto remote from our field of inquiry
- 5 - a radical epistemological break-away involving the adoption of a completely new way of looking at our subject of inquiry.

If we attempt to relate the contributions to recent SCOS symposiums to this scale, we find that levels 1, 2 and 4 are fairly well represented, and that several attempts were made in the style of level 5.

The purpose here is not to give out good and bad marks, but to raise a scientific problem (to which the Montreal symposium should, from all appearances, make its contribution): very few among us seem to have been concerned to develop specific ways of observing virgin phenomena, as would be required by level 3 on the above scale.

Obviously, such a break-away is not imperatively necessary for progress to be made in our field: the deployment of high-powered tools, such as linguistics and psychoanalysis, to work on problems typical of the organisation world has already brought valuable and convincing results. In the same way, an approach to observation sites along ethnographic lines, seeking to comprehend the rites and myths underlying this or that institution, throws fresh light on the inner workings of these. But, in every case of this kind, it can be said that the borrowing of these outside techniques, bases of interpretation, and so on, implies a rejection of the concept of a single and specific entity named "organisation", and at all events of the "corporation" as such. (Personally, I have never been very fond of the term "organisation", encompassing a prison, a business, a hospital or a theatrical company alike, and ignoring the specific import of the "economic" dimension).

A new method, for its part, is the link between a fresh approach and an object viewed as a total specific entity, with its own historical evolution, its own unique rules of internal behaviour, its own specific relationships with its environment (Society), etc. This is why we earlier passed rapidly over level 5 of our scale, which is closely related to level 3: only by concretising the newness of our outlook can we go on to imagine the appropriate ways of looking at things - even if the "newness" of those ways is somewhat soiled by their being borrowed from other disciplines.

My only aim here, of course, is to put a problem on the table (in fact suggested by a colleague who will, I hope, put his own pen to paper if I have in any way misinterpreted his thoughts). I have no answer to that problem, particularly since no answer can be purely theoretical, but requires practical experience of using new observation procedures. At all events, both as Dragon's chief editor and as a practicing researcher myself, your contributions

directed to this point will be of the greatest interest to me (which is not to imply any lesser interest in what you may have to say or show concerning the other levels of the progression set out above).

Finally, caught napping by a hectic publishing schedule, I got my timing wrong and my New Year wishes will reach you only later - being no less the warmer for that. I just have time to say that I hope that the coming year will enable me, at Montreal, Hull, Paris or elsewhere, to make the acquaintance of those of you that I have not yet met personally.

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## INSIGHT FROM A DISTANCE

or

## SOME WAYS OF GETTING TO KNOW ABOUT ORGANISATIONS

by Michel MATHEU

Preamble

Getting to know the organisations around us is an exercise fraught with one of two kinds of difficulties: either we stand too far away and can distinguish little of them; or we are too involved in them to have a true perspective. A study team composed of field practitioners and academic researchers considered ways and means of overcoming such obstacles and reached some interesting conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

It seems only natural that we should wish to know all about the corporations, administrations and institutions around us, and that we should readily be able to do so. Such curiosity is legitimate, concerning places in which we spend much of our time and whose activities affect our daily lives, and should at first sight be easy to satisfy: we have first-hand experience of some of them, and the news media feed us with information about the others.

It is not so long ago, however, that RIVELINE (1) pointed out that our knowledge of these organisations was very poor in some respects. Many things that happen there are unknown other than to the direct participants, and we have no great theoretical basis, borne out by field testing and supporting accurate forecasting of events.

This contradictory situation, where close familiarity jostles

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with virtual ignorance, gave food for reflection to what we called the "Organisation Ethnography" study group, concerned to consider the methodological problems involved in investigating our own social environment. The group comprises both field practitioners of organisation study and academic researchers in the subject, drawn together by their common working interest (2).

No group can really speak with a single voice, but this one appointed a spokesman who is the author of these lines and who also produces minutes of all the meetings to form a kind of collective memory. The purpose of this paper is to formulate a consolidated statement of the group's conclusions thus far, with special emphasis on the specific problem of the physical points of vantage from which it seems possible to develop new knowledge about our social institutions and the way they work. Most of the ideas expressed here came out of reflection by the group or by individual members of it, my own job being to select those most suitable for inclusion and fit them into an overall design.

We will first of all look at the paradox mentioned earlier: why is our knowledge of organisations so inadequate? and, if things are as they seem, what new elements have emerged to justify our ambition to know them better?

The answers given to these questions will show that we can effectively hope to improve that knowledge, providing we take up well-prepared observation posts providing a fine balance between remoteness and familiarity. The main body of the paper draws up a tentative inventory of such posts, accessible both to the academic observer and to the organisation insider.

Having thus outlined our catalogue of suitable posts, we go on

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to look at the implications of the name given to the study group: the differences and similarities between the approaches described and those used by the ethnologist proper are pointed out.

## 1 - BETWEEN THE FAMILIAR AND THE FOREIGN

### 1 - ORGANISATION SHOP-FRONTS

When considering the problem of choosing observation posts within a social structure, we must first stop to take a look at what immediately meets the eye. The first impression gained of an organisation, even after slightly closer acquaintance, raises at least as many questions as it answers.

#### (a) From shop-front to back shop

The first thing we see on approaching an organisation new to us is a kind of window display, often thought up by professional designers. Next, having crossed the threshold - and often, even, if we come to work there - we see a miscellany of things which, although in some ways related to the window display, do not readily enable us to form an overall picture of the whole business. In other words, it can be said that the progress through the organisation of the observer gradually takes him, if all goes well, from the "contrived presentation" to the "conventional practice" of its activities. Before discussing his further progress, it is as well to say something about these two terms.

On first acquaintance, then, we are offered a presentation of the organisation which it, or those responsible for creating its image, are concerned to put over to the general

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public outside - an image which, moreover, may be adjusted to suit different occasions. Although in many ways an artificial one, this image is not purely fictitious: it is consonant (though not coincident) with some of the internal facts and events encountered by the observer as he progresses into the second stage of inspection (3).

These facts and events are the object of the "Ethnography" group's attention. Behind the shop-front, behaviour patterns within the organisation are found to be influenced by cultural conventions (certain decisions are unthinkable), by internal rules of working and procedure (not always strictly respected, but permanently in force), and by dialectical usages which formulate problems in such a way as to suggest particular solutions. For example, in a manufacturing company it is taken for granted that the assembly line must never stop; in government administrations, strict rules and procedures control the ways in which public funds are to be disbursed and accounted for; and, in the advertising world, practitioners and clients communicate in a jargonistic language of "markets", "prospects" and "tests" (5) which is virtually inaccessible to the uninitiated. There is a particular criterion whose incidence is decisive - that of cost-effectiveness: it is generally recognised that there is an optimum level for a corporation, or even an administration, corresponding to the minimum resources which can be allocated to a given purpose; any operation tending to go counter to this ideal must present very sound justifications.

All these factors - procedures, conventions, language - go to make up what we have called "conventional practice", whose cohesiveness needs to be assessed and understood. Some

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researchers seek to demonstrate that it is so firmly established as to make its components impervious to the winds of change and, even, to the awareness of outside forces. The main reason put forward is that such conventions are engaged in the task of palliating the complexities of organisational life: in the final analysis, management requires simplification. Then, simplification in turn congeals language and shapes specific ways of thinking (6). For instance, the key-words in use in the Social Security services have come to be employed in all negotiations involving a wide variety of partners (laboratories, hospitals, public administrations, the Social Security department, etc), where they channel discussions along conventional paths and lead to foreseeable decisions (7).

#### (b) Internal sub-divisions

However, this solidity of the conventional practice is not unshakeable, but is periodically threatened. The threat stems mainly from two factors inherent in those strange things called organisations: disparities between the different activities found side-by-side in them; and interference by phenomena common to society as a whole, or at least to areas of society whose boundaries do not coincide with those of the organisations themselves.

These two factors have been subject to much investigation. Since the Fifties and Sixties, the works of CYERT, MARCH and SIMON have been giving currency to the concept of limited rationality (the organisation is broken up into relatively autonomous units, each with its own reasoning processes which, in aggregate, have no particular reason to culminate in the cost-return optimum; workers confined to these units cannot

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consider all the possible courses of action). Debate has long waged rife in the researcher community, from LAWRENCE-LORSCH to MINTZBERG, as to the extent to which internal organisation behaviour patterns are determined by internal constraints as opposed to influences from the outer environment.

Some researchers - including some members of the "Ethnography" group - are inclined, even, to make a more radical diagnosis. The validity, they say, of the very concept of "organisation" is questionable - at least when it comes to studying certain kinds of events: it might well have been created by just some people who work inside or in relation with organisations, and more especially (suggested by etymological analogy) by those whose task is in fact to organise. However, in practical situations, it sometimes happens that the people best able to handle phenomena observed in an organisation are neither the "insiders" nor the "outsiders" in the general context of that organisation, but the "insiders" and "outsiders" related to some quite different community.

These "inside" and "outside" terms have permeated into the common language, as noted by GIRIN (8). In talk among organisation members, the observer hears "we" and "us" to express a common belonging to a group, as opposed to people outside that group, these being "you" or "the others". It is found that a given individual expresses at different times his belonging to different groups denoted by "we": one of the "we" groups is that formed by the organisation as a whole, as distinct from its environment, but others correspond to communities whose boundaries may either coincide with those

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of a formal sub-division of the organisation (such as a "Service" or "Department") or cut completely across these (school-fellows, members of the same Party, etc). The establishment we have in mind is sub-divided into different compartments, some of which reach out to link up with other establishments, proximate or otherwise; they need not figure very prominently in the window display.

The "Ethnography" group has taken a particular interest in some of these sub-divisions: those corresponding to "we" groups aligned on the functional divisions of a business corporation - production, procurement (9), marketing, etc. Each of these functions has its own jargon and conventional practices (as described earlier), which are among the most prominent in the window display, and even in the inner workings.

These "we" groups are of the kind which extends both within and beyond a given organisation. Their membership includes local managers with a specialised qualification, outside consultants who propagate that speciality among different organisations, and academics who give systematic shape to findings reflecting or contributing to the know-how and practices of the former. There have thus emerged disciplines, in the scientific sense of the term, in the business and management areas: marketing, corporate finance, management of human resources, and so on. One or more of these disciplines may be relevant to a given functional division of a corporation: there is great similarity between their definitions and the corporation's operational management structure. They formulate problems in terms that are common to them and the corporate staff concerned, and suggest to the latter a range of standard solutions appropriate to those problems (10).

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## 2 - SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN THINGS

### (a) How a paradox can further knowledge

In the context just described, our search for knowledge about organisations falls between the two terms of a paradox. First, we have the proposition that the foregoing shows that there are very good reasons why the organisations in question should remain inscrutable.

They are first encountered by the incoming observer in the form of a window display of somewhat specious content. Even when inside, he comes up against highly fragmented practices and presentations, and has to contend with jargons which formulate all problems and secrete the solutions to them. However, if we allow (11) that there is more to be said of a human group than can be derived from its own perceptions of itself - meaning, in this case, that there exist behavioural factors relevant to the observer's needs, not expressed in the incomplete jargons of management, but capable of expression within different paradigms - then this fragmentation of the organisation's structure and the proliferation of its procedures and conventions represent so many obstacles to be overcome only with difficulty.

The second term of our paradox is precisely that there are also very good reasons, of equal force, why those obstacles should be surmounted, and the question of completing our knowledge of organisations be raised.

These reasons appear to be connected with a specific historical configuration, providing the social and cultural conditions which together enable would-be observers of organisational structures to view these from the right distance, sometimes from within, and sometimes from without, the organisation itself. An attempt to draw up an inventory, or even a classification, of those reasons would be a complete research

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assignment in itself; in this paper, I can merely put forward a few tentative suggestions.

These suggestions all arise out of the same consideration: the cultural tenets and other values which have thus far underpinned the corporate structure, and are likely to do so for some time to come, have recently had their legitimacy questioned. An example is that of the mathematical model and the attempts made to apply it to the whole range of human activity: the way in which operational research flourished in the wake of World War Two is a good illustration of this; the gradual emergence of a sociology of the sciences (including the mathematical sciences) amply indicates that formalized scientific models can no longer be regarded as sacrosanct. The same applies to the dominant rôle played by Economics in the planning of business activities: it remains the basic reference at the level of the organisations, but one can now criticise its excesses without being taken for an unconditional enemy of the social order. Some observers hold that the whole body of Society's perceptions of itself is being shaken by a crisis, and there are historical precedents for this. Simultaneously, this insidious doubting of our own cultural values has caused us to formulate a view of the non-Western societies in which these do not appear in a subordinate or "pre-rational" light; the process of distanciation made possible by this attitude shows a mental outlook which some authors would like to bring to bear on our own native culture (12).

Whatever the reasons, there is definitely taking place a degree of drawing back from the various factors which, at first sight, form a screen between the observer and the organisations he

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is concerned to investigate. It is this repositioning which will make it possible to gain a better view. We will now take a closer look at what it means for the inside observer.

(b) Cautious disbelief

In many instances, we find that organisation insiders observe some detachment with regard to the procedures in which they are involved and to the conventional language they employ. This detachment takes various forms and applies to different degrees.

It is linked with the attitudinal reappraisal referred to earlier. The very personnel of the organisation often realise that the paradigms they refer to are not apposite to real situations they have to face, and that the standard solutions handed down to them are often ineffective. This leads them to the conclusion that their organisation is the scene of events they do not fully comprehend themselves. Thus compelled to perform their jobs with the help of their personal powers of observation and assessment, they often develop their personal interpretation of some situations and are ready to put it forward at every opportunity.

Their detachment does not however go as far as complete severance from the set framework, and their relationship with regard to its procedures and terms of reference can be described as one of cautious disbelief, or pretence at belief. This attitude may come as something of a surprise to the Western Cartesian mind, but is a recognised feature of other civilisations and societies. VEYNE describes it in relation to the Ancient Greeks (13), and

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ZINOVIEV introduces characters - probably true-to-life - who, under the influence of drink or nervous strain, depart from the dialectical norm to criticise what they regard as harmful aspects of the Soviet system, but fall back into line when sober and mentally restored. In our own society, people are not reduced to such schizophrenic somersaults - these being induced by a totalitarian system, but they nevertheless frequently mistrust the behaviour patterns with which they may find it convenient to comply, and remain sceptical concerning some of the conventional wisdoms by which their own actions are guided.

The many and varied forms taken by this detached attitude are familiar to those who live inside organisations or are in frequent contact with them. We must also always bear in mind the fact that many people are unquestioning believers. Others believe unassuredly, in the sense that they might employ an expression listed by MANNONI in a psychological context: "I full well know ... (that things are not as they say) ... but, all the same ...". Here, the scepticism is limited by the difficulty of taking action in a world too different from one's own perception of it. A natural variation on the same attitude might be: "I full well know ... (that things are different, that the solutions lie elsewhere) ... but I carry on as before because it's impossible to do otherwise". One of the reasons behind this attitude is that the convention being questioned may be designed partly to simplify things: it is easier to challenge it than to find a substitute, since greater complexity is the result of any attempt to discard it. This duality of approach often comes out in "off-duty" conversation, with an exchange of remarks which departs from the

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official vocabulary and concerning events which, in the formal situations when they occurred, were acted out following the official script; VILLETTE draws attention to the existence of different ways, respecting the conventions to varying degrees, of reporting the same facts, depending on the person addressed and the circumstances (14).

It is important for what comes after to remember that all the many conventional codes of organisation behaviour are both brought into doubt and at the same time being applied. The proportions in the mix vary quite widely and are sometimes hard to delineate. For example, one of the official tenets encountered on entering a government department is that public funds must be spent solely in line with the principles of the general interest and the public service; this statement is backed up by hard and fast procedures: stemming from the rules of public accountancy, observance of which is deemed to guarantee compliance with those two principles. Experience shows, however, that this idea is not universally adopted and that the rules are regularly broken in the interests of facilitating the work of a given department. In some circumstances, such deviations from the rules are thought sufficiently admissible for them to be referred to in quasi-official circles; whereas, in other circumstances, they are found thoroughly reprehensible and liable to cost a high official his job. From the observer's standpoint, the relative doubt prevailing here - but never in any case going so far as to advocate the outright abolition of financial control over administrative action - opens up an avenue for investigation. When all is said and done,

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it is not for the observer either to accept or to disregard the façade of intangible rules, but merely to use it as a starting point: to observe the facts hidden behind that façade and to inquire into the logic supporting those facts, whose diversity does not fully emerge from the conventional intercourse (15).

(c) An internal-cum-external device

Thus, the second term of our paradox, the appearance of doubts or relative detachment, gives some credibility, and opens up genuine approaches, to an attempt to provide a description of the organisation which differs from that shaped by the conventional organisation language.

This is by no means an easy task, either for the observer from inside the organisation or for the one viewing it from an outside position. Our comments thus far give some guidance as to the principles to observe: leave to one side the official descriptions, together with, in many cases, the value judgements which accompany them; in so doing, reveal the real facts - inevitably numerous - which were not included in those descriptions, whose multiplicity is commensurate with the complexity facing the members of the organisation; move around the organisation so as to get over the hindrances of organisational fragmentation, and thus pick up the conventions and jargons of the sub-divisions.

The difficulties encountered are not exactly the same for inside as for outside observers.

The insider is less able to rid himself of conventions and jargons which determine his acts and those of the people around him; and cannot readily find substitutes for them.

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Also, he has problems with overcoming the barriers of internal compartmentalisation: he is familiar with only the local consequences of phenomena whose vital sources may be outside his field of vision.

As for the outside observer, he has a more detached and overall view, but carries the corresponding handicap of a lack of depth. He must devise methods and practical means of first getting into the organisation and then being able to work his way through it. He must not expect much assistance, inevitably being regarded as an intruder likely to try to upset established ways, and liable to pass on information - either outside or inside the organisation - which it is deemed preferable to keep private.

We see, therefore, that each of the two types of observer considered possesses at least some of the assets which the other one lacks. This means that there is a gap which must be bridged: the outsider must get far enough inside to have a close enough view, while the insider must move far enough outwards to obtain a proper perspective. Both are guided by the same principles, but the former has to find ways of entering and becoming established, while the latter needs a firm vantage point with a more detached view.

If they achieve their respective aims, they will have constituted what can be called an "internal-cum-external" observation system. The "Ethnography" study group has interviewed observers of both types who had succeeded in doing this. We will be looking at their characteristics as we go on, showing the ways in which they differ, but also how they are brought together by common aims and interests.

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## 2 - INVESTIGATIVE APPROACHES

### 1 - WORKING A WAY INSIDE

We will first take the case of the researcher or consultant about to investigate an organisation from the inside. They are one of two kinds, apparently rather different from each other and usually belonging to different academic disciplines. There are those who are called in for the specific purpose of solving a problem encountered by the organisation and, in most cases, formulated by the latter in precise terms; they are generally from the fields of economics and business management (16). The others are not brought in at the request of the organisation, but wish to gain observer status there, preferably for some length of time; these are frequently - but not invariably - sociologists or ethnologists.

The approaches adopted by the two types of investigator are not the same, to the extent that they have different ways of tackling the problem of gaining an established footing inside the organisation. But that problem is the same for both of them, which gives them something in common.

Their problem is a familiar one to the practitioners of the human sciences: any newcomer to a social group who intends to remain there for some length of time is branded by that group with a local status; he must fit into one of the recognised slots in the group's social structure, or at least occupy a position compatible with the group's pattern of perceptions. The newcomer cannot refuse to accept such a status, which is bestowed on him immediately he arrives but may evolve in some ways as time goes on. It is essential for him to establish that status very clearly; to paraphrase DEVEREUX, he will be given to observe a facette of the group "which depends on what the people being observed imagine him to be" (17).

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Some ethnologists have remarked on their inability to start their observations until such time as they are installed in an appropriate rôle inside the social group they are investigating. For instance, FAVRET-SAADA was not able to start her study of witchcraft in the French provinces until she became designated as an exorcist: she writes of how the people talking to her exclusively addressed themselves to the one who was "reputed to have the power of (...) or not to have the power" (18). This type of status, bringing close involvement, is not much different from that awarded to an observer brought into an organisation as a hired consultant. For organisations such as corporations, a similar phenomenon will be recognised hereunder as between the "hired" observer and the "guest" observer.

(a) The hired observer

Here, we are talking about the researcher or consultant who is called in by the organisation to tackle one of its own problems.

He thus gains admittance to the organisation because he is thought to possess the knowledge and remedies needed to handle a problem which the organisation, usually, feels able to state in clear terms. In the words of one member of the "Ethnography" group, he is called in because he has a "tool-box": computer, marketing, budgetary accounting or other tools.

If our observer is one of those seeking an "internal-cum-external" vantage point, this manner of entering implies several special factors. First of all, it is based on

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a misunderstanding. As we have seen, this type of observer is somewhat removed from the classical schools of economics and business management. On the other hand, the organisation which called him in may see in him no more than a specialist in one or several disciplines thought to secrete the solutions to its current difficulties. At first sight, this is an unpromising situation: the obstacle constituted by the organisation's internal conventions and procedures is all the more severe in that the observer comes in to find a veritable minefield of them.

What enables the observer to fall on his feet is the fact that, although the jargons employed are only fragments, and the conventional formulations only local representations, of the full picture, they nevertheless give access, step by step, to a whole mass of other information. The observers entering organisations with just a small box of tools all witness to this experience, using metaphors of the ball-of-string kind: you pull on a loose end - the specific planning, ergonomic or plant organisation problem handed to you - and then the whole ball unravels, bringing out a mass of facts which at first seemed unconnected with the end sticking out, but which must be considered if the problem is to be solved.

This type of observer is thus naturally led to substitute, as far as possible, the image of a wide-casting general practitioner for that of the narrow specialist initially attributed to him.

In the course of an assignment, this unravelling of the string draws the attention of the organisation managers to the overall implications of particular problems. In

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particular, some of the organisation's difficulties cannot be thought out in terms of the normal occupations of any one manager, owing to the fact that they arise, not in a single functional area, but at the interface between two or more areas. This leads to a two-way exchange during which the perceptions of the observer and the observed alike are modified <sup>and</sup> refocused: the former signals facts omitted from the conventional formulation to the latter, who reacts to this, and so on. Thus, when a researcher builds up a model of the operations of a workshop, with a view to solving a work-processing problem, each successive stage of his construction sets off a train of reactions between him and the workshop managers and operatives, so that all concerned eventually achieve a more perceptive image of what is really going on. Once a series of such assignments in one place has brought recognition of the researcher's status, he may then be called in by other organisations, being now considered as a many-sided specialist.

This illustrates the kind of detached position which can be secured through interaction. The observer does not simply respond to an assignment in the terms in which it is initially formulated, but considers that formulation as an indicative paradigm whose wider implications must be brought to light. As for the standard tenets of applied economics and business management, these are given no more than their rightful place. Cost-return studies and other text-book approaches are no longer seen as methods for solving problems, but merely as technical tools to be applied in appropriate circumstances after their contribution has been assessed. For example, in

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the case of government decisions affecting the environment, a researcher established inside the official departments and private associations concerned can see that a cost-return study, far from being an unimpeachable instrument of optimisation, is a partisan's weapon: in a controversy concerning, say, the management of public waterways, the conservationist associations must realise that there are several equally legitimate ways of making an economic evaluation, identify the one which best suits their interests, and join up with partners prepared to co-sponsor it (26).

Having said this, we must now take a more detailed look at the practical situation of an observer established inside an organisation. First of all, it must be realised that the expression "called in by an organisation" is too vague for our purposes. Given that organisations are mostly under divided control, and that only the top people have the power to make contracts with outsiders, the researcher is usually called in by the general management or by a very senior manager. This will always leave some mark upon him, in that he will always be regarded as having a special relationship with the top level - sometimes, even, as a "spy" for it.

Nevertheless, his presence will be seen as significant to all the people he has dealings with. They will all be expecting him to produce either positive or negative effects, and try to sway his conclusions in their favour. This is the factor which fills in the details of his situation and status, ensuring that he will be given access to more than the merely formal reactions reserved for an outsider without any "house" status. As we saw at the beginning of our study, however, it is also the factor which places limits on what he will be given to see.

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The observation post may vary from one case to another, but there always prevails a measure of give-and-take: the aims of the researcher are tied up with those of the organisation and its members: search for knowledge matched by search for improvement, anxiety to secure one's position, or fear of losing it. In this exchange, one of the sides - the researcher or researchers - contributes a method of working, didactic skills and, more or less incidentally, the backing of academic prestige or other outside source of authority, a rate of information flow unusual in the organisation, and an availability as a scape-goat; the problems may not be solved as easily as was at first hoped, but the organisation may, on the other hand, appreciate the introduction of a more overall view of things and a clearer perception of its constraints. The other side - the organisation and its members - contributes funds, time and effort, and puts up with the disruption inevitably caused by the intrusion.

So much for access to the inner workings. Although it is easier to gain for the "hired" observer, the distance between observer and observed required by the "internal-cum-external" principle cannot be guaranteed. The accumulation of experience, duly recorded and expressed in an academic context, is an aid to this, but each fresh attempt entails the risk of being swallowed up by the exigencies coming from the organisation, to the point where the initially detached observer insensibly falls in with local motivations and conventions. To combat this, some research bodies have set up what they call a "distance control protocol": an institutionalised system of dialogue between the researcher directly involved and a colleague or colleagues remaining more detached who help him to sort out the flood of motivations and representations (21).

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(b) The guest observer

We define a guest observer as one who, not belonging to a given organisation and not having been called in by it as a consultant, nevertheless gains access to it and has to achieve a vantage point and a status that are soundly based and compatible with the observer function.

Routinely practiced by ethnologists, this approach has also been adopted by researchers investigating social structures within their native societies from the organisation standpoint and there is a great deal of literature on the subject, particularly from North American experience. A little later, I will recall the methodological and ethical principles that have been developed in this connection.

Before doing so, it is appropriate to discuss the ways in which a guest observer solves the problem of gaining entry to an organisation, especially to those of the latter where business considerations are paramount.

In these organisations, especially business corporations, the social sciences practiced by most of the researchers seeking guest observer status carry little weight, particularly when they have an overall objective. Some branches of those sciences, such as social psychology, are commonly applied to problems of human relations, but very much as an auxiliary feature of a more recognised function (22); in academic terms, the subject is known as "human resources management". Unlike the specialists in this discipline, sociologists and ethnologists wishing to work in an organisation have no recognised status there and may even - especially the sociologist - be preceded by the negative image of the intellectual whose purpose is to interfere with the existing social system. The problem

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of gaining entrance is thus a very real one.

Some practitioners dispose of some part of the difficulty by presenting themselves under a label other than that of sociology, or with something tacked onto it. They still have to carve out their base of observation, but the initial problem of communication is to some extent avoided. One example is that of D'IRIBARNE, a researcher with an engineering qualification who is conducting a comparative study of management in identical manufacturing plants spread over different countries and is considered as an "off-beat engineer": his focus of interest - ways of settling disputes in different cultural contexts - is at first sight thought outlandish, but his grasp of technical matters puts him on easy terms with the local engineers and workers (23). Then there is the case of CHANLAT, a Canadian professor of business administration who finds a ready welcome into the large corporation whose culture he wishes to study, owing to the fact that the teachers from business schools form part, so to speak, of the corporate world; once having established contact with the local staff and management, he can go on to discuss with them the matters in which he is immediately interested - and which have little to do with either the usual concerns of the business school field or the corporate world (24).

Others tackle the problem head-on, and enter the organisation flying the ethnologist's flag after merely obtaining the permission of the top management. Here, however, the status profile has to be built up from scratch, especially if the observer intends to wander extensively throughout the organisation. He must be accepted also by the middle executives, the workers, and their union representatives.

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To achieve this, it is not enough for him to be merely an authorised visitor and he must obtain a stronger foothold. One ethnologist got herself taken on as an employee in the communications department and then the general services units of a catering organisation she wanted to study, doing temporary jobs on a salaried basis. She thus became integrated with the other staff, who were able to test her reliability as one of them and, as confidence in her discretion built up, the defensive barriers hiding the facts she was interested to know gradually fell down (25).

A recent paper by AKTOUF (26) reminds us that, once inside an organisation, the guest observer must share in the activities of the group he is observing, but without trying to pretend that he is an ordinary member of it; assuming the rôle of an acceptable and well-meaning stranger, it might be said. He must avoid going too far in either direction: too much emphasis on the observer aspect will lose his contact with the group, to the detriment of the participation factor, while too much participation will restrict his observation and make him less detached, by "going native", so to speak. The observer must be inside and outside at one and the same time, endeavouring to look at his "inside self" through the eyes of his "outside self".

Having got in, how does the observer manage to hold his position? Once established, the guest observer, in the same way as his "hired" counterpart, is caught up in a whirl of solicitations and negative reactions. If he succeeds in holding his ground, it is because the former are outweighing the latter. In other words, he is fulfilling certain requirements. These are sometimes the same as those met by hired observers, whether willingly or

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otherwise. The exact situation of course varies from one case to the other, depending particularly on the weight of the "sponsorship" which facilitated entry in the first place, but also on the way in which the observer reports on what he sees: taking an extreme view, the one who remains silent will not arouse any adverse reaction.

The guest observer is thus expected to act as a liaison officer between parts of the organisation which do not know very much about each other. Sometimes, welcomed as a long-hoped-for mediator, he becomes the target for the lamentations of individuals who feel badly done-by and who cannot normally get a hearing. The problem in which he is interested may be of special acuteness in the organisation concerned, which can encourage people directly involved to speak out about it; for instance, in the comparative management study referred to on an earlier page, the observer's inquiring mind encountered problems concerning the relations between expatriate supervisors and local workers. The presence of the observer, and the conclusions he is thought likely to draw, may sometimes seem to the advantage of a given staff category: for instance, the sociologist LATOUR, making an ethnographic survey of a bio-medical research centre, was made all the more welcome in that his conclusions directly concerned the scientists he was observing (27). In other cases, the observer may be of some assistance to personnel categories in respect of matters in which he is especially qualified (such as vocational training advice). Finally, in the same way as some organisations may find that the hired observer is not a specialised trouble-shooter, but rather a professional thinker whose more overall and detached view can make a valuable contribution, so they may discover, whether immediately or as time goes on, that the guest observer possesses knowledge that can be of use to them.

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The above remarks show that a degree of detachment is just as valuable for the guest observer as for the hired observer. It is achieved in much the same way: by retaining a firm academic base and, when applicable, by an institutionalised link between researchers quite outside the organisation concerned and the observer who is in the thick of it.

The respective approaches of the hired observer and the guest observer, which are often portrayed as being quite different, thus have many things in common. In both cases, he runs the risk of being thrown off course by the sollicitations to which he is exposed - for example, identifying himself too closely with a particular category of organisation members with which a special relationship builds up; both of them must therefore be concerned to control those sollicitations and, more generally, to make their position sufficiently clear.

Another common feature of their approaches, on both the intellectual and the practical levels, is as follows: many guest observers develop models of what they see, in terms different from those used by those they are observing, and then submit them to the latter for comment; in the light of the reactions provoked, these models are gradually adjusted in a process which simultaneously modifies the perceptions of both sides (method adopted by CHANLAT, already quoted above). This is one of the standard methods used by hired observers.

There remain, of course, some differences. The guest observer may have more opportunities for moving around the organisation than his hired counterpart, whose observations tend to be restricted to what directly concerns his

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specific assignment. On the other hand, the hired consultant, with his usually narrower but more searching focus, may find it easier to unearth information which would otherwise remain concealed by the organisation's conventional system of values, and then has a more legitimate pretext for subjecting that information to open scrutiny. However, this difference is more a matter of degree than of kind; in a way, the guest observer who stays in position for some length of time is drawn by the forces at work inside the organisation into a status very similar to that of the hired consultant.

## 2 - MOVING OUTSIDE FROM WITHIN

We now come to the situation of the member of an organisation who, from being too closely immersed in it, is anxious to enhance his perspective by acquiring a more detached position.

At first sight, this situation seems quite unrelated to those just discussed. As remarked by VILLETTE (28), some-one who really belongs to an organisation is involved in it to an extent that no visiting observer could ever achieve: the same author goes on to say that the experience of having applied for a job in the organisation, and subsequent awareness of the insecurity of tenure of that employment, considerably influence the attitude to being there, in a way which is quite beyond the ken of anybody based outside it.

However, all inside observers may not be so completely implicated. There is a kind of continuous spectrum going from the extreme of total involvement to the less constraining situation of an employee working out a stage in his professional career. The common feature of all inside observers, in

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contrast to those from outside, is that they have elected to take up normal employment in the organisation, without in any way declaring their observer status. The less constrained among them include the salaried employee who gives up his job after a few years, either to acquire the necessary detachment or merely to find the time in which to record his research findings; also included - but here we come close to a guest observer situation - is the fixed-term trainee who is given a precise operational task to perform (30).

The obstacles to be overcome by these inside observers are thus different from those faced by their outside counterparts. They reside mainly in the very local scale of the phenomena which can be observed or - especially when seeking to follow a normal professional career within the organisation, as can be a natural tendency - in the need to perform duties which involve subscribing to the local conventions; the "cautious disbelief" approach may sway too far in the direction of real belief.

As we have already said, the organisation's personnel are constantly obliged to interpret the events they see around them as they move around in what is often a hostile world; they all construct their own "sociological theories" concerning their working environment. The trouble is that organisations do not always possess a memory-recording function; such interpretations as can be formulated from inside them are often subject to fluctuation and revision in the light of evolutionary changes in the organisations themselves. This is aggravated by the fact that, although minor events are fairly easy to see for a totally immersed observer, he may find difficulty in decoding their meaning in systematic terms, owing to the lack

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of an permanent outside frame of reference. This illustrated by the remarkable work of LINHART (31): the author took a job as a production-line worker, a very deeply immersed post which brought to light a mass of information which could hardly have been obtained by any other means, but the absence of provision for any detached processing of that information limited his ability to produce a reasoned reconstruction of his observations.

The problem is, therefore - and even more acutely than for a guest observer - to establish an inconsistent, almost a dual, identity (32). One way of doing this is to obtain the support and recognition of a scientific community: the observer's relationship with a permanent institution of this kind provides him with the necessary detachment and with a base conducive to developing new systems of fact-finding and processing. In the normal course of his work inside the organisation, the observer does not stand out among his "ordinary" fellow-workers, taking notes only in situations where this is a normal feature of his daily work.

The need to take notice of minor events, of an anecdotal nature, is possibly more compelling for the immersed observer than for the observer categories considered earlier. An anecdote points up the discrepancy which must be established between the official theories and conventions then current and the revised description of things which the observer is concerned to produce.

In this connection, it is significant that the organisation's personnel, when first entering it, are introduced to the local values and conventions - what is or is not done - in anecdotal fashion. At that time, they are in an ambiguous situation with regard to events, since they are not yet "organisation-minded" and the set of procedures and conventions they have to

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cope with is just as foreign to them as it would be to any complete outsider. Furthermore, a series of anecdotes is a way of dismissing the wavering interpretations which, as we just said, the personnel tend to develop; and it is also a basis on which to build a construction of events which differs from the impressions of the people living those events. Thus, the recording of events and of discussion of them - plant breakdowns, for example - may prove revealing: we are dealing here with "minor events", usually considered as separate incidents needing ad hoc intervention; whereas if they are looked at as a whole, they may add up to make a phenomenon of considerable dimensions, whose solution implies complete reappraisal of the concepts stemming from the principle of scientific organisation of work (33). On another tack, a methodical examination of the circulation of paperwork within a research centre or a government department (34) can open the way for a fresh explanation of how those establishments work.

#### THE OFFICIAL INSPECTOR, OR THE INSTITUTIONALISED COMPROMISE

The reader may be surprised at the appearance on the stage, after the "immersed" observer seemed to have completed the cast, of a new character who could appear as something of an intruder. However, the "Ethnography" group noted that the inspector, even if his function is to assess the facts observed, is himself in a very good observation post. He is, of course, like the hired and guest observers, involved in very complex issues; but, as we have just seen, this very involvement makes it possible, providing the issues are clearly formulated, to observe and assemble the facts. He often has the urge to step in with corrective action, just as no researcher can be motivated by indifference, but sublimates his passion into methods (35). At all events, inspectors often write up, and sometimes publish, their own

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observations (36).

Needless to say, the inspector has ready access to the organisation he is in a position to observe. This being so, a kind of internal-cum-external status is immediately conferred upon him. He is accepted reluctantly, but accepted just the same. Given the instinctive tendency to present him with an embellished picture of things, it would be virtually unprofessional of him to take what he hears at face value - at least in the initial stages.

But that is not the main point. The confrontation between the inspector and the inspected produces that precise collision which is of interest to us: between an official formalism which presides over organisational behaviour but which does not determine it in every respect, and that behaviour itself. The inspector represents a norm which dictates how things should be, and comes up against things as they truly are.

Obviously, the inspector could be content to note the deviation from the norm and take sanctions against it, neglecting the fact that it is usually impossible for things to be as they should in every way. But it is here that the erosion of the formalistic position becomes evident. The inspector can hardly believe fully in the effectiveness of the norms he represents. Past experience has shown, and the head-on collision mentioned above confirms, that when the norm is forcibly applied, this leads to the appearance of factors and events which are incompatible with it. This applies in all the various

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kinds of inspection systems reviewed by the "Ethnography" group. The inspector responsible for safety standards well knows that if all the regulations were applied to the letter this would bring paralysis; he is thus forced to consider, rather, the behaviour patterns which build up in relation to the rules and to reflect on the many implications of the latter. The one charged with ensuring compliance with financial rules within a public administration similarly knows that strict observance of all the official accounting procedures may be incompatible with that administration's discharging of its assigned objectives (teaching, health-care, etc). He tends all the more to become an observer of organisations in that the operational logic of the ones he has to inspect is at the heart of this inner conflict: the disymmetry between the rules of efficiency he is charged with enforcing and the concept of efficiency or good performance prevailing in practice is bound to stimulate his reflections.

Furthermore, although the interaction between the inspector and the organisation is expressed in veiled terms, it is a necessary process. There is some similarity between the dialogue between the guest observer and the organisation we discussed earlier, and the right of appeal or counter-appeal which is formally provided under some inspection procedures.

The limits beyond which the inspector may not step in his approach to understanding are probably not those we would at first suppose. In the first place, the inspector

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charged with enforcing financial rules is inhibited, over and above his own possible misgivings, by the very weight of those rules. They allow him to highlight, by contrast, ways of doing things and working practices with which they are incompatible, but this revelation is likely to receive short shrift: budgetary domination, at least in government administration, is such that these rules, fleetingly questioned, usually end up by prevailing without difficulty within the organisations inspected.

Furthermore, although the inspector's status endows him with an internal-cum-external personality, one of these two positions may clearly outweigh the other. The inspectors who belong to the organisation inspected are particularly prone to lack much of the external element to the extent that, over and above the discrepancies brought to light in the exercise of their specific function, they share many cultural values and conventions with the people they are inspecting; the "Ethnography" group, listening to an inspector of this kind, gained an impression of close solidarity between him and his "victims" in their attitude to judgements coming from outside their common organisation. The internal element tends to be lacking mainly for the inspector nominated by an independent control body, owing to the fact that he often spends only a very short time in any given organisation; this is not always sufficient to allow of getting behind all the façades and assessing the distortions provoked by the rules he has to enforce.

### 3 - THE PROXIMATE AND THE REMOTE

It is now time for us to look at the relationships between the procedures we have just described

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and the practices and mental attitudes of the ethnographer which have been developed for approaching primitive or remote societies, and partly extrapolated for application to certain social groups in our own native culture.

In more precise terms, we will first of all examine a major difference between the observation modes classified by the "Ethnography" group and the ethnographic approach proper, and then review the similarities which were thought to justify the group's choice of that particular title.

### 1 - RESTITUTING THE FINDINGS

In the preceding parts of this paper, only slight allusion has been made to the manner of going about a restitution of the observer's findings to the objects of his observation. Nevertheless, unlike the true ethnographer who, on account of the cultural and geographical distances involved, is able to avoid this problem, the observer of his own native culture is compelled to face up to it.

#### (a) The horrified reaction

The "Ethnography" group found that all the observers it interviewed regarded the problem of restitution in strikingly similar ways.

In many cases, restitution "is a bad experience". In speaking of such a bad experience, those having gone through it employed the same kinds of terms: "horrified reaction",

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"shocking", "stab in the back". Sometimes, the observer presenting to management what is considered an intolerable image of the organisation is told to leave. At other times, it is the publication of the findings which is felt to be injurious. Our group in some cases were given an account of past examples of this kind, and on other occasions more or less staged the reaction - when observers and observees happened to be present at the same meeting.

The cases where such backlash occurs come under different headings: sometimes, the complaint is that non-compliance with the rules has been made public; or that too much publicity has been given to stresses and conflicts which would have been better "kept in the family"; or, even, that nothing appeared to be wrong until the observer came on the scene, but he intervened too clumsily. It is not always easy to find the right explanation, but the group attempted to do so in some cases.

For instance, it tried to explain the indignant reaction to the publication of a text describing how an experiment with a computerised accounts system came to fail: this revelation was deemed to be a serious undermining both of the corporation's internal efficiency options in general, and of the personal reputations of several of its top managers in particular. In another case, it emerged that certain practices of a corporation's purchasing staff, although perfectly normal in the local context and probably quite common in the profession as a whole, were found to be morally unjustifiable (the buyers were referred to as "cowboys" by one of their colleagues) because they were

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not consistent with seeking optimum cost-efficiency for the corporation (37).

Many other examples could be quoted. Their common feature is what could be called a short-circuit. The arrival of the observer suddenly brings into contact two components of the organisation which are normally partitioned off from each other, producing a sharp and unexpected shock. Systems of values and mental outlooks which do not coincide collide violently with each other. The same situation also arises in other contexts, such as when two companies merge into one: when managers of different origins have to work together, what is the obvious course for one may be an unthinkable heresy for another. In the "cautious disbelief" attitude referred to earlier, the "cautious" element takes fright when the heresy is too great; and the sudden introduction of too many unorthodox constructions is a rape of the conscience. We must also bear in mind that the observer's own system of values may make the situation even more complicated.

#### (b) Restitution as a tool of investigation

Despite all this, restituting the findings cannot be avoided. On the one hand, the observer involved in an organisation is necessarily led, in the course of a give and take process, to feed back an image or images of the people observed; we have seen, in fact, that this is a valuable part of his strategy. On the other hand, it is in the very nature of researchers and observers to seek to draw attention to their findings.

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In a way, indeed, this restitution is at the heart of the investigative processes we have described thus far. It could be said that the observee is lying in ambush for the observer at the point of restitution. That is the time of unravelling the fabric made of interaction. The common feature of all the moves described above is that the observer manages to remain on the observation site thanks to the fine balance established and evolving between himself and a body of expectations and fears born of his appearance on the scene. It is only when the restitution has been accomplished that the holders of those fears and expectations finally know where they stand. They will, of course, have already obtained some satisfactions and experienced some disappointments during the process of interaction, but the full extent of their gains or losses depends on the manner in which the sum of the findings is presented and distributed, and on the public given access to it.

This is why the investigation process is not fully complete when the restitution occurs. To the contrary, each time an image is fed back, and each time some information is published, the people observed react by adjusting their images and taking advantage of the findings. Even what might seem to be the final restitution - a memorandum circulated inside the organisation, or the publication of a book or article - is no more than the penultimate stage. It is itself taken up by the partners in the organisation game; it may subsequently be allowed to die, buried away in some obscure file after a final skirmish or two; or it may become a live issue, in the hands of some members of

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the organisation who hope that, with the help of what it portrays and the further support of its author, they will be able to achieve what they consider to be desirable changes in the organisation. In this last case, we may see the metamorphosis of the guest observer to become a hired consultant, of the kind described earlier.

The observer can, of course, adapt his own behaviour to suit all these events - which to him are foreseeable; but there are no standard recipes for doing this. Restitution on a regular basis definitely helps to reduce the short-circuit effect, with smaller shocks having to be absorbed each time. Some say that there are only two satisfactory ways of disclosing the findings of observation: by systematically concealing the identities of the persons observed; or by presenting the findings in such a way that they are acceptable to the organisation observed, in which case the latter is often prepared to co-sign the publication or report. The latter eventuality is often made possible by practicing regular and gradual restitution during the study.

It will always remain difficult - and here we recognise the limitations of research directed to one's own native culture - to feed back images conflicting too much with well-established values and, possibly even more so, to explain to another human being that his behaviour is almost completely determined by processes of which he may have no idea.

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## 2 - SUMMING-UP: ETHNO- OR NOT ETHNO- ?

We have just discussed a point of discrepancy between the observer approaches described herein and that of the ethnographer concerned with primitive or remote societies. The measure of that discrepancy should not be over-stated: many ethnographers proper present their models to their subjects and practice a kind of permanent restitution of their own.

At all events, there are some very clear affinities.

Our observers and the ethnographers both have the same concern for detail, the same interest in "minor" events, especially when these are neglected or unnoticed by the people observed and when they coincide poorly or not at all with the perceptions of the latter: there are some things in common between those who investigate the violations of accounting rules and those who investigate exceptions to a sacred tradition which prohibits certain marriages. Both also have in common the principle of reserving judgement on things volunteered to them, pending the time when they can confront them with actual observations. Other common necessities are those involved by maintaining the observation position: performing small services - as by offering an animal need<sup>ed</sup> for a ritual sacrifice, for example; obtaining recognition as an acceptable outsider - as by passing as a foreign sorcerer, learning enough of the local cult to gain an "inside footing", possibly becoming considered as a member of the religious community (38), and so on.

Finally, the distance between observer and observed, becoming stabilised after some faltering, and the tension between the external and internal modes - "between armchair and straw mat" - have close similarities, even if the starting points were different. This distance, tension and point of vantage are hard to

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hard to define in hard and fast terms, but both the ethnographer and the observer of his <sup>own</sup> society in their rôle of observer, know that they must find "the right place at the right distance" (37). In short, gain insight from a distance.

## NOTES

- (1) RIVELINE - "Pour une approche ethnographique des organisations" (Enseignement et Gestion, Spring 1983)
- (2) The group has met regularly since late 1982. It has already published Ethnographie des organisations, assembled by MATHEU (Ecole Polytechnique, 1984), which gives a detailed presentation of its procedures. Its first methodological conclusions, some of which contribute to the above article, are set out in full in MATHEU - "Ethnographie et sciences de la gestion" (Enseignement et Gestion, Spring 1984)
- (3) This passage obviously raises the whole problem of the development of the corporate culture concept, which is the subject of many writings elsewhere.
- (4) This refers to the idea that, in a corporation or organisation, the members share beliefs and images which determine both their perceptions and their action. This idea is supported by many researchers interested in corporate culture. See SMIRCICH, Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis (ASQ, September 1983).
- (5) For problems raised by management languages, this paper owes much to the work of LAUFER, e.g. LAUFER-BURLAUD - Management public, Gestion et légitimité (Daloz, 1980) and LAUFER-PARADEISE - Le prince bureaucrate (Flammarion 1982)
- (6) For further details, see BERRY - Une technologie invisible (Ecole Polytechnique, 1983)
- (7) MOISDON-TONNEAU - Le B en sursis (Ecole des Mines, 1983)
- (8) GIRIN - "La Gestion de la parole dans les entreprises" (Critique, Winter 1984)

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- (9) POUVOURVILLE - "Volonté de changement et cohérence organisationnelle. Comment modifier les politiques d'achat des grandes entreprises ?" (Annales des Mines, July 1981)
- (10) MATHEU op. cit. and HATCHUEL - "Sciences des organisations de la pluridisciplinarité à la construction d'un objet" (AFCET Symposium, 1982)
- (11) This premise is of course debatable. American researchers currently divide into those who hold that only native-view paradigms provide a valid description of human groups, including corporations, those who think that the researcher should construct his own paradigms according to circumstances, and those in positions somewhere between, as is the "Ethnography" group. See GREGORY - Native-view paradigms: multiple cultures and culture conflicts in organizations (ASQ, September 1983)
- (12) The ideas outlined in this paragraph are based on works from various disciplines, including LATOUR - Microbes, guerre et paix (Métaillé, 1984), some quite old work by POLYANI and DUMONT, in which interest is being revived, LAUFER-PARADEISE, op. cit., and GOODY, La raison graphique (Minuit, 1979)
- (13) VEYNE - Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes ? (Seuil, 1983)
- (14) VILLETTE - Ethnographie dans l'entreprise (Minuit, in the press)
- (15) MAYER - Les réglemens de sécurité dans une industrie à risque (Ecole Polytechnique, 1982)
- (16) Including what is known as "human resources management". See Chercheurs dans l'entreprise ou la recherche en action (Documentation Française, 1985)
- (17) DEVEREUX - De l'angoisse à la méthode (Flammarion 1980), pp363/74
- (18) FAVRET-SAADA - Les mots, la mort, les sorts (Gallimard, 1977) NB pp 23-56 on methodology.
- (19) The following refers mainly to the work of the CGS, the CRG, ISEDR, and the Econometrics Laboratory of Ecole Polytechnique, all represented within the Group. Use was made of the methodological works of CGS and CRG, including BERRY-MOISDON-RIVELINE - "Qu'est-ce que la recherche en Gestion ?" (Informatique et Gestion, September 1979) and GIRIN - "Quel paradigme pour la recherche en gestion ?" (Sciences de Gestion, October 1981)
- (20) HENRY - "La micro-économie comme langage et enjeu de négociations" (Revue Economique, January 1984)

.../.

- (21) On this important point, see the paper by BERRY (Ecole Polytechnique, 1984) Logique de la connaissance et logique de l'action, réflexions à partir de l'expérience de recherche en gestion menée à l'Ecole Poly-
- (22) VILLETTE - La psychologie d'entreprise (La Jaune et La technique Rouge, June 1985)
- (23) Several publications including detailed study Les facteurs socio-culturels du fonctionnement et de l'efficacité de l'entreprise (CEREBE, 1984)
- (24) Gestion et culture d'entreprise: le cheminement d'Hydro-Québec (Québec-Amérique, 1984)
- (25) FENEYROL, La communication en procès, essai d'ethnologie dans l'entreprise, doctoral thesis to be published soon
- (26) AKTOUF - "La méthode de l'observation participante" in La rupture entre l'entreprise et les hommes (Québec-Amérique 1985)
- (27) LATOUR-WOOLGAR - Laboratory Life (Sage, 1979)
- (28) Ethnographie - op. cit.
- (29) Applies to VILLETTE (see Ethnographie ... op. cit.), a member of our Group, many of whose analyses we refer to from hereon. See also (similar situation but less detailed analysis) MOREL - La grève froide (Editions d'Organisation, 1981)
- (30) Case study presented to "Ethnography" Group by SINCLAIR (pseudonym) - Bidule: essai sur la gestion prévisionnelle assistée par ordinateur (OL-Informatique, December 1976)
- (31) LINHART - L'établi (Minuit, 1976)
- (32) Here and in following paragraphs we refer back to VILLETTE.
- (33) RIGAL-WEIL - article in this issue.
- (34) LATOUR-WOOLGAR - op. cit. and study of a government administration presented to the Group by an immersed observer taking special interest in exchanges of mail and telephone calls.
- (35) DEVEREUX - op. cit.
- (36) LEO - Le bon sens administratif (E.L.F., 1940)
- (37) See also WINKIN - "Travail ethnographique et objectivation", Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales (November 1984)
- (38) Examples and terms in quotes are taken from GIBBAL - Tambours d'eau (Sycomore, 1982), NB pp 203/4



## DESIRE VERSUS INTEREST

Norman JACKSON &amp; Pippa CARTER

INTRODUCTION

Deleuze and Guattari, in their seminal work 'Anti-Oedipus' (1984), have charged the capitalist ethic with engendering a schizophrenic society by alienating Desire from Interest. Such criticisms must have implications for the way corporate organisations, which constitute the major vehicle for operationalising the capitalist ethic, conduct their affairs. In recognition of this, our intention is to explore how such a process is manifested and realised in corporate organisations.

It is intrinsic to Deleuze and Guattari's argument that capitalism achieves this alienation through appropriation of the signifier. It is, thus, wholly appropriate to address this issue from a symbolic perspective. The necessarily limited objective of this paper is to examine the issue at a fairly coarse level, using the corporate image as the symbolic aggregation of the organisation, its manifesto. Since the corporate image is a fiction, there emerges from it, its negation in the form of a counter image (or, more correctly, images). The inevitable tension that arises from the opposition of the corporate image and the counter image, as signifiers of Desire and Interest, constitutes, at least in part, the *raison d'être* for the management role in its contemporary socio-historical form. The praxis of management is managing for Desire - the benefit of the few, rather than for Interest - the benefit of the many.

THE CORPORATE IMAGE AND THE COUNTER IMAGE

In this section we consider the characteristics of the corporate image, i.e., that intended by the organisation, and what we have called the counter image, images which emerge in opposition to the one intended. By considering such images as signifiers our interest is in what is signified, the underlying meaning and significance of the symbols, in relation to social practice.

The 'official' corporate image is communicated through various means.

'Official' needs to be understood in terms of two components: on the one hand, there is the formal image management of an organisation, represented by such functions as advertising, public relations, marketing, industrial design, service units, etc., (i.e., although these functions may not actually output images, the formation of the image is a conscious part of the role); on the other hand, there is the routinised, informal, but intentional and internalised, image creation of day to day management that emanates from such things as organisational language, incentives, processes such as internal memos, information systems, and so on. This official corporate image is aimed at people within the organisation and a generalised public outside the organisation. The boundaries between such groups are inevitably blurred - a "worker" can also be a member of the generalised public, and therefore is subject to two forms of the image, and may also be a manager who propagates the image, thereby being simultaneously a sender and a receiver of the corporate image.

It is the nature of the corporate image that it is controlled by the organisation and is unidirectional, definitional and didactic. It is active rather than interactive, and tries to be integrated and consistent. One of its crucial aspects is that the corporate image should not be testable, i.e., that distance should be maintained between the image and its intended audience.

In contrast to the corporate image, the counter image - or, more correctly, images - is experientially based, as the only available medium for challenge to the corporate image. In the way that the corporate image has an integrated quality, the counter image is highly fragmented, since it is not intentional. (This is not to say that there are no coalitions of counter image, or that under some circumstances a counter image cannot be fabricated.)

Deleuze and Guattari have illustrated contemporary capitalist consumer society in terms of the disjunction between Desire and Interest. That is to say that the capitalist productive ethic promotes desire for its

productions contrary to general class interest. Capitalist productions are not to be seen as mere products, but as including particular social relationships. All aspects, direct or indirect, of the corporate image can be seen as representing support for the major organisational aim, which is disposal of outputs as a means of generating efficient inflows of cash. (It is possible that from a general social, rather than an organisational, perspective the social relationships part of this formulation is the more important, in so far as, taking a systems perspective, successful promotion of acceptance of these enables a society to withstand perturbations without violation of its stability criteria). Deleuze and Guattari are concerned to explain the mechanism by which people can desire that which is manifestly against their interest. Within this general context, our intention is to look at the role of the corporate image in promoting desire, and how the counter image emerges experientially in terms of interest.

In understanding the fundamental nature of the corporate image in terms of Lack and Desire, this lack is one engineered by the consumerism of capitalist society:

"Lack ... is created, planned and organised in and through social production ... Production is never organised on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack .... The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class."

((Deleuze & Guattari 1984, p 28)

Or, as D'Amico (1978) says:

"But if desire and need are themselves actively formed by a social structure rather than merely negatively repressed, and if control can be exercised as much through what it allows as what it prevents, then the relation between desire and labor can never be simply hydraulic."

(p 88-89)

The desire that is promoted is not desire for the object per se - that which the organisation can provide - but for the promise of access to a particular social milieu, access to the desired world of the Other. The 'art' to which Deleuze and Guattari refer is the art of the use of symbolic structures as a mechanism of multi-faceted social repression, and, as such, in pursuing the images one actually incidentally pursues repression.

The corporate image is intrinsically fictional, ("fantasy" - Deleuze and Guattari), and as such is open to being unmasked. When we buy into a particular corporate image, what we get is the output of that organisation, and that is all. We do not gain thereby access to the fantasised social world of the Other.

The genesis of the counter image is found in these exposures of the corporate image as fiction, and is informed by inescapable existential, if unarticulated, awareness of class interest. This stems from realisation of a disjunction between the manufactured homogenous social unity and the individual experience of being relatively weak in a world of asymmetric power relations. Or, in Adorno's terms:

"... a contradiction ... between the definition which an individual knows as his own and his "role", the definition forced upon him by society ..."

(Adorno 1973, p 152)

In using the term 'interest' we are not denoting a pragmatic empirical sense of the word. Habermas defines interest as

"... the basic orientations rooted in specific fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species, namely work and interaction."

(Habermas 1978, p 196)

This definition is particularly apposite for a number of reasons: the emergence of the estranged self is prima facie a knowledge constitutive

process; it seems to concur with the view of Deleuze and Guattari that the constitution of the subject lies with desire and labour (see D'Amico 1978); and it provides a substantive correlation with Carchedi's more general definition of class interest. For Carchedi (e.g., 1983), social classes are the primary social relationship, determining all others. They include economic, political and ideological elements, and are, under capitalism, asymmetric and antagonistic. Knowledge of reality is a function of involvement, estranged from ownership, in material and mental transformations. The interest which informs the counter image is a knowledge-and experientially-based interest, which is real in so far as it reflects the actuality of being relatively powerless in relation to the creation of wealth. We would like to suggest an affinity between class interest in these terms and the Lacanian Real, of which Bowie says

"... the Real is that which is there, already there, and inaccessible to the subject ...; when we appear on the scene as subjects certain games have already been played, certain dice thrown. Things are. But to become aware of this is not to be compelled to silent acquiescence ... Secondly, ... the Real is the primordial chaos upon which language operates: 'It is the world of words that creates the world of things ...'(Ecrits)."

(Bowie 1979, p 133)

In modern industrial societies, as Marcuse (1972) points out, repression is exercised through rational control rather than through raw power. An instrument of this rationality is the appropriation of language and other symbolic systems to serve particular, rather than general, interests (Habermas 1979). The thrust behind the semiotics of the corporate image is to privilege one meaning over others (Derrida 1982, Cooper 1986) - very often necessitating the invention of a completely new meaning, in the manner of an Orwellian Newspeak (Orwell 1954). This represents a conscious misuse of symbolic systems, not least because in privileging a particular meaning the intrinsically binary nature of, for example, language is subverted. A significant characteristic of the corporate image is its untruth at a moral and philosophical level, both in the way that words and images are used, and in the enforcing of supposed similarity between fundamentally dissimilar

concepts. It is now widely accepted that this falseness of the projected images exists in some form or other, yet, unless it can be demonstrated as illegal, it is regarded as relatively socially harmless. There is an apparent assumption that, whilst words can lie, pictures, for example, do not communicate in the same way - a picture associating cigarettes and health is permissible, whereas a sentence describing that relationship is not. But if the Deleuze and Guattari thesis has substance, this inescapable exposure to contradiction, as furnished by the simultaneous existence of the corporate image and its negation in the counter image, is far from unproblematic, due to the dissonance that is created by the authoritative use of symbols, where the message fails to be borne out by experience. On the one hand, the promotion, through the corporate image, of desire which is unattainable, and on the other, the reality of the object which is attainable but which does not contain the essence of desire, results in a praxis which manifests itself in a schizophrenic society.

The intrinsic satisfactions of the image and the object are of a substantially different nature, and whereas the object can be achieved, the promise of the image remains a fiction. However, if one has the intention of achieving a non-schizophrenic praxis, i.e., an emancipatory interest, there is no way that this can be achieved within the positive dialectic of contemporary capitalist society, which eschews its own contradiction, predicating a unitary society purged of 'irrational' meaning, one big happy family. The negation of this which is to be found in the counter image forms the basis of a new praxis which potentially reunites Desire with Interest, not by the subversion and repression of Interest but by the promotion of Desire which reflects genuine class interest - in Habermas' terms, achieves a communication free from domination (1979). Within the terms of this paper, this means a corporate image which does not promote Desire in contradiction to Interest.

#### MANAGEMENT OF THE TENSIONS

MacIntyre (1981) argues that managerial authority rests upon the twin suppositions of morally neutral effectiveness and expertise. He rejects

both these claims on the grounds that the concept of effectiveness can never be morally neutral and that the idea of managerial expertise is a fiction "because the kind of knowledge which would be required to sustain it does not exist" (p 72). If management is a skill, but is not the skill that it claims to be, what skill is it?

As we have noted, Deleuze and Guattari have argued that capitalism promotes Desire contrary to general class Interest, which results, at a general social level, in a schizophrenic tendency. The opposition of these two conditions obviously gives rise to organisational tensions, and it is our thesis that the function and skill of management lies in regulating the conflict of Desire and Interest in favour of Desire. Deleuze and Guattari's argument is that capitalism promotes an artificial lack to stimulate Desire on the part of the subject. However, as they note, Desire is not desire for the object, but Desire for the subject, fantasised vicariously through the object. That is, the desire is the desire to appropriate the social other which is perceived as accessible through the object. Objects can be products, roles, symbols, etc. - particular social relationships. Interest is the historically specific existential possibility for emancipation. It is the achievement of the possibility of the negation of surplus repression (Marcuse 1969). In the words of Deleuze and Guattari:

"It is not a question of ideology. There is an unconscious libidinal investment of the social field that coexists, but does not necessarily coincide, with the pre-conscious investments, or with what the preconscious investments "ought to be". That is why, when subjects, individuals, or groups act manifestly counter to their class interests - when they rally to the interests and ideals of a class that their own objective situation should lead them to combat - it is not enough to say: they were fooled, the masses have been fooled .... It is a problem of desire, and desire is part of the infrastructure. Preconscious investments are made, or should be made, according to the interests of the opposing classes. But unconscious investments are made according to positions of desire ...

The investments of an unconscious nature can ensure the general submission to a dominant class by making cuts ... and segregations pass over into a social field, insofar as it is effectively invested by desire and no longer by interests. A form of social production and reproduction, along with its economic and financial mechanisms, its political formations, and so on, can be desired as such, in whole or in part, independently of the interests of the desiring-subject."

(p 104)

The cost to the individual of pursuing Desire at the expense of Interest is ultimately, the acceptance of socially unnecessary levels of repression. It is clearly not a natural condition to accept repression, particularly when the promise of the object is never fulfilled - it is a condition which must be artificially sustained. This is the task of management.

We do not argue that managers as people do not possess certain skills, such as technical skills, but we would question the authority of these skills when they are redefined as managerial, or neutral people-manipulative, skills. The differentiation that is being made here is a teleological one - a technical skill is a thing-in-itself, whereas a managerial skill does not exist for itself, but has a purpose other than the exercise of technique, i.e., the manipulation of behaviour.

In previous historical periods raw power has been used to regulate such relationships, but this is not the contemporary form. Rather it is exercised by privileged access to symbolic systems. The contemporary form of organisational power is the ability to specify the signifier-signified relationship, to privilege one meaning over another, to bound concepts in a particular and an arbitrary way, and to claim the superordinacy of that bounding via the appeal to 'rationality' - the dispute about the meaning of the term 'economic' in the 1984-5 miners' strike in the UK is an apposite example.

To illustrate this point, one can look at the recruitment of labour.

Starting from a general concept of labour requirement, the undifferentiated possibilities of available labour are progressively attenuated and segmented by an arbitrary symbolic bounding process, which nominates, as signifier, differential characteristics which may be relatively unambiguous but which have no transcendental authority, such as sex, age, marital status. However, the skill in management is not the identification of such signifiers, but the unilateral determination of the underlying signifieds. Lacan has stressed the autonomy of the signifier relative to the signified, such that whereas, for example, male-/female-ness may be relatively determined, there is no transcendent signified attached to male-/female-ness - it is not necessarily clear what male or female means. That is, the signifier-signified relationship is mediated by purpose, benign or otherwise. However, some specified signifiers are significantly less unambiguous, such as education and experience, and, at an even further remove, specifications like 'confident', 'persuasive', 'dynamic'. As with the previous example, management unilaterally determines the nature of the signified. In the terms of Fromm (1979), this process is the prioritising of having over being.

The thrust of the process is to minimise the Desire/Interest gap in people taken on by the organisation. The fundamental criterion of the capitalist need for labour is their ability to add value, to create profit, rather than to fulfil a social need as a reflection of worker interest. By buying into this system the individual perpetuates the means of his own repression. In other words, present unemployment can be seen in the context of a shift from certain types of industry for reasons of profit, without reference to the interests of those who are displaced. The shift towards skills not associated with the working class, e.g., technological skills, bears no consideration for the need of the displaced members of the working class to survive as members of society. The attempt to promote desire for redundancy payments as a means of shedding responsibility for labour was a prominent feature of the miners' strike.

Having acquired the labour it wants, the process continues, for example, with job titles - this is well illustrated by the use of adjectives such as

Chief, Principal, Senior, (interestingly, Barthes (1984) highlights this use of adjectives as a means of constituting identity, a point which will be raised again shortly); and with symbols of status, such as company cars, where the hierarchy of models signifies particular status. However, once a person has been taken on as an employee the power relationship does, in a matter of degree, shift, and management no longer has such total control. Thus, although it is still regarded as the prerogative of management to specify what is signified by a particular signifier, this definition may be subject to some contradiction in alternative meanings promulgated by, for example, an 'organisational subculture'. Because managerial control is thus, however marginally, circumscribed, the demands on their skill as regulators of the Desire/Interest relationship are accentuated. This is the supreme area of the operation of a skill which is intrinsically managerial. The skill is not merely concerned with labour, but also applies to, for example, products, services, sponsorships, etc., and thus very broadly to the general consuming public.

We have suggested that Desire is privileged over Interest by the arbitrary creation of identity, and that by adopting the identity one also adopts repression. The gravity of spurious symbolic identity has been highlighted by Bataille, who has written that

"The fundamental right of man is to signify nothing. This is the opposite of nihilism, for it is meaning that mutilates and fragments. The right not to signify is nonetheless the one least recognized, most openly ignored. As reason extended its domain, the part of non-sens was diminished, Fragmented man is, at the moment, the only one whose rights are recognized."

(Richman, 1982, p 138)

This is to argue for the restoration of being over having. Adorno makes the same argument with his concept of non-participation, which he saw as "absolutely necessary in order to keep alive the capacity for experience of the non-identical" (Buck-Morss 1977). This was part of Adorno's sustained attack on the philosophy of identity, which he saw as unambiguously an

instrument of repression (Ryan 1982). The arguments can be intimately linked with the deconstructionist project of Derrida. Derrida's concept of difference patently underlies the privileging of one signified over another, but

"Difference is not derived from identity; rather, difference makes identity possible and, in so doing, makes impossible a rigorously pure self-identity in the metaphysical sense, one absolutely exempt from differential relations."

(Ryan 1982, p 10)

Management, in taking the prerogative to create identity in a non-negotiated bounding progress, to specify the signifieds of any particular signifier, fundamentally negates the social nature of being, which is inescapably connected with Interest. It is the ability to do this, and for it to be accepted, that is the consummate skill of management.

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Bruno Bolognini

## IMAGES AS IDENTIFYING OBJECTS AND AS ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRATORS IN TWO FIRMS

### A methodological premise

Studying the organizational culture, keeping into account the symbols, the images and the rites that are in all organizations, an epistemological question comes up: whether the organizational culture, and its symbols, are to be viewed as the "being" of the organization itself, its essence philosophers would say, or whether culture is one of its resources, a "having" to be used in order to reach the organization's aims (Smircich, 1981; Smircich, 1983). Together with the epistemological question goes a methodological one: the study of the organizational culture does it mean to read its symbols by means of a work of understanding (verstehen) of the meanings referable to subjectivity or is it that our research must tend towards an "explanation" of the rules and the principles of its workings?

This alternative seems to reproduce the old querelle about the character of sciences of culture (Kulturwissenschaften) whether they are ideographic or nomothetic. This contraposition must be solved, not only for the fact that each of these points of view if isolated is partial, but also for the fact one cannot stand without the support of the other: structures always come from processes, just as processes are transformations of structures. And yet it is not so easy for us to substantiate such demand epistemologically and methodologically.

Our analyses move from the premise that the synthesis between the two positions is useful as well as possible if we use an adequate theoretical model which can express the social reality in its meanings and in its reproducible structures and rules. The systemic approach, through which the science of organization explain the organizational phenomena, can be used as a theoretical model only if we abandon the organicistic frame where it is too often set. The metaphor of the relation "part - everything" can be still used to explain the living organisms but can lead to ambiguities if seen sociologically, as in Parson's functionalism. Luhmann (1971), he too quite near to functionalism, offers a very useful theoretical basis to consider both a generalization of the social phenomena and to understand them singly. He sees the social systems not as aggregations of parts, but as systems founded on "sense". The object of his analysis is the relationship of meaningfulness: which quite changes the barycentre of a systemic investigation because it gets you to consider the object of your investigation, that is social systems and subsystems, as systems and subsystems of sense, while your analytical units become communication codes.

Starting from a different point of view, though getting to results similar to those of Luhmann, Giddens (1979) proposes a structural model of analysis of social realities which allows a search in relation to their meaning both as processes and expressions of conscious strategies, and as normative structures regulating social relationships.

Right now we will only point to the methodological effects of such theories. Our aim is to watch organizational phenomena to get to the specific "individual" character of these analyzing the actual forms, the cultural shows and the meanings you can read there. We will, in the end, watch cultural phenomena: and in this paper we will specifically deal with images, though our theoretical premise makes us consider these phenomena (through which intentions, motives, power strategies, commitments, conflicts etc. are expressed) as signification structures, that is as social codes.

The object of our investigation, then, is not the single organizational phenomenon, the fact which has been experienced and how to refer it to any behavioural rules. Our attention is

rather devoted to the relationship between organizational behaviour and the social structures which may be their sources: the cultural phenomena, the various symbolic forms in which an organizational culture appears are seen as expressions, and as means and resources through which the organization achieves its objects at the same time. From a methodological point of view the researcher's task, while directed to understand the trends, strategies and value systems followed within the organization, and so analyzing their history (Pettigrew, 1979), does on the other side adopt broad conceptual instruments, which means he can reconstruct the signification structures implied in the codes he can learn.

Images are one of the ways to express an organizational culture: we will try to identify their characteristics and will then proceed on to the analysis of two relevant examples to develop, in the end, our methodological and epistemological assumptions.

#### Image: cultural and organizational phenomenon

Images are tendentially seen as a very relevant cultural phenomenon, but no precise distinction is made between images, symbols, metaphors and other symbolic expressions. All these are generally seen as concrete phenomena, words, pictures, drawings, photos etc. which are read as signs of something else: like any other symbol, images too have their referents, and like any metaphor they are concrete significant. These characters identify the genus proximus as images as a cultural phenomenon. I will now try to identify the differentia specifica as well. In fact images are the expression of an "aesthetic function", as different from a "linguistic function" and from a "mythical function" (Cassirer, 1923; Bolognini, 1984). The linguistic function establishes a cross - reference relationship between significant and meaning: he who speaks or writes is aware of using signs to show objects, actions, facts, a discourse to which the attention is turned. In a mythical function the significant is never isolated as a cross - reference instrument, but is often mistaken for the meaning: the emotional force of myths lies in



that symbols are accompanied by an emotional charge which is often "over - determined" so that, for instance, a place is connoted as a "sacralized" space the access to which may be forbidden.

Though it is difficult to strictly distinguish these various functions in practice, as they are often intertwined, yet it seems useful from a methodological point of view to keep them and even to better identify the "aesthetic function". Here the signification relationship achieves an unstable equilibrium: it is neither a simple cross-reference nor confusion between significant and meaning; it is a situation where the significant, that is the image, which yet clearly represents some reality (though sometimes abstract as is the case with abstract art), exists for itself, has its own physiognomy, an autonomy of its own which allows for a proper existence. The aesthetic function is especially shown in art, though we can find it in other kinds of experiences, often together with other functions. It is anyway well known that even works of art have other functions too, for instance as objects of cult for which reason Benjamin (1955) distinguishes between an expository value and value for cult in the works of art. According to Mukarovsky (1971) the aesthetic function has mainly the effect of "isolating" the object and of "chaining" the attention to it. This isolating ability makes it possible to give prominence to the object and, if necessary, to rid it from anything unpleasant.

This structural property of images, the prominence in it of the aesthetic function, makes it possible for us to distinguish it from other forms of symbolic expressions and to consider it as an "indicator" of how the shared meanings, values and especially their supporting structures are articulated. We will pay special attention to these structures because we think they represent a way of reading the organizational reality which is not solely based on the intuition of the researcher (though this too has a remarkable methodological importance for a research), but also on some objective instruments of analysis.

#### Example 1: the image of a product nice and successful

Our first example concerns an important Italian car company. It produces luxury cars with powerful engines which are very expensive. It is a private manufacturing company which is linked up with a multinational holding: its name is connected to the world of motor races. Its main characteristics are: its operative units are three factories located near a town in the centre of Italy, it has a turnover of approximately 200 billions lit. a year and about 1,500 workers. They sell in Italy and their exports go all over the world. Its orders in hand are usually defined fairly in advance and generally fill the following 12/18 months production.

The primary objective of the company is to keep its quota of the market focusing on the high quality of the product. Following such policy, quality circles have been introduced along these guidelines: 1. responsibility has been given to the line foremen for their team which is coincident with their circle; 2. all personnel has been involved in helping identify and solve the problems arising; 3. trade unions have been informed, but have not been directly involved. All meetings of the circles are being held during non working hours, with no retribution and voluntary attendance.

According to all experience, such managerial proposals, in similarly dimensioned companies with non overactive trade unions, are not accepted unless particular incentives are introduced. Even in times of economical crisis like the last decade, it is difficult to get any willingness. Remembering this (and also adding that its site is located in an area where unemployment has been very low) we wish to point out that the response to the company's invitation to join the circles has been extremely positive: 14% of the workers have applied to enter. Also the results obtained during the first year have been considered quite satisfactory by the company. Let us read these facts as an expression of the workers' commitment which has been very high. We want now to deal with the explanation of so high a commitment in relation with the image of the company's product and with the organizational use (and not only for advertising) this image has been consciously subjected to.

The relationship between commitment and the product's image, rather than the workers' retribution (which is average) does not

A few kilometres from the car company, in much the same environment, we find another company with similar characteristics: it is a mechanical manufacturing company, employs more or less the same number of workers and enjoys a similar turnover. But this is not part of the private sector, is instead linked with a state holding, the value - added to its production is low and has recently undergone a deep economic and financial crisis. Anyway in the last two years there has been a remarkable effort to define new strategies, to modify the company's commercial policy, and to better the financial situation.

The policy directed to balance the financial situation has required a big effort for organizing, especially so as workers little trusted their managers. We can appreciate the situation from what happened to the new managing director. Just after his arrival he decided to meet the executives to give them a frank description of the situation and outline his policy to get in contact with and possibly gain the confidence of the people who were to organize and support his action. He was quite disappointed because of the lack of interest: very few intervened either to ask for explanations or to make any objections. But the intervention of an engineer was of great help as he frankly admitted the general mood and went on more or less like this: "Sir, you have just illustrated a plan to reach a balancing situation in a few years. OK, but you must know that we have already listened to similar propositions; we would not meet again in one or two years' time to listen to someone else illustrating a new plan!"

This episode was known only two years after it had occurred. The situation had by now changed: managers had kept their jobs, balancing was at hand, and, above all, a new sense of confidence was beginning to show in executives. The frame of mind which had then shown was a sign of the lowering among the executives of the sense of belonging to that one company, of the very low degree of confidence and trust in the managerial leadership, and especially of the apathy determined from the lack of reference points both because of the tourbillon of managers and of the lack of perspectives in such situation.

originate in the mere realisation of the product's glamour, but is born of the knowledge of the organizational use such image was put to by the management to launch its quality circles. These circles were announced in a letter enclosed in the pay envelope where only a broad description was given and the intention of introducing them was announced. With the letters the workers found a photo of the first victory of a car of that making dating to many years back.

In the pay envelope of the following month the workers found the description of the ways the circles would work, together with a copy of the regulations established by the company; these news were accompanied by the image of the car produced at the moment photographed in an European capital to point out their presence and their success in the world. Only a month later did they receive the modalities to start this method of work, and now the image enclosed featured a workshop with a group of workers around an engine. We wish to draw your attention to three facts:

a. the introduction of such instrument as the quality circles surely does not represent a novelty or a particularly important fact; and yet we must stress the "Japanese style" success of the company both in the number of applications and in the proposals put forward by the circles;

b. as to the organizational behaviour we must point out the workers' response as a good example of commitment: looking at how proposals were submitted to the management you could detect even from the accurate expository terms the strong involvement of the workers in following this new trend of work.

c. my thesis is that to analyse such phenomena we must focus on the object produced and on how its photo is used. Management are well aware of the affection for the product and want to exploit this, so they represent the car as a race winner, parading for the world to see, during construction so as to stress the fact that all results, victories, exports depend on what is done in the workshop. It is the use of a photographic sequence, more than the single image, which in its timing suggests the implied causal relation.

#### Example 2: a company looking for an image

Notwithstanding the meaningful changes effected and the clear perception of increasing commitment on the part of the workers, some non positive signals still showed, and, first of all, the lack of a sense of unity and the insufficient degree of identification with the company.

#### Social structure in an organization

We will start from the assumption that the "ideographic" point of view and the "nomothetic" one are complementary. The single organizational phenomenon, the understanding of the meanings subjects give to signs, symbols, images, etc. and of the communications between the actors, must be placed in the single specific situation of that organization. And this we can do only if we can refer the single phenomenon to the general structures of signification.

When speaking of structure we mean "the logical construction of an object as a system" (Boudon, 1968). My opinion is that in the organizational studies we generally find a reference to the concept of structure especially to locate the articulation of the communicative channels and of the relations of dependence between the roles for organizing. The structure is thus a rational system of decisions connected with one another so as to favour the attainment of the organizing aims, after Simon's concept of limited rationality (Simon, 1957, March & Simon, 1958). Whilst relatively little importance has been given to the notion of structure as a social structure, as a complex of codes of rules and values which regulate the relations between individuals and groups in the organizations.

I agree with Pettegrew (1973) when he says that March & Simon are especially concerned with the individual as an information - processing system and not enough with the organization as a whole. Actually the prevalence of the psychological perspective has led to consider "human resources" as instruments of the organization and this, eventually, has favoured disregard for the social aspect of the structure of the organization. It is not simply an ideological or humanistic question: the prevailing of the attention towards the behaviour of individuals or of small

groups (motives, kinds of leadership, groups' dynamics) often while trying to get ways of handling them, has often led to negative results. In fact the various attempts at handling have clashed against a "hard matter", the impossibility to answer the laws of psychology. Which does not mean they are valid or reliable, but organizations are made up of social relations, both "formal" and "informal", of institutions.

The social structure of the organizations is the expression of such social institutions and consists of models of signification in a broad sense, including the semantic codes, the rules and values. Communications are important in determining a structure; and not only in relation to the channels used to communicate but largely in relation to the semantic codes.

One of the most complete and complex formulations of this notion of social system can be found in Luhmann's writings where the systems are analysed in relation to the layout that there the main means of communication and their codes assume. On the basis of this theoretical construction communication is very different from a simple transmission of information: the identification of the two terms generates ambiguities and, as showed Feldman & March (1981), besides the use proper of information there is a symbolic one related to the dominant social rules. But as Luhmann (1971) writes, the difference between information and communication is especially a difference of function: whilst any information is defined especially in relation to the degree of novelty (overcoming of uncertainty) which it transmits to the receivers (Pierce, 1961), any communication is a transfer of sense: "when any news is repeated has lost its informative value, but it has not lost its sense". The social systems are formed through communication, through which the trends of sense "deposited" from the social processes are transmitted. The study of the social systems is then addressed to examine the means of communication and the codes which allow the transfer of these trends of sense.

It is not necessary to further investigate these theoretical references. We only wish to stress that, from our point of view, to define more completely the concept of social structure of the organizations, we can try to put one near the other the notion of social structure as a system of sense of Luhmann and the structuring perspective of Giddens. In many ways the two writers

are quite far from one another, sometimes even opposing; but they can be put close for one aspect. They both construct their theoretical models starting from Parson's notion of a "double contingency" of social interaction. According to Giddens (1979) this is the foundation of the "normative character of social practices", while according to Luhmann (1972) double contingency, the mechanics of "expectations of expectations" that it creates, and the normativeness which derives as a simplification and as a position of objective expectancies, are the foundation of the notion of "structure", functionally defined as a "strengthening of selectivity through a double selection". Structures, that is, limit, through a choice which generally is not conscious, the field of the possibilities of choice.

If we consider the social structures according to this point of view, we must especially study communication in relation to its operative codes, because these are the structural basis of selectivity and of the transfer of sense, that is that they permit to identify the decisional premises present in an organization, its normative function, but a cognitive one as well. To meet disappointments, besides strengthening the normativeness of one's expectations and considering the disappointing phenomenon or behaviour as deviant, one can put a cognitive expectation into effect, which means that one gets ready to learn and to adapt to reality. This is the condition which allows the process of transformation of the codes of communication and of the social rules.

Analogically, for Giddens (1979), there are two ways of social structuring, or better two perspectives of analysis of the structures: one stresses the strategies of interaction, where the stocks of knowledge and resources are utilized to achieve some results; the other brackets strategic conduct and examines "rules and resources as institutional features of systems of social interaction".

The parallelism between Luhmann and Giddens goes no further: our intention was simply to point out the structuring functions of social expectations and their field of action as foundations for the articulation of sense and the definition of decisional premises. The concept of structure as a carried model of social normativeness and of the references of sense opens up an

interesting perspective for the analysis of organizing structures: the structures become the "institutional indicators" that is the ways of access to the knowledge of an organizing culture and of the systems of relation in use there, including political relations (Riley, 1983). With such perspectives also images are institutional indicators which carry out a structuring function for the definition of the codes of sense of an organizational culture.

#### The structuring function of image

The example of the car manufacturing gives us the opportunity of seeing the structuring function of images in creating normative references at work. The process of identification between the company, the workers and the product, via the photographic images, is, at the moment illustrated in the example, already consolidated also through the mass media: the use of images to introduce the quality circles only concerns a confirmation and a reiteration. We can so describe its mechanics.

The image of the car in its three moments of "archetypal success", of "commercial success" and of "practicable and repeatable success" (on the part of the workers thanks to their capabilities in the workshop) becomes an implicit reference point in the code of communication. Probably in every judgement and in every decision, as an implicit "major premise", the product as an object carrying a value and the necessity to meet such social expectation are at work. The aesthetical shape of the product, in relation to the value grown on its success, and as an isolated image out of its context (which might also be felt as unpleasant being a working site) becomes a reference point for the articulation of the experience of the workers in a world of values and of negative values, the product belonging to the former. In the strict sense the image in itself carries an aesthetic value; but there is a stickiness of the values (Mukarovshy, 1971) and of their readiness for an experience which makes the boundaries between aesthetic and ethic values vague: the beautiful gets mingled with the good, as has always been in all forms representing values. That is why the image, thanks to

its aesthetic enjoyability, can carry on positive connotations in a general way. The image of the car combine these positive characters till they can "overdetermine" the sense of victory, of supremacy of a commercial and sports success. The image of the workshop suggests, then, identification: the message receiver is also the one who contributes to the realization of that value and that can contribute even better joining the quality circles.

The passing from the aesthetic to the normative level is nearly automatic: rules here have a concrete point of reference, an elementary binary code which immediately puts on the positive side all that is connected with the production of that object and with the maintenance of its standard value. The social order of the company can, then, find a normative model in those images: the reading of this model passes through the recognition of the structuring function of images.

The case we have just examined is a typical example you cannot easily verify so clearly everywhere: in our complex social world the individuals has other commitments besides his being a resource in an organization of work (Burns, 1965). The normative system of our example has been strongly affected by the product's image because this one goes beyond the boundaries of the organization: the external environment confirm the identification of value regarding those images. It may not be easy to find such situations in other realities. And yet, as it was demonstrated by Beck & Moore (1983), the Canadian Royal Bank combines a remarkable success in business with an equally successful image with the customers interviewed. The authors do not want to point to any causal relation, but they stress the relation of strengthening.

The other example has different characteristics. The effort the managers have done to have a recovery has determined a positive reponse from the workers; but, as we have already seen, there is a lack of identification with the company. What stands conspicuously out from the comparison is the absence, in this case, of aesthetical references to support the identification with the company: we neither find images analogous to those of the product of the car manufacturing company, nor a logo charged with a particularly forceful symbol. The unifying normative system of the company is instead originated through

different channels which are the justifying force of facts, i.e. the figures of balancing. But there, though carriers of a rational message of justification, do not have any value and normative overdetermination that an image can have and, as is obvious, do not have the same structuring function.

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# THE SYMBOLICS OF SKILL

by ANTONIO STRATI

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Individuals and organizations are generally proud of their own skills. They are also proud of being able to recognize someone else's skill. This usually happens without any scientific support and, even if organizational actors and audiences do not share the contextual values, competences and rhythms, skills are anyway acknowledged.

At least in principle it is of value not to appreciate unskilled organizations and unskilled people, and in everyday life it does occur to almost everybody to assert that these operators and these organizations are not skilled, while other people and organizations are. It is not a matter of being previously against them because the skill of enemies and adversaries are acknowledged in ceremonies and rites.

It may also be possible not only to distinguish but also to locate the skill of organizations and individuals in some activities better than in others and do it without providing any scientific statement concerning skill. Thus, skill seems likely to be a fact that does not need specialists to see and locate it. In a motor shop or in a local war everybody looks for skilled people and skilled organizations. Skill has the power of distinguishing the favourite elements of the context.

The sense of pride in skill belongs to the owners and their supporters. Anyway this sense goes beyond them toward other audiences in the organizational environment. The ritual is to ask for positive feelings, and people are trained to perform that ritual.

Skill, in conclusion, constitutes one of the reasons why individuals and organizations need to legitimize themselves in human societies. It is a fact which is easy to perceive, recognize and locate. It is also highly frequent, and people are trained to search for it, to acknowledge it and to feel receptive towards it. Its history, too, is a very long one, whereas linguistic clues are grounded in meaningful actions. These clues have their origins in Old Norse, and they belong to several ancient languages, meaning: 'distinction', 'discernment', 'incisiveness', 'knowledge', 'reason', 'cause'.

However, its factual existence, its rate of recurrence, its emotional and linguistic grounds have not led social scientists to put skill into a precise and comprehensive statement. With all its significance, skill seems to evade description and to be rooted in intuitional understanding. Social scientists have

\* This is part of the 'Introduction' to the booklet edited by  
A. STRATI, *The Symbolics of Skill*, 1965.

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conceived and analysed skill as a form of work activity. 'Skill' and its synonyms such as 'ability', 'competence', 'mastery', 'proficiency' have been utilized in order to properly characterize organizational actors and to map the distinctive levels of action of an organization. 'Skill' has been used to qualify operators and jobs, to classify the kinds of activity of an organization and their outcomes. It has been included in designing organizations, e.g. in collective bargaining. New skill has been claimed to face difficulties in organizational life and in inter-organizational relationships, performing the ancient ritual of collective renewal.

Skill has been described mainly through its synonyms. 'Ability' and 'dexterity' have been coupled in many observations of workers' performance. 'Talent', 'adroitness' and 'gift' have been used to describe the work of a craftsman and a masterly command of managerial techniques. Special capabilities and distinctive competences have characterized successful organizations in comparison with their competitors within a similar environment. The focus is mainly on the organizational actors' performance. A Skilful organization possesses capabilities of its own, which are possible to perceive since the organization performs its specific activities better than others. The sense of a fact acquired and developed through experience has been preserved. This fact brings into discussion the unspecified element that is more than what individuals and organizations could act out.

The paths of the analysis of skill have crossed each other. Skill seems to go further than the boundaries of the content of a form of work activity. The performance which makes skill recognizable by the audience looks more like a proof of the existence of the skill as such, which allows both experiential and mythical levels to be understood. On the contrary, the individual, organizational and inter-organizational levels of the analysis constitute a spectrum of contiguous frames that mainly reinforce the significance of the *sine qua non* of skill.

The belief of the important influence of skill on organizational life and, generally speaking, on society dynamics and processes is common to both laymen and social scientists. Their identification of skill may be based on different kinds of investigation but their findings seem to be similar in their use of the synonyms and their acknowledgement that significant characters do not have scientific names.

The aggregate level that the organization maps in the metaphoric cartography of skill does not seem to have added anything to analytical conclusions that may lead to the formulation of proper methods, and thus is no different from analysis at an individual level. In both cases, skill seems to be an aggregate of its synonyms and of its unspecified fields. The differences seem to be located in the performance of skill rather than in the nature of skill.

Intuitional understanding provides the premises for a discourse that identifies the topic of skill, while analytic logic focuses on the limitations of social scientists' instruments for its understanding. Skill has an immediate and historical validity

for theorists and organizational actors. It makes sense to almost everybody. It produces the feeling of a deep understanding of reality and of incisive action. Skill is meaningful in several cultures and does not belong to a specific process of learning. Rather, learning skill is a process of discovering capabilities, and is an initiating rite. Rituals provide training which includes, for instance, competence, the command of people and crafts, and the institutionalization proceed that may be acquired and developed learning from experience.

Likewise, skill has the power of adding new value to an organization's or individual's performance. This fact does not seem to violate the nature of the organizational actor's performance. Also, it does not appear to be needed in order to provide ordinary and good performances, while, for example, competence does. On the contrary, it is needed only in the case of skilled performances by an organization, but those performances are regarded as vital in organizational life by its producers and its users.

## The Acquisition of Skill

«When I think about presenting this paper», David Sims writes, «I have an image of the situation and of myself in it.» Skill is a fact deeply rooted in this process of prefiguring a course of action within an organization and in the outside world on behalf of the organization. The room, the light, the smell, the people attending the meeting, the friendly atmosphere and the fear in a person's stomach once he imagines himself about to present the paper, these are all imagined and experienced during the mental rehearsal. The process is under a certain control. The daydreams shape the substance, the expectations and the extent of a skilled performance, and the mental rehearsal leads to its awareness. The skill is fantasized as need be in order to succeed in finding an audience with whom to communicate concerning the subjects which are significant in the action.

The action may consist of coping with impossible tasks, characterized by insufficient information and an uncertain outcome, and by the fact that, whereas the nature and the type of impossibility have been ascertained, the task remains impossible. This action emphasizes the meaning of the *sine qua non* of skill. Moreover it highlights the differences between competence, knowledge and skill. It emphasizes also that skill is recognizable, not only when the performance renders it observable but also when the performance makes it desirable. The action of coping with impossible tasks focuses on the energizing vitality included in the skill and its nature as a qualitative measure of effective acts.

Dealing with impossible tasks is the type of action that indicates the elements of the myth of skill. In work life, such as in complex multi-cultural society, organizational actors have recourse to skill for their renewal and for the celebration of themselves for all time. Mythical thought symbolizes secular values of skill, reinforcing through beathen rites the circumscription in human society of

its roots and its boundaries, while the form of activity may not be so. Work life and organizational life have also been investigated and understood in theology; thus other deep meanings and ultimate senses of experience that providing the basis for labour cultures and the organization corporate cultures have been brought to light. However, symbolic and religious ways of thinking are only two separate areas in the discourse concerning courses of action and organizational actors, as shown by various disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, psychology and so on.

Fantasies and imaginings locate and develop the process of acquiring skill. Daydreams may prove to be both a cause and a consequence of the awareness of the organizational actor. Once the decision has been taken to choose a course of action, the decision-making processes are enacted by reflecting feelingly, and the symbolic representations and interpretations of the passage towards different or superior levels of experiencing the work and the organisation life show the acquisition of skill. Both Stephen Fineman and Omar Aktouf underline the management of impressions according to rules of social conduct in order to survive in organizational life. Fineman points out that occupation marks a key passage to full membership of organization and of society on the part of people, and that this passage is supported by the belief that people are what they act. Aktouf illustrates how promotion marks another passage to full membership of an organization, and that promotion is supported by the belief in the one single interpretation of action within the corporate culture of the organization as a whole.

The symbolic reasons for acquiring skills, therefore, are grounded in the image of loosely-coupled processes and conflicting meanings of the occupation (and of its synonyms, e.g. 'work', 'labor', and 'job'), and of the organization. The skills required to 'get through' the day despite difficulties constitute a 'strong currency' in the initiating rituals of both occupation and career socializations.

## Positioning Skill

Job policies and collective bargaining illustrate the relevance of the symbolic reasons for the acquisition of skills in organizations and in society. In job policies and in collective bargaining there are claims for acquiring, developing and applying skills that are functionally important if job creation in competitive markets is to be successful. Better performances on the part of the members of an organization are also claimed through wages indexically related to skills. Claims are also addressed towards the development of distinctive competences of organizations, and the acquisition of professional skills to the technical, cultural and economic benefit of the organizations.



Kristian Kreiner argues that wages and skills have a symbolic, not an indexical relationship, and that there is much confusion over the role of skill in organizations: the organization's success is explained in terms of individual abilities; the statement of such abilities is rather unprecise and, moreover, organizations celebrate the skills which are a liability, according to their own criteria, and neglect the ones that are an asset. Bob Grafton-Small and Steve Linstead point out that professionals, and consultants as professionals, in dealing with the fundamental problem of intervening in states of disorder, directly or through agency and on behalf of society at large, often use skill and success as mutually supportive. They argue that professionals manage the identity and the boundaries of such occupational kinship groups by claims of indeterminate skill, and by a continual negotiation in society of the body of abilities and knowledge that constitute skill. Elisabeth Sundin and Ulf Wiberg illustrate how an organization's skilful performance can both escape the common sense understanding of a context as a determinant for behaviour and be grounded in activities that are interpreted as symbolisms in such an external environment and inter-organizational network. The symbolic image of the organization's skill is a picture of the socio-culture of the company and of its courses of action in the sociocultural structure of the local environment, and of the attitudes and qualities in the inter-organizational network of the other organizations and institutions as interpreters.

Claims for skills as a means towards successful courses of action are not grounded, therefore, in functionally determinable special capabilities of organizational actors. Rather, the nature, the contents, and the boundaries of skill are socially constructed, continuously negotiated, and ritually celebrated, without having been ascertained. The relationship between power, autonomy, and success and the skill of individuals and organizations are conventional and mutually supportive, and they focus on a symbol. The processes of positioning skills in the organization life, in the inter-organizational network, and in professionalism, indicate and describe skill as a tool for understanding the symbolic boundaries of a course of action of individuals and organizations, and the nature and the extent of such action. Skills convey meanings of work life, of labour organization, of professional competence, and of corporate culture as crucial explanatory variables.

## Using Skills for Research Purposes

Analysis of skill has stressed the sense of action in organizational life. Data to legitimize discovery and the spontaneous acknowledgement of skill have been illustrated in this analysis of the symbolic reasons for acquiring skills and of the symbolic positions of skill in working life, in the corporate culture of an organization, in the social negotiation of the legitimacy of the courses of action of an individual organizational actor, of workers and managers within an organization, of entrepreneurs within the environmental socioculture, of professionals and consultants acting individually or through agency. The skills of 'getting by' in the initiating rituals of occupation and career socialization, the skills of discursive symbolization by use of crucial explanatory variables, the skills of exploratory analysis of a course of organizational action and its nature and boundaries, and the skills of experiencing them by reflecting feelingly have been described. The methods and the techniques of acquiring rich data on the topic of skill, of analysing and communicating them have been those of sociological, anthropological and psychological research in the field of organization studies.

The attempt of studies and theories of labour and of organization to understand skill objectively, by providing a rational-technical and functional account of its operations, has been analysed by using data gathered in organizational settings that have been distant in place and in time from the researcher, and in organizational settings that have involved the researcher, such as in the course of introspective, psychoethnographic and speculative studies. Such analysis has thrown light on the issue of the use of skill for research purposes and, thus, of the acquisition of a language in which skill can be adequately dealt with and its richness captured — that is, the acquiring and developing of skills in research that allow the experiential process of action in organization to be grasped, analysed and expressed; and not only justified in the conventional language of scientific discourse and in organization theory's own frames.

The boundaries and the limits of the language of justification that lend legitimacy and theoretical body to skill as an organizational topic, without succeeding in describing it, have been discussed by means of an analysis of skill whose methods and techniques do not belong specifically to the organizational symbolism approach. The processes of symbolic representation and interpretation of skill have been described in terms of their involvement in a simultaneous process of mythical language and mythical thought. The relevance of acquiring, developing and using proper skills in order to understand and communicate the existential level of action of skill, which is experienced by the organizational actors in their relations with one another, has been featured.

Robert Witkin and Robert Poupart present a method for obtaining qualitatively rich data at an early stage in the operation of the research. This is based on the theoretical distinction between the language of justification and the language of action for research. The purpose of this method is to acquire rich data, and it is also designed as an exploratory instrument in order to begin to formulate some needs and hypotheses for the construction of an investigation which includes a variety of distinct methods instead of having to wait a considerable length of time and having to go through participant observation procedure. To obtain qualitatively rich data in this way, they have rejected ordinary interviewing techniques because this way of framing questions and putting them to participants is an invitation for them to use the language of justification in which they have already been trained.

Although the technique in itself is very simple, and the informant only has to talk through a given experience and re-enact it by using the present tense(s) of the verbs, the present tense does convey justifications. But the process of achieving the action that the informant is also going to shape theoretically, and the training of the subject in using this method are a different issue.

This method and technique of interviewing, by asking for the use of the present tense, requires a development of skills related to the method in both researcher and informant which stresses the sense of researching with people rather on people. The co-operation on the part of the subject, which is generally required whenever the analysis concerns cultural issues such as organization and work life, is reinforced in this process of playing together by the aesthetic mode of symbolizing a course of action, and by the researcher's skill in keeping the process going in the present tense, in participating feelingly in this kind of mental journey, and in providing feed-back to the informant. In other words, expressing trust, setting a scenario, and not asking for information seem to be of great significance for the purpose of using the researcher's special capabilities in gathering rich data at the initial stage of understanding skill.

## Conclusions

Giving a running commentary on imaginatively re-enacted courses of organizational action leads to the awareness of skill, and if reflected feelingly may symbolize the metaphor of the conclusions of *The Symbolics of Skill*. The conception of strategy in organization theories may be seen as a process of mental rehearsal of the skill that organizational actors display in order possibly to acquire it and position it in the inter-organizational network and within the organization itself, and the skill that they can imagine as distinguishing their activities from those of other organizations and individuals.

Thus organizational strategy highlights the character of skill as an instrument for the exploration of the nature and the boundaries of the chosen courses of action in an organizational process that enables them to be reflected upon deeply and to be experienced before action is taken by the owners of the organizational process.

*Skill needs to be imagined in order to exist, and this fantasizing enacts the social negotiation of the generative characteristics of such a skill through the rhetoric of persuasive accounts and through images synthesizing higher orders. Moreover, skill needs to be elaborated in a specific set of organizational performances and in relation to specific audiences.*

Skill is an instrument for the exploration and the understanding of organization strategy and of the pragmatic dynamics of organizational life, stressing the sense of performing chosen courses of action and simultaneously conveying the opportunity to communicate as part of itself. In its requirement for being communicated in order to have meaning, skill proves to be an appropriate tool for acquiring knowledge by the organizational actor in context.

In organizational activities, skill may highlight the distinct components that constitute a course of action. This is the case, for instance, of work-life, where being skilled in one's own activity is not grounded in the shared beliefs, purposes and meanings of the activities as such; it does not lead to its awareness, however, unless the skills of communicating skill are acted out.

This analysis of the symbolic representations and interpretations of skill, therefore, demonstrates the relational nature of skill as a tool for understanding organizations. Skill is a *trait d'union* between feelings and the production of organizational realities, which may appear more fertile ground for organizational metaphor than those metaphors which refer to Newton's clock, or to the organism, or to cultural man.

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Edited by ANTONIO STRATI

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THE FORTHCOMING OF SUBCULTURAL LIFE  
Conventional Organisations in Despair

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Due to the terminology of contemporary structuralism, professionalized sociology must take into account, that "post-industrial" societies with their cultural institutions are endangered by "pollution". Since the music of Giuseppe Verdi backgrounds commercials, Mona Lisa sticks on letters reduced to a stamp, and the Pope's propositions on "Familiaris Consortio" met with sarcasm, a creed in the harmony of social systems became rather unreal. For certain social groups and their symbolic communication the profane has emerged more existential than the pretended "essentials of the whole" ever have been before. Obviously there is no meaning to find any more with the presentation "of the one and only mode" for living and behaviour. But exactly the forthcoming critical activity of mind, the disintegration of cultural purposes, misleads the inheritors "of rule and order" to acclaim an "entire apocalyptic vision", instead of being capable for distinct concepts beyond the formal structure of apathy. "Formlessness is therefore an apt symbol of beginning and of growth as it is of decay."<sup>1</sup>

### Concerning the juvenile background

Without any doubt, "culture" - or "civilization" - commonly is understood the contrary to pollution. According to its development society creates, socializes, and maintains specific value patterns, in order to conserve rules of order, modes of behaviour, and terms of communication. These items altogether seem to represent a permanent fight against dirt and decline. They promise the system's stability and the individual's security; whereas deviant entities - like young peer-groups - just bridge the gap between one status of conformity and the other.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately occasional symptoms of outbreak seem to be nothing else than accountable factors of irritation. "Deviant motivational factors are always operating, and become established so that they are not eliminated from the motivational system of the relevant actors. In that case the mechanisms of social control account not for their elimination but for the limitation of their consequences, and for the preventing their spread to others beyond certain systems."<sup>3</sup>

Following this structural analysis of societies one may be unanimous: Actual deviance is - as Emile Durkheim pointed out - a matter to re-inforce the consistency of a system. And the sources of strains, or "dysfunctions",

in a system can be various, although they do not really distort the institutional presumptions. "The term 'cultural lag' has become famous as one way of interpreting social strains stemming from the fact that technology often changes faster, within a system, than the 'super-structural' institutions of that society, such as law, family system, education, and so forth, so that these institutions are no longer appropriate to the new technology."<sup>4</sup> Such a lag usually calls forth repressive measures or superficial changes within the institutions.

This current manner, however, neither is subject to considerations concerning basic issues of contemporary subcultures; nor to the tactics of violent guerrilla. Probably not by chance - because he knew America as well as Europe quite exact - it was up to Talcott Parsons to reveal the historical dimension of social upset: "A movement which utilizes ... such symbols as freedom and justice may receive interpretations incompatible with the functional needs of the institutionalized order. But, precisely in terms of the approved cultural tradition, it is not possible to stigmatize these interpretations out of hand as illegitimate. Taking advantage of these latent legitimation possibilities is one of the most important characteristics of deviant movements."<sup>5</sup>

What Parsons meant, is, that the prepositions for a fundamental change of patterns - including revolutionary ones - depend from the broadness and deepness of cultural diversification. In regard to this, but, the American scheme of interactions cannot be representative for what is entitled with a concept of "subcultural incorporation". In consequence of his considerations Parsons, for example, did not mind temporary disturbances at some of the American universities, which finally would uphold the basic norms of scientific investigation.<sup>6</sup> Yet actually he - like many others - never became aware of what Thomas S. Kuhn called "a scientific revolution": "The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy, and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research. It is upon their existence more than upon that of revolutions that the notion of normal science depends."<sup>7</sup>

The shortened view of Parsons has been pointed at, in order to mark such a social background, against which a forthcoming of subcultural life can

not be imagined: In the perspective of European philosophy the United States of America are unhistorical; and accordingly the American society's interactional patterns are monolithic. As, amongst others, the functionalists did explain, the prevailing orientations there root in the economical constraint, the Puritan creed of the whites, and the dominant conjugal family. "That evidence, however, is sufficient to show within this broad type the American system has, by contrast with its European forbears, developed far in the direction of a symmetrical multilineal type."<sup>8</sup> Peculiar functional and dynamic problems, deriving from that pattern, are regarded as "deviance", in order to become isolated from the "normal" society."

European history instead has been almost always incited by extra-ordinary philosophers and initiators. Platon and Aristoteles, Jesus from Nazareth and Paulus from Ephesos, Nikolaus Kopernikus and Galileo Galilei, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel and Karl Marx were only a few of the vanguards in their epoch. And although their efforts officially aimed at philosophy, science, and religion, these were inconceivable without a notion of fundamental social evaluations. Whenever the economical empires, the modes of kinship, and the value patterns are trembling, the rituals of priesthood and the fortune-telling of social engineering may retard the historical process, but it is not in the position to stop it. - In this regard the history of European culture repeatedly has been the topic of juvenile prophecy.<sup>9</sup>

Institutions in discount: The case of Western Germany (I)

One of the ambiguous catch-words in sociological analysis is the one, which circumscribes the so-called "generational struggle". On the surface it entails the pretension that younger people are privileged by the right to revolt against established systems, to gather in peer-groups, and to influence the contemporary fashions in the public. In fact, however, it conceals the persuasion, that the older generation will at last submit the youngsters to the means of economical inducement, hierarchical seduction, and philistine comfort. - These "rules of generational-conflict", after all, are said to mark an ever-lasting institution themselves; - except in the secret-mongering of sociological research: "You

can measure the value of a system by what its offsprings and offshoots produce. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains, that the sociological 'sons' are simply not as good as the fathers. If this were not the case, there would be a considerable number of leading men present today who were not around in the 'thirties'. But this is not the case. The 'generational struggle' is present everywhere but in 'official' sociology.<sup>10</sup> When Irving Louis Horowitz published this statement in 1964, the society of Western Germany on one hand, and its sociology on the other, were already on the road to verify the actual antagonism between reality and research:

First the social scientists had to explain and to analyze the cruel inheritance of fascism; - and they had to educe their own part during as well as after that period. Because not all of them had been arrested or forced to emigration. More striking even: especially those, who had not left Nazi-Germany, like Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Schelsky, became favourites of the post-war government. This government, accompanied by an unchanged industrial management, at that time emphatically introduced an "American" mode of politics, economics, and militarism; - in order to brush over the outlawry of the past. The older generation should repress their guilt; meanwhile no reason should be given the younger people to investigate their parents' failures. - American business was established like a fence between the generations.

Nevertheless this attempt did not succeed completely. About ten years after the liberation numerous groups of young people, who were not affected by a questionable heroism, started to revolt against the glamour of the American "throw-away-culture". In fact their opposition to the new style was not literary differentiated, abrupt, and sometimes even violent. But almost nobody tried to analyze the hidden motivation of the protest. Hence just - scarcely contradicted - the favourite sociologists, the formerly accepted ones, were allowed to declare this phenomenon a simply passing mechanism. - A misunderstanding that, which should produce an after-affect for long.<sup>11</sup>

For real the typical German "Theory of Institutions", fixed to physical anthropology, continued an ontological superstition, and prolonged a two-fold narrow-mindedness: According to that, institutions will outlast all social arrangements; and any subjective idea will expire in marginality.<sup>12</sup> These convictions seemed to be curious, after precisely the "super-

structures" of nationalistic cults had just crashed, and only the idea of a democratic society was still vital with at least some self-confident individuals and groupings. Nevertheless the majority of the population blindly obeyed the returning "objectivity of sciences", and underpinned the same with "American persuasions", which were smoothly mixed up with empty phrases of holy values, kinship, believes on equality, and blank anti-communism. Being blamed for the own past, one fled into the embrace of oversea dependency.

Seen from a different perspective, one can say, that the society of Western Germany became subject to "self-fulfilling-prophecies": It got acquainted to the drawings, which sociology - and psychiatry - had projected to it. Whereas the cultural values of self-determination, justice, and subjectivity withdrew in favour of inconsciousness. - They should return more then ever in the eighties.

Till then, however, sociological research for more than two decades did not stop to adopt the misunderstandings of "institutionalized generation conflicts", which were initiated in the fifties. Since then a non-accountable number of investigations on young people has been carried through; almost all of them biased by the same preoccupation<sup>13</sup>: They started with the prejudice, that the nuclear family will remain an ever-lasting, "nature-given", institution; and, that the value patterns, troublesome held up by this family against the conflicts of reality, would outlast from one generation to the next. So, when the researchers found out, that young people between fourteen and eighteen years of age were more conservative than the older ones, they formulated the absurd conviction, according to which these youngster would remain conservative in the future too; instead of reflecting the possibility, that people could change their view after having left their parents' environment.

After all it came out, that the researchers were caught up with the reports, which they had spread themselves. Misled by the narrowness of their methodological tools - the consistency of nuclear families, the sequence of generations, and the stability of abstract institutions - they got lost of any conceptual imagination. - So long as until recently a group of sociologists took into consideration, that young people are only expecting their release from institutional conventions; - to join assemblies of subcultural opposition.<sup>14</sup>

### Skills of resistance

A theory of social systems prepares the citizens for adjustment and prejudices: As long as every interaction seems to be frictionless, there is no reason for complaint. But whenever something is going wrong a scape-goat must be found and prosecuted. The pretension of "theoretical neutrality" vanishes instead of immediate aggression. "Whether a theory is accepted or rejected, whether it undergoes change or remains essentially unchanged, is not simply a cerebral decision, it is somewhat contingent upon the gratifications or tensions that it generates by dint of its relation to the sentiments of those involved. Social theories may be sentiment-relevant in various ways and to varying degrees may inhibit or arouse the expression of certain sentiments. As a limiting case, the degree to which they impinge upon sentiments may be so small that, for all practical purposes, they may be said to be 'neutral' in their sentiment-relevance. Yet even this last case is consequential for reactions to the theory, for the sentiment-neutral theory may simply elicit apathetic or disinterested responses, the feeling, that the theory is somehow 'irrelevant', and thus induce avoidance of, if not active opposition to, it."<sup>15</sup>

With the pointedness Alvin W. Gouldner in 1970 already forecasted the phenomena, which became dramatically striking in the eighties: Hence the repressive conservatives - in difference to those, who conserve an ideal - still cling to their "optimistic theory", whilst the opponents increasingly tend to ignore that unreal attitude. The events of Zurich/Switzerland in 1980/'81 for example were shocking for the entire region: Traditionally, in a sense of immovableness, Switzerland is a comfortable place for tourism and commerce, stable trade, and fancy consumption. But all of the sudden - in the eyes of the population; in fact an omen had rumored for long - an enormous amount of people, by far not only youngsters, denounced the "social contract". They ceased the cooperation with the local administration, disregarded the provincial orders, and - most alarming - neglected the means of consumption. Especially the refusal of exquisite articles was an abstrous symbol, because the production-consumption-circulation had been the holy creed of the countries national stability. - The silent abstention only jeopardized the entire society.<sup>16</sup>

Provided, that just certain peer-groups of young people had exercised such an extraordinary behaviour, the event would have been forgotten after short. But actually, in the case of Zurich, a large number of adults, popular citizens, and even politicians participated in the movement of refusal. Therefore it could not get neglected as a "generational short-coming". Furthermore the attempt to stigmatize foreign scape-goats, or to keep the whole event secret, failed. - The social system had produced a new quality of resistance: the skill of abstinence.

That kind of demonstration did not entail unhappiness among the participants. On the contrary, they created new performances of imagination, communication, and frolicsomeness; -whereas the "national" majority became distracted and malicious. Aggression, however, catapulted as a Puritan weapon against anchored sensitivity, indicates the descend of a rigorous value system. European history has gone through several vain experiences to fence worldly reason and vital sentiments by means of condemnation. One of those was the Council of Trent (1545-1563), when the Roman Catholic Curia tried to hinder the renaissance and got, in concrete blamed. "The relativization of sin and virtue in the life and thinking of the Renaissance necessarily linked right choice with a correct assessment of the situation, with human judgement. That is one of the reasons why I have called Renaissance deism a religion of reason."<sup>17</sup> The same reason for, but, what is called the "new sensitivity" in some of its perspectives may be comparable to renaissance: mainly, because it gets prosecuted by a similar Puritan mentality. Apart from that, in addition, the foundation of juvenile passion in Europe is - in contrast to anti-intellectual sects in the USA - not religious. No European politician could gain popularity by the exchange of material opposition for verses from the bible. And, on the other hand, the movement of resistance is too strongly tied to the basis, for that the stock exchange could take it in.

Simon Frith has explained these differences in his remarkable "Sociology of Rock": Following this analysis rock-music in America is regarded an "ideological category of sub-culture", whereas in England the history of the music-audience always was identical with the prevailing symbols of juvenile tendencies. This observation acknowledges the fact implied,

that - from a commercial point of view - a mass-culture, although it originates in the underground, always can be bought or oppressed. Unlike a self-determined culture, on the European "scene", agitates at the horizon of social history.<sup>18</sup> "On that route the revolt with its cultural practise calls in question the delivered signs, norms, and values; it figures a space for dreams, where any prohibition is forbidden."<sup>19</sup>

Such a code denies all encumbrances for sexual behaviour, gestical attitudes, modes of communication, expressions of sensivity, and - basically important - the obstacles of national preoccupations. - Not by chance, this concept accompanies the prediction, in accord with Jack Lang, next to that the skills of juvenile resistance to rigid institutions will shape the joint future of the European culture.

#### Sociology in descent: The case of Western Germany (II)

"The existence of subculture has become a lasting phenomenon in the western societies of industry and consumption, although their alienated symbols are submitted to continuous change."<sup>20</sup> But, that exactly, is the "tinkers" - how Jürgen Zinnecker calls them - advantage: They are able to cope with the provocation of institutionalized rituals; and to transform these ironically in favour of their own intentions.

This ability bears the reason for the attribute of "juvenility": First, the skills of resistance are not bound to a specific generation; the more traditional kinship has lost its influence, the more convincing the readiness for alternative modes of thought became. Secondly, it is not evident any more, that "post-adolescent" - or "anti-materialistic" - behaviour is a privilege of higher education; gradually the opponents originate from all social strata. And finally, the refusal of predominant rituals does not stem from "subversive characters", but, on the contrary, from the system's self-representation: A prevailing cult of consumption provokes its subcultural opposition.<sup>21</sup> - "The attempts, to conceive contra-identities, or to live in a sense of non-identity, must be understood a denial, contrasting the solidification of subjectivity, which is to be seen the destiny of 'the normal' and of many adults."<sup>22</sup>

Although a huge amount of comparable studies, concerning subcultures in other regions, has been presented, the case of Western Germany is rather significant, because one finds specific cuts during the post-war epochs. The first notions of opposition in the fifties, when an age-class grew up, that never had handled weapons, were not really articulated. Therefore the feelings of repression could get neglected by the "silent majority" quite easily. The students' revolt of the sixties, however, which actually had been prepared theoretically throughout many years, embodied a concrete historical character: Not dependent from any age-group the engaged intellectuals conceived the idea to continue the tradition of class-struggle. It was their main purpose to prevent a return of fascism via the abolition of its groundings. But the population, lamed by the past - and the mass-media - on one hand, spoiled by the economical increase on the other, could not follow their argumentation; finally, not at last, there was the immense influence of the "American dream".

Actually, in the eighties, the American influence is going to expire; nevertheless the reproaches of a conscious "Anti-Americanism" are misleading. What really counts is the feeling that a cult without philosophical tradition can not offer any skills for future survival. - The culture of sentiments is contradictory to the "no-future-labels".

Hence statements, according to which the students' movement finally has ended up in resignation, are only partly applicable: Certainly the former fiction of class-struggle lost its fascination. Nowadays oppositionals, instead, tend to ignore the rulers and their institutions, in order to create their self-determined style of living. The same time they are prepared to understand, not accept, the experiences of their ancestors, for abstaining from comparable illusions. They do not accuse their environment; - because, in consequence of their "do-it-yourself"-mentality, they do not want to get disturbed by it.<sup>23</sup> The contemporary, almost "stoical", culture of sentiments did not originate from organized centres; "it is a typical social revolt, which develops successively and irregular" into the direction of autonomy.<sup>24</sup> Anyway, one has learned from the students' movement to comprise the roots of uneasiness, to refuse violence, and to demonstrate human understanding.

In this respect the value patterns of the forthcoming subcultures have not changed the contents; the scale of preferences, however, has turned almost upwards down: The discrepancies to the parents' orientations in no other industrialized country of the west are as obvious as they are in



Western Germany. At the top of desires the so-called "a-material" values are ranging: tender and equal relationships, security within a sane environment, fulfillment in one's field of activity. Although the predominant wishes are partly hedonistic too, mere income and luxury is getting marginal. The criteria of a "good life" are "the ethic of profane", autonomy of self-reliance, and comprehensive justice. - Altogether one can ascertain a basic shifting from quantifying measures to the evaluation of qualitative orientations. For the figures may vary with the samples, the trends, instead, are unquestionable.<sup>25</sup>

From these conceptual changes in juvenile mentality immense difficulties for professional sociology arise. Their methodological means became blunt confronted with a "hidden" mode of life-style. Hitherto it was a rule, to check public opinion with regard on the matters of politics, economics, and fashion. Thus the painting of a society and its self-understanding seemed to be identical. Finally even the myth of motion-pictures became congruent with "reality": "second-hand life-style".

The recent culture of sensitivity, meanwhile, has retired from the cynical public; it cannot be quoted with statistics anymore. Since incorporated feelings do not alienate their skills they are resistant against factorization. In that context also operational sociology came to an end. Contemporary subjectivity - as subcultural movements - symbolize horizons, that never anybody has met before. Provided, sociology will be prepared for a new beginning, it has to remind an entire philosophical tradition.

#### At the horizon of sensitivity

Although it has been banned into the underground throughout many epochs, the continuity of European enlightenment could not get really extinguished. Platon's idea of democracy, Aristoteles' concept of justice, and Diogenes' existential irony repeatedly were shining through the darkness of inquisition, imperialism, and abstract rationality. These ideas purposely undermined the embracement of overwhelming administrations, since they denied any embarrassment of thought, and, consequently, had to suffer from prosecution, followed by the aggression of the masses. Where the rulers were guilty, and mass-culture was introduced to console the suppressed population, the critical intellectuals got suspected. - Contemporary subcultures again entered on the stoical experience, to break through this vicious circle.

They are fortified by the circumstances that the nowadays political, economical, familiarian, religious, and educational institutions have lost a lot of their imaginative reliability. In Western Germany, for example, less than one third of the "post-adolescents" under forty years of age trust the public organizations; the "adults" do not seem to be fundamentally more confident, however, they cover their intimate convictions. That weakens the formerly omnipotent public in favour of privacy.<sup>26</sup> Foreseeing one can say that the public and the private are going to exchange positions. That prospect for, yet, the sensitive culture - in contrast to the masses' cults - has to sharpen the skills of incorporated resistance. Especially in Germany "the courage to be" - as the philosopher Paul Tillich had called it - never has been rather expressive. The isolated individuals must learn to become self-determinating subjectives; the symbols of subcultural communication may confirm this process against illusions.

Hence the European idea is basically different from the one, that Charles A. Reich circumscribes by "The Greening of America": "Beyond the industrial age lies a new age of man. The essence of that age must be the end of subjugation of man, the end of his subordination to the machine and the beginning of the subjugation of the machine - the use of technology to create a still higher level of life, but one based upon values beyond the machine."<sup>27</sup> - This sentence is somehow unmasking, because it entails an "ontological foundation": the creed in "essentials", the vision of an end, and a "level" of values. European existentialism is, on the contrary, as the term indicates, entirely historical. It starts, not grasping for "origins", with an explanation of the given circumstances by means of a material concept; it embodies the traded resistance throughout all figurations of social life; and it conceives just a tendency - never a drawing - for future facilities. In other words: cultural existentialism is rather "animal" than "civilized".

Such a formula sounds, not by chance, irritating, since apparently all the achievements of industrial civilization seem to get neglected. This impression, indeed, must be differentiated: The juvenile culture does not abolish technology; it even makes indifferent use of the products on one hand. Because, at any rate, physical and intellectual survival, liberated from organized arbitrariness, is one of its major issues. On the other hand, however, every now and then it is aware of the reality



that the admired technological achievements are short-comings of alienation. One must consider the absurdity, when the USA - as well as their allies and opponents - begin consultations on disarmament with a martial increase of deterrent. A mentality like this embodies the totalitarianism of enemical stigmatization. That sort of "civilization" leaves no chance for the renaissance of enlightened humanism. The imaginative faculty of its strategists are narrowed to the alternative between world-wide imperialism and an apocalyptic catastrophe. - There is no basis left for an existential arrangement.

The power elites do know quite well that from the "niches in between", "the dirt of deviance", paradoxically the starting point of cultural sensitivity emerges. "The new symbols are confronted with the ancient codices; and they contain no message: Their main declaration is to be found in their 'confrontation dress'." <sup>28</sup> It spreads subcultaneously out from the crooked logic of an abstract system. For the reason of enlightenment mediated the acknowledgement of nature and senses, these get revitalized beyond the rules of military commerce. Certainly an act of profound skill is demanded for, in order to make concrete the balance between encouragement and resignation. "If the only permissible alternatives to conventional political activity are 'pure' civil disobedience and legal forms of nonviolent direct action, the morally conscientious citizens who intensively dissent face a difficult choice; either they must restrict their protest tactics which promise limited results at best, or they must go beyond them at the risk of being considered derelict in their obligations as citizens or even disloyal." <sup>29</sup>

This distinct consideration rests upon the premises, that the official institutions themselves are tied to the traditional ideal of philosophical legitimacy and social loyalty. Hence, in fact, the solidarity of citizenship got disbanded, and the common culture depraved to indoctrination. Under these auspices, the forthcoming of subcultural life becomes almost a "natural" - dialectical - obligation for survival. Social subcultures are onwards to realize the classical concept of communicational equality. Diogenes may symbolize the path: "He kindled a lantern at day-time and said: 'I am searching for a human being'." <sup>30</sup>

# Adnotes:

- 1) Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, Harmondsworth/ Middlesex 1970, p. 190.
- 2) See: Samuel N. Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation, London 1956.
- 3) Talcott Parsons, The Social System, New York 1964, p. 298.
- 4) Martin Oppenheimer, Urban Guerrilla, Harmondsworth/ Middlesex 1970, p. 20.
- 5) T. Parsons, 1964, p. 296.
- 6) See: Talcott Parsons / Gerald M. Platt, The American University, Cambridge / Mass. 1973.
- 7) Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Social Revolutions, Chicago 1962, p. 90.
- 8) Talcott Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory, New York 1964, pp. 184 f. - See: Max Weber, Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, Tübingen 1920.  
Concerning this aspect, the "retrospective-prospective orientation" of "Ethno-Methodology" finally does not differ: "Thus it frequently happens that in order for the investigator to decide what he is now looking at he must wait for future developments, only to find that these futures are informed by their history and future. By waiting to see what will <sup>have</sup> happened he learns it was he previously saw." (Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology, Englewood Cliffs 1967, p. 77.)
- 9) This is to see in the context of enlightenment and wordly sensuality, which traditionally ever has been more present in regions with Catholic influence, especially the Mediterranean ones. (See: Ernst Bloch, Atheismus im Christentum, Frankfurt / M. 1968; Alfred Lorenzen, Das Konzil der Buchhalter, Frankfurt / M. 1931.
- 10) Irving L. Horowitz, The New Sociology, Oxford 1964, pp. 15 f.

- 11) See: Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation*, Düsseldorf 1957.
- 12) Arnold Gehlen, *Anthropologische Forschung*, Hamburg 1974, pp. 76 f.
- 13) See: Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell (Shell-Studie), Hamburg 1953 - 1983; Bundesministerium für Bildung und Wissenschaft, *Berufsbildungsberichte*, Bonn 1977 - 1981; Bundesminister für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit, 1980 - 1981; Ennid, *Jugend zwischen 13 und 24*, Bielefeld 1964 - 1975.
- 14) Sinus - Institut, *Die verunsicherte Generation - Jugend und Wertewandel*, Opladen 1983, p. 45.
- 15) Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, London 1971, pp. 30 f.
- 16) See: Eidgenössische Kommission für Jugendfragen, *Thesen zu den Jugendunruhen 1980*, Bern 1980; Jeanne Hersch, *Antithesen zu den Jugendunruhen 1980*, Schaffhausen 1982.
- 17) Agnes Heller, *Renaissance Man*, London 1979, p. 34. - Most revealing, in concrete, is the fact, that the opposition against the Roman Catholic Curia gathers the christians in Europe and overseas to communication (see: Gustavo Gutierrez, *Theologie der Befreiung*, Düsseldorf 1972; Peter Eicher, *Bürgerliche Religion - Eine theologische Kritik*, München 1983).
- 18) Simon Frith, *Introduction to: Sounds Effects Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*, New York 1981.
- 19) Wilfried Breyvogel, "Gegen das Vergessen", in: W. Breyvogel (ed.), *Autonomie und Widerstand - Zur Theorie und Geschichte des Jugendprotests*, Essen 1983, p. 8.
- 20) Sinus - Institut, *Jugendforschung in der Bundesrepublik*, Opladen 1984, p. 100.
- 21) Sinus - Institut, 1984, pp. 93 ff. - That does not exclude a specific narcissism on the young peoples' side, which reflects the antagonisms of society and its "families" (see: Thomas Ziehe *Pubertät und Narzissmus*, Frankfurt/ M. 1975).

- 22) Werner Helsper, "Identität in der Nicht-Identität", in: W. Breyvogel (ed.), 1984, p. 128.
- 23) Sinus - Institut, 1983, pp. 52 ff. - "New, and often equally jealously guarded, hierarchies and forms of distinctions are constructed within the process of production, but also new broader solidarities and identities are constructed out of the process of deskilling, involving cultural recognition of the forms in which labour becomes generalized and more dependent." (Richard Johnson, "Three problematics: Elements of a theory of working-class culture". In: John Clarke et al. / eds., *Working-Class Culture*, London 1977, p. 248.)
- 24) W. Breyvogel, 1984, p. 7.
- 25) Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt / M. 1981, II, p. 584. - See: Bernhard Schäfers, *Soziologie des Jugendzeitalters*, Opladen 1982, pp. 56 f.; Paul Willis, *Profane Culture*, London 1978.
- 26) Sinus - Institut, 1984, p. 93.
- 27) Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, London 1971, p. 251.
- 28) W. Breyvogel, 1983, p. 3. - Whereas, in consequence of issues like this, "The Floodgates of Anarchy" (Stuart Christie / Albert Meltzer 1970) get devilized on one side, European thought, on the other, thoroughly is able to acknowledge "both sides of witchcraft" (see: Carlo Ginzburg, *I Benandanti*, Torino 1966).
- 29) Elliot M. Zashin, *Civil Disobedience and Democracy*, New York 1972, p. 301.
- 30) Diogenes Laertius, *Leben und Meinungen berühmter Philosophen*, Hamburg 1967, p. 315.

# SYMBOLISM OF SKILL: THE CASE OF CONSTRUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

Some central concepts of social sciences have not received adequate attention by students and practitioners of construction management. One could mention, in this context, the inadequacy of research into the meaning of action. One might also mention insufficient emphasis on the role of cultural differences on organizational choices.

The present paper aims to approach the system of skills in construction as a system of codes. Indeed, within the context of traditional construction, the system of skills is organized into a coherent system of crafts, which does seem to disintegrate under changing conditions.

The paper will attempt to analyze this code and explain for the contradictory interpretations in the face of a changing code.

By way of introduction, I should point out, however, that the paper does not aim at an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but that it is only a preliminary attempt to a semiotic analysis.

## THE NATURE OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The construction industry, in the traditional sense, is characterized by a

number of features, which lead to particular organizational formations. The most prominent of these characteristics are as follows:

- . The product is immobile, while the process is mobile. In other words, the process takes place (in traditional construction) at a construction site, which constitutes the place of manufacture and consumption.
- . A large portion of the production consists of individual "made to measure" products.
- . A major part of the work is carried out in the open air; this renders the process subject to seasonal changes and sensitive to climatic conditions.
- . The demand comes in bulks and is usually difficult to predict; in other words, there are fluctuations in the demand pattern.
- . The industry basically relies on craft skills and a craft-based workforce (Irwig, 1984).

## THE MEANING OF SKILLS IN THE CONSTRUCTION CONTEXT

A skilled man is defined as follows in the Dictionary of Building: "Either a tradesman or a leading hand in a modern trade which has expanded too quickly for the apprenticeship system to become general (general riggers, bar benders, rivet testers, steel erectors). Many such men, who are not called tradesmen, may nevertheless have more skill and adaptability than most tradesmen. Most of them work to drawings. Since there is no apprenticeship, many skilled men have risen from labourer (Scott, 1975, p.317).

In connection with this concept, then, a tradesman needs to be defined:

"A man who has been an apprentice for some years in a building trade and has therefore enough skill to be considered a journeyman at his trade. He may

be a carpenter - and - joiner, bricklayer, mason, slater - and - tiler, plumber, electrician, house painter, glazier, floor - and - wall tiler, plasterer, paperhanger, steeplejack, hot - water fitter, etc." (Scott, 1975, pp.363-364).

And a craft or trade is defined as follows:

"An occupation which needs intelligence and manual skill, a man who does this work being called a craftsman or tradesman" (Scott, 1975, p.91)

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE CRAFT - BASIS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK

According to Stinchcombe (1959), craft institutions in construction are a method of administration. Stinchcombe, outlines the characteristics of craft administration by contrasting it with mass production. The prominent features of mass production are:

- . Both the product and the work process are planned in advance by persons not on the work crew.
- . The elements of the work process planned are:
  - the location at which the task will be done
  - the movement of tools, equipment, materials and workers to the workplace
  - sometimes particular movements to be performed in getting the task accomplished
  - schedules and time limits for operations
  - inspection criteria for particular operations
 (as opposed to inspection criteria for final products)

Stinchcombe goes on to say that these features of the work process are governed by the worker in accordance with the empirical lore that makes up craft principles. These principles are the content of workers' socialization

and "apply to the jobs for which they have preferential living rights" (Stinchcombe, 1959, p.170).

It may, then, be added that the craft-basis of construction work not only implies reliance on manual skills, but also a particular method of administration. According to Eccles (1981), the trades are also distinguished in terms of work activities, training, skill level, and assessed value in the labor market.

According to Eccles, however, there are further differences between traditional construction (job-shop) and mass-assembly or continuous process technologies: "In the typical mass assembly process raw materials are progressively transformed over a series of separable steps into the final product. Between each separate step are buffer inventories that absorb fluctuations in output at one stage in order to avoid ripple effects further down the production line. These inventories permit a decoupling of a serially related set of tasks where the input of one task is the output of the preceding task... in construction the various trades do not have this serial relationship in as rigid a form, although it does exist to a large extent. Some trades cannot proceed or begin until others have completed a task, e.g., carpenters cannot build the walls until the foundation has been completed. Mechanical trades (plumbing, heating and cooling, and electrical) have to complete various tasks before carpenters, masons, and painters can proceed... the loose coupling of some tasks gives trades a range of time within which they need to complete a task". (Eccles, 1981, pp.337-338)

Based on this line of reasoning, it may be inferred that craft-basis, in addition to the features cited above, involves a loose-coupling of tasks as opposed to serial relationships.

The working group of the Bartlett Summer School 1979 on Labour and Construction, in discussing the nature of "skill", defined the characteristics outlined below as essential (Report of the Working Group on Labour and Construction, 1979, p.194):

- . manual dexterity
- . training / experience (apprenticeship)
- . ownership of tools (for which a tool allowance is given)
- . the ability to interpret and execute job from e.g. general description, drawings, etc. (comprehension, flexibility)

It was noted, further, that another of the distinctive features was the presence of a craft ideology of "skill" and "standards".

The system of skills in traditional construction is a way of communication. By means of this system, the traditional craft defines itself in relation to other crafts and to the whole of traditional construction. In other words, the organization of skills into crafts expresses the organization of traditional construction work as well as the relation between individuals and work groups. The system implies a perceptual organization, whereby the relationship of parts to other parts, and parts to the whole is defined.

The skills in traditional construction constitute a protocol. The craftman has a place in society and a function, defined by what Stinchcombe refers to as "the empirical lore". The system defines relationships of power and authority, superiority and inferiority, distinctions, rules of combinations and rules of collective action.

Through the organization of skills into particular crafts, particular kinds of experience are coded into particular kinds of rules. This constitutes the

information basis for the crafts. In other words, crafts are symbols of skill and competence, because they signify access to and command of information.

It is possible to clarify the argument by means of an example. Let us look at the job description for a particular craft, carpentry. A carpenter is expected to possess and perform the following skills: to construct, erect and install wooden structures and fittings, performing by hand or power tools operations such as sawing, planning, nailing and gluing; laying out, cutting, fitting and joining lumber to construct framework; cutting, fitting and installing doors, door frames, window frames, stair cases, interior and exterior trim; laying hardwood covering on floors. (C.I.R.F., 1969)

It is observed that a particular craft is an organization of several skills that are based on particular types of information and that the craft also prescribes the rules of combination for the particular skills in question. In this way, it reflects an agreement among the members of the society. It is this agreement that renders the system of crafts a code.

Each craft has a place in the sequence of construction work, with each craft contributing to the meaning of the whole and each contrasting with other crafts. This sequence can, then, be interpreted as a syntagmatic -that is a linear- relationship.

Although the code is coherent and well-structured in traditional construction, there are cultural differences. An inquiry into the occupational situation in various countries by the International Labour Organization led to the conclusion that many of the job descriptions that were valid in Western countries were not applicable in developing countries and that the trades usually covered a broader range of skills than common in industrialized countries. It was

reported that a mason in Honduras was expected to do steel erections, plumbing, plastering, bricklaying, stone-masonry, terrazzo-work, cement finishing and floorlaying. In Tanzania, a mason was also expected to perform electrical installation work (C.I.R.F., 1969, p.16).

Therefore the value of crafts and skills shows variations with cultural differences. It may be inferred, then, that this system is arbitrary in the sense that cultures divide the crafts in a different way.

#### DEVELOPMENTS AND CHANGES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

As we have seen above, the totality of these structures constitutes a system of interrelated parts. "... any alteration of the perceptive structure...-that is to say, the mode of apperception of reality- leads to a restructuring of the system as a whole" (Guiraud, 1975, p.21).

The major development that influenced the relationships and distinctions between the skills and trades is industrialization. This is defined as a composite process, covering the following aspects (Turner and Turner, 1972):

- . systemization of products
- . specialization of labour
- . concentration of production and marketing
- . mechanization of production

These aspects may be defined as follows:

Systemization - is a design process, whereby standardized and correlated construction components are used to form a unit (Turner and Turner, 1972).

Specialization of labour - is "the breaking down of work tasks into component operations, and their distribution among a larger number of workers implying an efficiency and expertise in performing the simplified subtasks that would not be in performing the original, more broadly defined task" (Turner and Turner, 1972, p.I-6).

Concentration of production and marketing - the gathering of these functions into a unified location.

Mechanization of production - the substitution of machines for human labour.

According to Stone (1966), the emphasis in industrialization is on the reduction in the number of separate operations and more efficient utilization of labour and machines. This, in many cases, implies the replacement of in-situ work by on-or off-site production. In other words, the effect of this change is to reduce reliance on skilled labour to produce the parts of the building in-situ and to create a simple assembly process consisting of the erection of components.

Industrialization aims to achieve a continuous building process. In doing so, this process introduces the concept of job descriptions, as defined by the management.

The question, discussed at length by many authors, is whether an increased division of labour, introduction of new materials, products and machinery led to the disintegration of the craft-basis, or created new "skills"? Another question, probably neglected, was whether what was created could be defined as skills in the traditional sense.

Two points need to be mentioned in this connection: Firstly, the change in

the organization of construction is gradual, still retaining the handicraft character of production in many construction processes. Secondly, the construction industry is generally characterized by the coexistence of three sectors: a traditional sector, an intermediate sector and a modern sector (C.I.R.F., 1969).

According to the Working Group on Labour and Construction, it was not possible to simplify all labour process due to the identification of skills with materials (Report of the Working Group on Labour and Construction 1979, p.195). For instance, the introduction of plastics and copper made an impact on the plumbing process but did not lead to further simplification of the task into its components. The introduction of concrete led to the emergence of new functions such as concrete-mixer operator, but also to the carpenters erecting the frameworks. The Working Group argues that this was essentially a semi-skilled operation 'tacked-on' to the traditional range of activities associated with handicraft techniques due to

- . the relationship between skill / materials
- . the relationship between materials / tools, which, in construction are 'craft'-specific. (Report of the Working Group on Labour and Construction, 1979, p.195)

One important change, that should be mentioned, however, is stressed by Clarke: "... many trades became more broadly based, defined in terms of function performed on a variety of materials rather than by association with one particular material" (Clarke, 1980, p.39).

#### CHANGES IN THE EXISTING CODE

It is obvious that the coherent code of crafts is undergoing a transformation

although the syntactic relationships are not completely upset. The division of skills into their component parts and the introduction of new skills leads to the changes in the semantic fields of various skills.

According to Eco (1975, p.80) not only can there exist contradictory semantic fields, but the same cultural unit can itself become part of complementary semantic fields. Therefore a skill such as assembly and installation of pipes may occupy positions under the crafts "plumber" or "pipe-fitter".

The emergence of new skills such as (cement finisher, machine operator, concrete-mixer operator, hoist operator etc.), however, means the addition of new forms to the existing repertoire, and therefore modifies the values of the components of the existing repertoire.

The reason is that skill, as a concept, has social and ideological dimensions, which stem from the status in holding a particular position (Bedale et al., 1980). Therefore the change in the semantic fields of the existing skills and the addition of new skills to the existing repertoire signifies changes in relations of power and authority.

As mentioned earlier, one of the distinctive features of the traditional craft is the ability to interpret and execute job, in other words, the incorporation of the control function. An implication of the changes, in the structure of the industry, on the other hand, is the isolation of the control function to the management side. This change causes the breakdown of the concept into various levels, e.g., the managerial, the supervisory, and the operational. Thus, one may observe the emergence of new concepts such as project manager, general superintendent, site supervisor / foreman, technician, building draftsman, etc. These new functions are also based on skills and on combinational rules, constituting a new code.

In this connection, mention should be made of the relationship of code and competence. Competence is defined by de Ventos as "a combinatory human 'faculty' always susceptible of new creations; as a capacity to produce an unlimited number of forms from a limited number of elements" (de Ventos, 1980, p.184).

Transformations, therefore, may be understood by starting from the existing code. This explains, according to de Ventos, why the first paintings were structurally altar panels and why the first ornaments in bronze were modelled upon the laws of ornament in stone. Likewise, this explains why the introduction of new techniques and materials failed to change the structure of certain processes, such as plumbing in construction.

A code, in this sense, may be modified and transformed, restructuring itself into a new field. At this stage, these are contradictory interpretations as to whether the transformed structure is just a degradation of the existing code or a new code.

The systems of convention governing the organization of skills are of interest to students of organization theory and to students of construction management because through these systems of convention, one may gain an insight into organizational choices.

These choices are primarily related to delineating the organizations boundaries, the scope and structuring of the organizations activities, technology and scale of operations.

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Vincent DEGOT

## FOREWORD

In a paper submitted last year to the Lund conference (1), I described a corporate model which, among other things, gave prominence to the part played by the social and cultural environment of a corporation in determining some of the changes taking place in the latter. I will now be using a similar approach when attempting to interpret and assimilate a number of impressions accumulated during my last ten years as a researcher in this field.

I deliberately use the imprecise word "impressions", for two reasons:

- firstly, because the material is made up of a miscellany of items related to various different areas. My task is rather like that of the spectator who, having seen random excerpts of a film, attempts to reconstitute the whole plot. My only particular asset is the model referred to above, which I use to build up a basic framework into which my bits and pieces will eventually fit;
- secondly, because I am not about to attempt to make a rational demonstration of my thesis. This paper seeks to secure your connivance. Personally, I think that even the apparently most scientific demonstrations have always done this, but unwittingly or shamefacedly. Here, on the contrary, I openly express the hope that my words will arouse your own associations and provide hooks on which you can hang other personal impressions that are so many other fragments of the same plot; or, even, which produce quite a different version of it.

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The starting point of my observations concerns the evolutionary trend taking place in the Personnel Departments of certain corporations over the past ten years. Let it be clear that these are corporations with which I have worked personally or of which I have been told by associates, meaning only a limited sample, and which furthermore possess some specific and common characteristics: they are all of considerable size and most of them are credited with being in the forefront of social innovation - which could be one reason for their working with the research institute to which I belong.

This evolution on the part of the departments concerned involves a number of factors which, although it is not yet clear to me which of these commands the others, tend to form a coherent whole:

- Firstly, the Personnel Department has taken on a more "important" role: its activities now extend well beyond the payrolling and recruiting functions formerly allotted to it. Nowadays, it has many other activities which can be put under the general heading of "social intervention". This is reflected in its modern title: from just plain "Personnel Department", it has become the "Department of Personnel and Social (or Human) Relations".

- Their social intervention function consists in studying, and attempting to influence more effectively, the working lives of the corporation's employees: career planning, job satisfaction, conditions of work, and so on. To this end, personnel departments perform or commission special surveys, compile statistics, liaise with other departments of the firm, publish a house magazine, and so on.

- These new functions are to be associated with two other

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observations, always remembering that no causal relationship or order of precedence between these and the former has been established:

- firstly, the work performed in the Personnel Department has become more absorbing and more specialised. In many cases, the department has grown larger and it offers career prospects as attractive as those elsewhere in the corporation;

- secondly - and this is linked to what has just been said -, the work profile in such departments has changed over the years. This is due not only to the higher degree of specialisation of functions, but also to a change in the departmental image: it is no longer considered as a waste-basket for discards from the more prestigious parts of the firm (production or sales, as the case may be), or as a parking lot for retired Army officers after a short course in psychology. I encountered the first of these two categories ten years ago, when organising discussion sessions on improving working conditions. Henceforth, the Personnel Department employs numbers of younger people - including, significantly, many young women - who possess the highest academic qualifications.

- Personnel Departments are now relatively communicative, and what they say is intended both for internal and external use. Formerly, in most corporations, only the sales side and, to a lesser extent, the technicians had the right to speak out (the financial side also, but only within limited circles). Now, it is the Personnel Department which has the loudest voice, telling of the social progress achieved, and of the wonderful experimental schemes which I will discuss later.

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- Finally, quite outside the corporation itself, there has grown up a whole body of general legislation which to a great extent supports the enhanced role taken on by the Personnel Department: statutory provisions instituting health and safety committees, consultative procedures of all kinds, and the 39-hour week, all compel the corporation to adapt to deal with its employees in specified ways, and thus to employ specialists capable of implementing those provisions inside the firm.

There are doubtless several other matters of a similar import which could be mentioned, which escape me for the moment, but the above are enough, in my opinion, to illustrate the structural evolution I am concerned to describe, and to raise some questions concerning the significance of it.

As concerns what might be called a rather theoretical and abstract long-term significance of the phenomenon, the model referred to at the start of this paper leads to some conclusions which I will come back to later.

It is also relevant to inquire into the origins of the changes. Was it the General Management echelon which felt a greater need for personnel executives with a higher profile, or did the few high-profile ones already inside the department apply strategies to extend their influence? In the latter event, what means did they employ? Did they grasp the coat-tails of the new statutory regulations, placing new means of action within their reach (such as the "Quality Circles")? All these questions call for a detailed investigation of the way in which the Personnel Department has evolved, which would also enable us to identify the particular corporations which set off the trend, to determine

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the amplitude of that trend, and so on.

I now propose to examine this trend from two standpoints considered to be most enlightening:

- firstly, a "macro" approach which investigates the structural evolution concerned on a very broad overall level, inserting it in the "natural" trend of events;
- then, a micro-analysis directed to the local strategies which accompanied the transformation of Personnel Departments (accepting the strategic hypothesis, but not assuming it to be a conscious initiative); attempting to demonstrate the relevancy of the "experimental" concept.

#### 1 - AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN CORPORATE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

In the paper referred to in the Foreword above, I described a model incorporating three dimensions:

- the social structure, a kind of extension to the corporation of the sociological patterns observed in society as a whole. Each employee of the corporation is thereby awarded a sociological status, or "habitus", whose characteristics affect his career prospects and behaviour (1);
- the organisational structure, covering all the procedures and functional distinctions enabling the corporation to achieve its technical and economic purposes (here, the word "technical" means matters in the production and the management areas alike);
- the cultural dimension, encompassing the perceptions and

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beliefs shared by virtually all the employees and which make it possible for them to work together, by reducing complex reality to a series of convenient variables.

Each of these dimensions has the property of evolving over time and, so to speak, bringing the corporation into contact with the social environment. For instance, the relative worth of diplomas inside the corporation, and the career prospects attached to them, depend on the standards set up outside: if they become significantly devalued, then the employees holding them move to jobs elsewhere. Reciprocally, the corporation itself contributes to sustaining the outside standard of relative values.

Another example, this time illustrating the trend in terms of time, is the effect of "industrial intercourse". By this term, I propose that we understand the process and effects of the gradual conversion of ever greater numbers of people to accepting the "values" of the corporation (which, by making employee behaviour predictable, enable the corporation to function): value of the time factor, sense of collective responsibility, and so on.

In the same paper, I suggested that the driving power behind the evolutionary trend considered, at least initially, could be taken as represented by the transient and theoretical image of the rationalistic corporation (when it was, so to speak, at liberty in a society still sub-industrial). This rationalistic image is striking when the values of the corporation are set against those which ruled society under the Ancien Régime: prestige, birthright, etc. To function in a rationalistic way, the corporation had to export its fundamental corporate ethic to permeate its immediate environment:

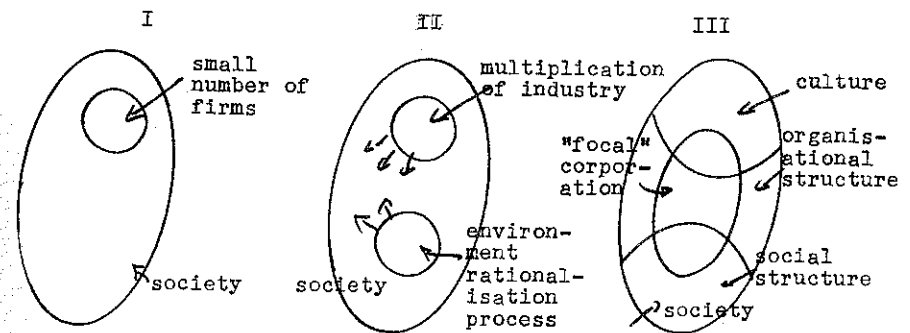
- by converting its increasing number of workers to its own values,

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- and by creating new occupational categories, thus furthering structural change throughout society in general.

However, just like the ripples on a pool return concentrically inwards, these new values and structures flowed back to the corporation after their assimilation by the wider social fabric, so that it became enmeshed in a web of social and cultural conventions which had little to do with its initial rationalistic impetus, but which it had increasingly to take on board.

The above very brief description of an evolutionary development illustrates how the corporation, from being a marginal feature of society in the 19th Century became, a few decades ago, its focal structure. The following three diagrams express the successive stages of this process:



Referring to this evolutionary pattern, with external cultural and sociological pressures gradually being felt within the corporation, I come to postulate that the latter has undergone a similar process generated from the inside: its Personnel Department, until recently lying on the fringes of the corporate

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structure, has moved closer and closer towards the centre, playing an increasingly important part both in day-to-day management and in strategic planning. For many and varied reasons, however, this movement has taken place rather more slowly than the corporation's own accession to a central position in society:

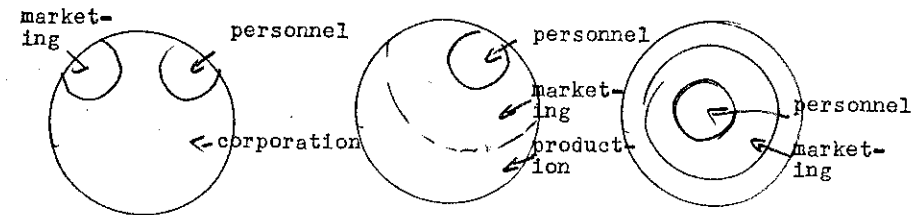
- In the first place, there is a well-established French tradition by which most corporations are headed by engineers, and these have instilled an "engineering culture" into corporate life. For example, it was only quite some time after the last War that the sales and marketing staffs gained the recognition corresponding to the importance of their function. The personnel officers followed in the wake of this, but had to overcome a number of structural obstacles.

- Then, historical factors played a part: the drive for factory reconstruction and the rapid rate of growth in the 'Sixties helped the production ethic to keep pride of place.

- Finally, there are reasons related to the antiquated educational system, to the built-in attitudes of an industrial culture which regarded office workers - including personnel managers - as unimportant when compared with those engaged on actual production work, and so on.

All these factors explain why the Personnel Department's progress towards the centre of the corporate structure, which should have accompanied that of the corporation towards the centre of society, was in fact delayed. One effect of this was to make it appear a sudden development, while another has masked the causal relationship I am concerned to demonstrate. The three stages depicted below should be seen in conjunction with our earlier diagram:

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When considering the evolutionary trend, we must also take account of the part played by the personnel responsible for work organisation (e.g. Order and Methods Office) who, to the extent that they are dealing with the same people (the work force) as the Personnel Department, but with different motivations, were bound to come into conflict with the latter. I will come back to this later, when discussing the strategic aspects of Personnel Department development.

Another element, which was to prove decisive for the propagation of the evolutionary trend, is represented by the work of outside business consultants. Naturally, they helped to generalise new internal organisation systems but, to my mind, their most decisive influence came through the way they affected the corporate image of the lower-grade workers (manual and clerical grades). In the past, organisation experts worked with the Production Departments and built up a worker image consonant both with their own assignment and with that partner in discussion. Now that these experts are usually called in under the auspices of the Personnel Department (such as when Quality Circles have to be organised), they have changed that image to suit the new configuration of their assignments.

Finally, in the rear of the expert consultants, a new category of interveners took shape - the one to which all of us here belong: the researchers, lecturers and academics who have either played a direct part or been to some extent involved in the development of the trend.

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In referring to the above categories of interveners who have been in some way involved in the process whereby the Personnel Department has become the centre of things, I feel it appropriate to start off by dealing with a specific type of activity which has taken on increasing proportions in recent years and with which they have been associated to some extent. I am speaking of the "experimental schemes" which, I believe, are closely related to the evolutionary trend in question.

## 2 - THE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT AND THE EXPERIMENTAL SCHEME

Once again, I shall be speaking primarily from my own personal experience, but I think that the events described have had their equivalents in other countries than France. The first time I heard of these schemes was in connection with the improvement of working conditions. We all remember this wave which swept through the European business organisation sector in the early 'Seventies, evoked by such names as Volvo, Saab, Tavistock Institute, Hertzberg, and so on.

At that time, I was called upon to take part in two research projects, directed to very different types of corporation but both of very large size, with a view to the internal promotion of this "policy". I use the word "policy" advisedly, since it suggests a good description of the context in which the Improvement of Working Conditions Schemes were set up in the two undertakings concerned. Unlike the events surrounding the Quality Circles, to which I will return later, the drive for improvement of working conditions initially took the form of a kind of manifesto, at first sported outside the industrial milieu but later taken up by individual corporations who adapted it to suit their own specific frameworks (3).

Without going into too much detail, it should be recalled

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that one of the special characteristics of this movement was that it relied extensively on persuasion by comparison, on the lines of: "You should adopt this or that policy - see how well it has worked at Volvo, Saab, etc". Another line, used mostly outside the corporate context, was more theoretical and directly concerned the worker image: "We are dealing with real individuals, with aspirations to this, that or the other, and we have so far failed to allow for this". At all events, the classical economic argument limited to investment options was replaced by a form of reasoning based either on comparison with outside examples or on a do-or-die forecast ("if we carry on like this, we won't be able to carry on at all").

The first corporations to "import" these ideas into their workplaces took care, as I have already said, to adapt them to local circumstances; but they still lacked precise indications as to how to go about things. In reality, there was the implicit suggestion that the approach could be worked out only on the ground, i.e. inside the workshops. This meant that management executives and engineers had to make experiments: job enrichment, rearranged production processes, work-station comfort, etc.

At first sight, we can thus interpret the experimental scheme as resulting from the weakness of the economic argument. It should also be recalled that, in the early 'Seventies, the industrial climate was very tense. Measures affecting workers were introduced only cautiously, due to the feeling that if some groups were granted what appeared to be advantages, then all the other groups would immediately claim the same treatment. Finally, the corporate executives whose ideological and methodological instincts led them to espouse the principles of the improvement of working conditions theory were employed in the Personnel Department and, at the time, it would have been quite untoward for them to lay down rules in an area belonging to Work Organisation territory. Consequently, the production engineers who carried out the experiments did so on a purely voluntary basis.

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Generally speaking, the technical managers who took this initiative were rewarded by enhanced careers. Most of their experiments were highly localised, often affecting sectors on the fringes of the main production shops (maintenance and machine setting, for example) or, in some cases, job stations of a sufficiently specific kind to avoid the risk of contagion mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, they made a considerable impression both inside the corporation and elsewhere. In the final analysis, judging from the corporations where I was involved and from a survey performed by the National Agency for the Improvement of Working Conditions (ANACT), these experiments directly concerned only very few people, but they were sufficient to earn the firms which housed them a high reputation for social innovation.

This disproportion between the scale of the actual events and the echo which they aroused, and the image enhancement gained by the firms taking part (Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the French President at the time, held a luncheon party for twenty industrialists whose companies had been prominent in the movement), is bound to raise suspicions of window-dressing. If we fall in with this view, the experiment had an intrinsic value as well as a demonstration value. In actual fact, moreover, it did not demonstrate a great deal, mainly because the scale of implementation was too small to enable the level of incorporation into routine that would eliminate the Hawthorne effect.

Even though some institutional machinery set up when the Working Conditions Improvement campaign was at its height is still in place - such as the ANACT agency referred to above, it can be considered that the movement ran out of steam in about 76/77, when the persisting economic depression reduced its credibility (unemployment becoming the overruling concern) and solutions were sought in other directions.

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Nevertheless, in my opinion, a trend had been set in train and showed up in two ways:

- firstly, the role of the Personnel Department has clearly evolved. This is not to say that the Working Conditions Improvement campaign was alone responsible for the change. At all events, this Department is the one which traditionally deals with union relations, so that during a period when factories are being closed and jobs are being lost it was bound to be in the front line. However, the campaign gave it a more positive image - a more "intellectual" one, so to speak;

- secondly, there emerged the notion of experimental actions and all that goes with them - top management policies to encourage change without imposing it, in areas where its cost-effectiveness is not evident, then publicising the first effects obtained and rewarding the company executives who engaged in it.

To use a marketing term, a market was thus opened up.

I cannot say whether the time-lag elapsing between the Working Conditions Improvement campaign and the introduction of the Quality Circles corresponds to the time need for the consultant firms to develop a "product" aimed at that market. The fact is that it took about three to four years for these to make a significant entry onto the French scene. And, during that same period, several major social issues occupied the ground at the national level, extending outside the corporate fabric: shorter working hours, earlier retirement age, worker representation, and so on.

For the reason just given, the Quality Circles represent

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a major step forward: they comprise standard procedures, apparently of a highly technical nature, which prevent the fragmentation of types of action such as occurred during the Work Conditions Improvement campaign. However, behind these differences, I see some close analogies. Before discussing these, I feel it appropriate to underline that the earlier campaign, conducted under a Right-Wing government, gave birth to a State controlling agency, ANACT, whereas the Quality Circles which have grown up under a Left-Wing régime come under a private body, the AFCERQ (Association Française pour les Cercles de Qualité) (4).

It is the "experimental" idea which, to my mind, connects the two movements being discussed here. This idea is not made a principle underlying the Quality Circles, as it was for the Work Conditions Improvement campaign, owing to the more formal status of the Circles, but in actual fact the French companies who have already set up Quality Circles have done so on a scale affecting only a small number of employees. Furthermore, the membership of AFCERQ is only 600 companies, or about 0.25 percent of the total number of corporations in France. Here again, therefore, the reverberations being heard (even via non-specialist media) are out of proportion with what is actually being done. And, in the same way as we did earlier, we can again talk of "window-dressing".

### 3 - EXPERIMENTAL SCHEMES RELATED TO THE ENHANCED ROLE OF THE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

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When we draw the relationship between the experiment idea and the evolutionary trend of Personnel Department functions, especially if certain of its implications are recognised, this to my mind suggests a transformation of top management practices. To clearly illustrate the nature and scope of that transformation, it is necessary to refer to a number of specific issues:

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- in the first place, the new practices concerned are based on a system that can be summarised by three words: experiment - window-dressing - incentives. The aim is to create, within the corporation, specific thrusts of impetus sparked off by example and carried forward by imitation. Each employee remains free to form his own opinion. An obvious advantage is that those who subscribe, of their own free will, to the policies proposed in this way, will be deeply convinced that these are right, even if (or perhaps because) they are not founded on economic considerations. A probably decisive element is that there is no question of a rationalistic argument, whose conclusions are likely to vary as conditions change, the substitute being rather to secure adhesion to certain beliefs. Underlying this new form of management, there is a kind of ideological bent to promoting participation in beliefs inspired by carefully-staged examples played out by company personnel. Whether these examples represent policies as described above, or are designed to manipulate the perception of images such as those attaching to certain tools of management, the response interval is a long one. This style of management depends on the forces of inertia inherent in the process of change in the corporate culture. Consequently, it cannot take the place of what might be called the "conventional" tools of management: investment options, organisation of work systems, and so on. But it can interact with those tools, such as by modifying the conditions in which they are deployed. To take the case of the Working Conditions Improvement campaign described earlier, the latter could not attempt to take over from the Order and Methods Department and produce its own plant lay-out schemes. But, in a marginal way, it could influence the initial design stages of those schemes by introducing a new mental approach which led to considering technical solutions of a kind which had previously been rejected out of hand (such as integrated work-stations

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as an alternative to assembly-lines);

- although these new management strategies cannot replace the existing ones, we must try to define their respective fields of action, firstly at the technical level, as just mentioned, and then from the standpoint of the corporate philosophy and internal claims to legitimacy:
- as concerns their place in relation to the conventional tools of management, we can identify two situations which both involve the idea of the practice of management by symbols, using staged experiments and incentives:
- the first of these corresponds to what we meant when speaking of "policies" on an earlier page. The aim is to change the mental approach of management executives by reference to methods implying variable degrees of preciseness - the difference in this latter respect is illustrated by our review of the Improved Working Conditions and Quality Circle systems respectively. This changed mental approach can affect, more or less informally, the way in which the conventional tools are used. For policies which implicitly seek to change the worker image perceived by the engineers, the result may cause plant investment options to be modified at different levels: either through promoting the idea of workshop designs which leave greater scope for initiative by the workers (autonomous shifts as by Working Conditions Improvement measures), or by introducing procedures through which operatives can effect minor adjustments to a production system designed outside their orbit (Quality Circles). In the latter case, it may some day happen that the workshop designers will bear in mind this possibility, and thus produce systems which will from the outset anticipate subsequent adaptations. This is not yet however the case, and the Quality Circles are still more of an outside intrusion on the production process;
- the second case is that where the aim of management by symbols is to change the image perceived by some agents - usually the executive grades - of the conventional management tools. In an earlier paper read at Antibes (5), I illustrated this type of action in relation to career-planning systems. The large corporations apply more or less formal procedures to career management, and these

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attract all kinds of criticisms concerning the way in which promotions are awarded, the criteria taken into account, the career aspirations of different staff categories, and so on. Here again, the exemplary displaying of some careers (example now being substituted for experiment) makes it possible to modify the way in which the staff perceive the variable factors affecting career prospects. By this means, the aspirations of staff members can be brought more into line with the actual possibilities that the corporation has to offer (especially when those possibilities are becoming more restricted).

In both of these cases, the "symbolistic" tool of management is deployed in conjunction with the familiar conventional tools, either to influence the way in which these are used (when they allow of some flexibility of interpretation), or to re-focus staff perception of them. It is as though, in a way, the technical problems connected with the conventional tools of management had been solved, or the manner of solving them had been discovered, so that the real problem was that of manipulating worker attitudes to them. The consultation machinery set up during the last few years is consistent with this way of looking at things: we cannot say in which situations and with what frequency a solution worked out through consultation is better than one handed down from authority, but we are quite sure that, when consultation does not take place, the workers affected by a decision will be less wholehearted in following it. This is a relatively recent cultural development, and one of which managements must take notice. We thus have another example of a constraint imposed on the corporation from outside, resulting from generally changing mental attitudes, which follows a process fitting smoothly into the procedures of the corporate model described earlier.

- Then, management symbolism also makes itself felt with respect to the dominant philosophy obtaining inside the

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corporation. When I spoke earlier of centripetal progress being made by the Personnel Department, this applied not merely to its acquisition of increased technical responsibility, but also to the corollary gaining of a more legitimate voice than hitherto in the formulation of the corporate ideology. It is hard to say whether the emergence of a rather less "businesslike" philosophy - in terms of strict cost-effectiveness - stems from the relative failure of the earlier techniques or, on the contrary, from the fact that those techniques are being successfully applied wherever they proved their effectiveness. Personally, I incline to the view that the language of cost-effectiveness was a reassuring factor (especially in France, a society ruled by the engineer), but that it was founded on such a very large number of assumptions that its application became little more than the emanation of a cultural consensus. If this is so, there seems no reason why a different type of consensus could not be substituted. But such a hypothesis implies that the link between rationalism and the corporation is not an imperative, and that the former was a momentary factor, a kind of "fashion".

It is thus hard to determine whether this enhanced legitimacy of the Personnel Department's philosophy is the result of a planned strategy, or whether it arises out of a more profound development, a natural evolution of sorts. The fact remains that the new legitimacy is recognised by many people, extending to the general public. This is connected with a phenomenon which has emerged over the past fifteen years or so: the appearance of the corporation in the mass media; and the wider the public addressed by the media, the greater the accent placed on the social implications of the corporation. This redounds to reinforce the legitimacy of the corporate staffs whose responsibilities lie in that area.

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#### 4 - MANAGEMENT SYMBOLISM AND SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Referring to the various elements brought together - even if imperfectly - in the above review of the position, we can see an overall trend developing over the last fifteen years. This trend is marked by the appearance of functional changes and new kinds of company officers with influential voices, within the Personnel Departments of large corporations. These have developed a specific style of action which can be summarised by the label "experiment/example plus presentation plus incentives". This transformation makes itself felt through changes in the corporation's philosophical essence, in its manner of working, and sometimes in its structure. At this stage of investigation, it is impossible to say whether this trend is or not the result of a deliberate strategy conducted by a corporate faction and leading to the three-pronged "attack" summarised above. It may well be that this is merely a temporary circumstance translating a cautious approach to re-styling the traditional corporate ethic. In either event, I propose to refer to the new trend under the name of Management Symbolism.

We see, therefore, that many questions concerning the suggested mutation remain unanswered, even if I have just tried to offer one interpretation of it. In the meantime, but as a conclusion to this paper, I would like to consider another aspect of the problem: that of the rôle of the researcher (in management, sociology, or organisation symbolism) and his possible incidence on this kind of process. My personal view is that one of the purposes of research directed to the corporation is to try to identify the current and future development trends affecting it. To some extent, this endeavour is just as legitimate as that consisting in a study of past corporate history and reveals the same concern to understand how corporations work.

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However, this to my mind raises a kind of ethical issue which arises when I have to deal with the problem of the manipulation of symbols and images. Take the case, for example, of trying to trace in the recent history of a corporation the signs of emergent trends:

- should we merely observe those trends, without making reference to their deeper origins, and being content to discuss only their superficial appearances? As a general rule, the corporation itself is aware only of the latter and sees them as erratic events within an overall development process;
- or should we, on the contrary, should we assist the emergence of the trend, on the pretext that an analysis of the type described above reveals it to be inevitable?

In fact, both of these questions can be regarded as specious, for two reasons:

- many people will maintain that the scientific approach imposes the first of these two attitudes;
- other and closer observers will realise that, in actual fact, many researchers have already adopted the alternative.

The second of these last two opinions, to which I incline to subscribe, is based on the observation that, in the many years since researchers in the Human Sciences first started to take an interest in the way corporations work, they have constantly reported to managements an increasingly complex image of their workers - especially office workers - as individuals, and said

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that this complex diversity must be allowed for in management techniques and procedures. Without wishing to put forward my own hypotheses regarding the status of the worker within the corporation, I can point out that, in the course of time, there have been three broad images finding acceptance (6):

- the worker according to Taylor, a kind of robot seeking to optimise a few simple factors: to earn more money, to perform well-defined tasks, and so on. Once the corporate structure had fully assimilated the components of this image, further research became unnecessary;
- the individual of the psychologist or social psychologist working on Human Relations, who reacts to motivations not always grasped by the corporation or the researcher, but some of whose characteristics are known: he likes fulfilling tasks, appreciates respect, and so on. The corporation can adapt only partially to these requirements, and the complex diversity of individuals does not fit any standard model. Thus we have a market for unlimited research, survey and consultancy services;
- then comes the personality of the sociologist, who responds to rules which not only escape the orbit of the corporation, but actually impose themselves on it. In this view of things, the lines of research are limited, since both the individual and the corporation are part of the same mechanisms and these cannot be influenced. Once those mechanisms have been delineated, there remains little more to add. This stage corresponds to the model I described early in this paper.

The worker image deriving from the human relations approach (going as far as Hertzberg) is the one which thus far opens up the greatest possibilities for research and study assignments. I am

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here referring to research directed to the inner workings of the corporation, rather than to its adaptation to the environment. But, over the last few years, a line compatible with the sociological model of the worker has been opened up, in the shape of corporate culture and symbolism. The individual working in the corporation brings with him many behavioural characteristics which derive from his belonging to a social group outside the corporation. The big question now facing us is: which components of his behaviour are determined by his social personality, and which by the corporate culture and symbolism? For me, at all events, this question pointed to the light at the end of the sociological tunnel.

But, at that time, I had not yet come to realise two things concerning research on corporate culture:

- firstly, it is part and parcel of an evolutionary process of considerable amplitude, as I have tried to convey in this paper. Coincidence or not, there is an objective connivance between the emergence of a school of corporate culture and the appearance of new corporate management practices which, if systematically arranged and deliberately applied, could be called by the name of management symbolism;
- secondly, the results which it produces, by drawing attention to the cultural phenomenon and showing what rules govern its development, provide the corporation with the means of more rapid awareness of the value of symbolism as a management tool.

In other words, any future enthusiasm for the subject with which we here are concerned is likely to be caused when the unconscious, erratic and random practices we identify become a systematic and deliberate skill in the hands of the corporation.

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A PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF  
CONCEPTUALIZING BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE

Omar AKTOUF

INTRODUCTION

These days, trying to say something new or original on the subject of interpersonal relationships in the industrial workplace is, without doubt, a perilous task.

However, it seems to us that there remains much to be studied and understood, in a field where some believe that they have seen it all. In our opinion, the mass of the iceberg remains to be explored; particularly concerning what happens, in human and social terms, within the being of the worker; what he lives and feels «inside», while at work in an industrial setting.

How does this person, the workman, live his relationship with the ways of the working world and how can we explain his «experience»? What does this relationship signify from the point of view of the person? Does it compete with his «ontological security»<sup>(1)</sup>, the guarantor of emotional, moral and mental integrity? Might this relationship shed some light on why the workplace suffers from incessant social conflicts, in spite of an arsenal of «human and democratic» methods currently in vogue in the entire industrial world? As. R. Laing stated: «The quantitatively interchangeable grist that goes into the mills of reliability studies and rating scales is the expression of a processing that we do on reality, not the expression of the process of reality» (1969, p. 39).

Might an anthropological (in the larger sense of the term) approach permit us to better understand the problem, while maintaining a safe distance from the persistent vision of «economic» man which often dominates the work-place?

We have, therefore, studied the «holistic» perspective that is found in the relationship between phenomenology, science of the individual, and social anthropology, to make up a basis for the type of observation and analysis used<sup>(2)</sup>.

The result has been appropriately named «participant-observation» (observation by an insider). This consists of «living» among the persons to be studied, and observing «from the inside» as in the field ethnology of B. MALINOWSKI<sup>(3)</sup>. The researcher must take into account his own position as «observer» and «participant», while integrating his own experience as completely as possible in the process of description, and analysis. This approach resolves - at least partially - the delicate problem of the «relative psychological space» that all observers occupy<sup>(4)</sup>.

In real terms, this involved being hired as a seasonal employee in two beer brewing factories of comparable size, technology, age, business volume and organization ... one in the Montreal area and the other in the suburbs of Algiers. There we «lived» (worked at all the jobs, shared the breaks, the meals, and the professional life in general of the workmen in the bottling divisions) in all close to eighty-five days, in two periods between July 1981 and March 1982, imitating the pattern set by our illustrious predecessors<sup>(5)</sup>. The result of this «field work» was a daily journal or logbook, of about five hundred little notebook pages and about one hundred «in depth» discussions with the workers, unionists, foremen, directors, and engineers. Before proceeding to the essential outcome of the study, (i.e. the data) we think it appropriate to furnish a few details concerning our analytical method.

In beginning with a global methodology, decidedly «softer» than «tradition» would have it, it is quite natural that we adopted an eminently qualitative viewpoint, both non-formal, and «non-objective» for the resulting analysis. Our principal inspirations here were the School of Semiology<sup>(6)</sup>, as well as, and especially the Schools of British Social Anthropology<sup>(7)</sup>, and that of Antipsychiatry<sup>(8)</sup> of J.P. SARTRE<sup>(9)</sup> and G. DEVEREUX<sup>(4)</sup>. This permitted us to better place human work as an «act», i.e. one of the various modalities of being part of this world, an act in particular that we should recognize, analyse, intercept and understand. It is part of a constellation of acts, components of the global act of working, which are successively or

concomitantly, the acts of speaking, feeling, relating, imagining, thinking, reacting and symbolizing... In fact, all are elements that represent the object of one or another of the human sciences.

Here then, is the second aspect particular to our approach as a whole: the use of an analytical grid that calls upon each of the social sciences to account for each of the «acts» inserted in the constellation. Let us be precise however, we are not talking of «encyclopaediaism», nor of a blend of ideas, but an attempt to integrate subjects long forgotten by, and isolated from one another. We will not go to the core of this discussion, as it is not our objective in the present work. This approach permits us to immediately classify any element belonging to the observed situation or to its genesis as pertinent to the research.

One of the outcomes of this integration-reconstitution research and the analysis of all that we observed, shared, and experienced, is that a number of paths of reflection quite unusual to this field appeared. These will be explained to the reader in the form of assorted rubrics and other dimensions which will place them in the context of the process observed, their roles, importance, characteristics, causes, effects...

#### Dimension I: The work, the task, the position

An analysis of modern theories about the workplace (A. GORZ<sup>(10)</sup>, R. CESSIEUX<sup>(11)</sup>, H. BRAVERMAN<sup>(12)</sup>, S. TERKEL<sup>(13)</sup>) bring us to confirm the following three major conclusions: 1) work is an opportunity, in the factory, to exercise a certain violence, physical and mental, 2) work is «soulless», lacking any significant human or personalised content, 3) work is an «external» activity that guarantees survival, and that is «done more and more «outside» of the worker.

This state of affairs might be explained by the convergence of facts which we discovered in our two breweries.

- Work, as an activity, becomes more and more a simple function of «surveillance»: watch the machine, watch the conveyor, watch the dials, watch the temperatures, watch the flows, watch the men, watch the team leaders, watch the foremen...
- The product through its degeneration towards the state of «merchandise», and towards that of «optimal» economic «output», becomes a pretext for oppression.
- Middle-management and foremen hold, more than ever, the office of «persecuting-babysitters».
- Equipment that contributes to making the man more and more extraneous in the production process.
- The rhythm and implacable mechanical order that turn man into a trapped animal, the whipping boy of the machine.
- The haughty distance of the «firm» and its representatives who «interest themselves only in the bottle-count».
- The similar distance maintained by the union authorities or so-called «worker-representatives» who really only look after - at least in our breweries - the interest of their «caste».
- Cutbacks on general expenditures for facilities (canteen and changing rooms in Algiers, and stocking bottles in production areas in Montreal ...) that reduce relentlessly the precarious «comfort» of the workers.

From what we observed, these are all cumulative factors that contribute to the creation of a curious and bizarre concept of productivity: a worker who doesn't look like he is suffering can't be a «productive» worker ... This notion will certainly distance man, more and more radically from his work.

However, the «system» does not lack recovery capabilities. We discovered, from our experiments, at least four very different cases that display industrial flexibility in certain of its adaptations:

- The first practice consists of the most banal type of «conditioning». This conditioning ranges from the «socialist-ethic» to depersonalisation. One example being the worker affected to quality

control: He showed a morbid attachment to «his» electronic eyes, and believed, with the active complicity of his chiefs, that he was responsible, even during his time off, for the «company image»...

- The second practice consists of a refinement of the eternal «divide» and «conquer» principle. In addition to the division by rates of pay, comes division by schedules, by legal status, and by the degree of workplace security. Day shift against night shift, permanents against occasionals, old against new ...
- The third practice, like the fourth, was a real discovery for us: the invention and proliferation in these industrial systems of pompous names to designate perfectly indigent work: Many grand-sounding terms such as «operator» «technician», «technical-assistant», «control»...
- Finally the fourth practice, much less subtle, consists of the exercise of direct violence. This is the systematic «taming», or «subduing» of the workers through work in «purgatory» or temporary status\*, and by all sorts of harrasement and humiliation: \* In both Montreal and Algiers there exists a compulsory period, of from three to eight years, wherein one has a «temporary» status and is paid half salary without any rights and at the mercy of all. A foreman in Algiers even spoke very directly, and very ingeniously, of «wearing down» the occasionnals to make good permanant employees!

There exist, however, two forms of defense that the workmen use against all this. These defenses consist of some curious practices for safeguarding free will and self-determination.

First of all, we retain the attitude observed in both factories, of rejecting security accesories such as safety glasses, masks, and ear plugs... They are, in theory, compulsory, but like everything else that does not «impede production» they are simply overlooked... From what we observed (and heard occasionnally), this attitude could be prompted by two «motives»: masochistic behavior, (being aware of all the harmful factors and assorted traumatisms that bottling operations conceal) or the realization of an objective reason

for withdrawal from work. In both cases, the object is the same, to have the freedom to decide for oneself.

After that, there is the curious case of the «dumpguys» in Montreal and the «skidders» (a position consisting of decapping waste bottles and piling the full cases on transport skids all day) in Algiers. They exhibit a conscious and «enthusiastic» desire to remain in these detested positions. Remaining voluntarily at these work stations effectively removes all possibility of being sent there by the supervisors (some even admit it). Is this conquering a grain of freedom? Is this taking charge? Is this taking away the possibility of pleasure from the supervisor? Is it also self-punishing? From what?

On the basis of what we understand and «feel», it might be punishing oneself while at the same time determining one's fate. By imposing conditions on oneself that permit neither adaptation nor acceptance, one experiences a feeling of «revolt» a feeling often admitted to, by the holders of these positions, in particular.

It might also be self-actualizing behavior, in that one is considered different, and special when representing the «toughs» of a prison. In any case, the working world is far from being a uniform and homogeneous greyness wherein one merely measures the «average» degree of satisfaction or alienation... but one where a fundamental question must be posed: why are these men, in what should be the most normal aspect of their lives, pushed to what one might call perverse behavior? pushed to extremes that one only observes in situations of stress such as war, or prison...?

#### Dimension II: The foremen

We could say in fact «ranked and assimilated»; because for the worker, even the unions and the secretaries are as much as a part of the hierarchy as the foremen and the top management. The same general feeling exists in both breweries. It is the «same gang», an indefinite «chain», united, snobbish, cynical and contemptuous, who act with one

goal in mind: to pressure the worker continuously more and more, using any means, from lies and cruelty to demagoguery.

For the foremen in particular, everywhere they are seen and explicitly designated as «dogs». We should mention, though, the case of «L» the «good foreman» in Montreal (the only case of a foreman «liked» by the workers that we met). He was the only foreman to hold a high «technical diploma» amongst those we met in the two factories. The crushing majority are obviously barely literate. We think that «L» (to whom production is as important as it is to the others, if it weren't he'd lose his job), has a «tacit contract» with the management: they permit him to be «good» but he will never advance in the hierarchy. His diplomas, his experience, and his seniority could open the doors to prestigious positions for him, but they never will...

Is there a relationship between the level of education and the perverse behavior of the foreman? There is clearly an inverse one. We wondered why management strangely names quasi-illiterates for these positions. The answers supplied by the directors interviewed are completely edifying. They claim «not to have the choice». They state that many workers often educated, «refuse to advance in the ranks»... It is true in fact, that many workman refuse «their promotions»... they do not want to become «dogs».

In the same vein, we have the foreman «B» (the most hated foreman in Algiers): He explained to us how he conceives his roles; «I use the «occidental» method»... «no buddy-buddy stuff with me, I keep my distance». He is the least educated of all the foremen there... Taking these elements together, is it surprising that he is viewed as the worst foreman in Algiers? His internalisation of the job is similar to the way «S» (the «dog of dogs» as he is called by the Montreal workers) internalizes his: «no mixing, no fraternizing, no «Mr. Nice Guy». What is it in the system that pushes the less cultivated, and probably less intelligent, to hold such convictions? Management vehemently defends itself to the point of «deploring» these convictions. The foremen, on the other hand, know that management approves, and they say so! Again

we note a tacit contract, and an old tradition that is passed down «from foreman to son», on the job, ignoring all the grand theories that specialists in «gentle-productivity» have dreamed up over the last seventy-five years.

There is something perverse and sadistic here. When the «big boss» passes by, he must see terror in the faces of the employees. In the words of the workers, «the management wants them (the foremen) to be ferocious», «they are here just to create tension».

### Dimension III: The narcissistic component in relationships with others

The mechanism, well known in psychoanalysis, of using someone else to build our own «self» and using one's own image to establish a relationship with someone else is neither new nor original. Because of the obscure concepts that form the basis of this theory, we never would have thought of using it. However, the clarity of both Montreal situation and that of Algiers brought it to the fore.

These are neither simple words nor abstract theories, it is something that is lived, seen, and determines the behaviour of persons. It is «L» who will trigger the fundamental question: «to like oneself» is essential in determining the quality of one's relationships with the workers. The worker's relationships with him also play a compelling role in this «liking oneself». Let us look at the case of «D» («L»'s counterpart in Algiers). He evidently «likes himself», he is also better educated, and declared unanimously «good» by the workers. Twice then, in similar circumstances, but disparate environments, we see the blatant and irrefutable phenomenon showing that in the working world one has to have a good relationship with oneself to be able to get along with others. A positive relationship is at the base, narcissistic, but is Narcissus there?

Is the narcissistic dimension, so essential to human relationships, possible, even conceivable, in a situation where everyone lives as infrapersons, and are treated as such? How can this narcissism



be conveyed when the day-to-day dimensions of the workplace are so degrading and depressing? Can one establish and maintain a positive relationship between and among people that say, «I'm sick of myself», «I'm going to end up hating myself», «I'm a vegetable, a «cow», a «convict», a «member of the living-dead»? It is as if their work and their working conditions are causing their decay... Is it this situation, this negative narcissistic relationship, that after many years, creates the phenomenon of the «bad» foreman?

#### Dimension IV: The place and role of speech

Let us recall that talking and being able to talk contribute greatly, from what we observed, in establishing a balance and in maintaining a certain «morale». This comes to mind when we consider our two particular groups, the «dumpers» and the «skidders». They have, quasi-officially, the use of speech as a compensation for the particular tediousness of the position they have «chosen». For them, talking to one and another is one of the principal reasons for their choice of task, and they know it.

Furthermore, we can very realistically suppose that the generally less tense atmosphere in Algiers is due greatly to the fact that the work stations are closer together, the workers are more numerous, and verbal exchanges easier and more tolerated.

It is interesting to note that the workers will consider «good», the foreman that talks. The foremen identified as being «bad» call themselves «unfriendly», «non-talkers», they keep their distance and they deliberately avoid contact.

From a different angle, there seems to be a close link between the position held, the type of work performed, and the tendency to talk. In fact, we noticed that more the position was insignificant, more the holder was talkative. Following this observation, the hypothesis occurred to us that the employee feels «driven» to talk in order to «compensate» for the «lowliness» of his task... The «dumpers» and the

«skidders» were by far the most loquacious... an essential lesson in linguistics came to mind; i.e. the idea that «the act of talking is a component of being» made known by E. BENENISTE<sup>(14)</sup>. This is strikingly evident when one witnesses the incessant chattering of our «skidders» and «dumpers»... The more one is «deconstituted», by what one does, the more one «reconstitutes» oneself by what one says?

It remains to be seen what «significant content» is conveyed by these streams of words. Without a doubt, it is a world not only unthought of, but unthinkable...

It remains also, to explain in an acceptable manner the cases at the other end of the scale, those who hold more prestigious positions and who talk less. In our view, it would not be at all unrealistic to think that the act of «talking to oneself» constitutes an act of being; one falls back on a certain «interior dialogue» but is not really «driven to talk»...

One feels it worthwhile to take note of the role «talking» plays in the two situations. It is an important point of distinction between a «good» and «bad» foreman, a major attribute of the «preferred» positions, something for which the management and the unions (which do not talk to the workers) are blamed, a fundamental condition for relaxing and for a relaxed atmosphere, a factor of designation, a contrario, - of he that wants to become a boss - (one does not talk if one wants to «climb»), a factor of moderation in the harshness of the working conditions... Moreover, it seems to be something which is at stake, something one fights for; management tries to banish it and the worker seeks it, even if it means accepting the most hated positions.

#### Dimension V: The problem of general ethos

We borrow this concept of «ethos» from ethnologist G. BATESON<sup>(15)</sup> as meaning «the general emotional tone of a group, productive or reproductive of a certain continuity of «culture» and «common feeling».

The «emotional climate» shared in each of the breweries is a fact and a decisive reality. This «ethos» is, in both cases, dominated by a moroseness and a moral lassitude. We would like to mention as evidence two «jokes» that we witnessed: the extremely sad «baptism» of a newly-wed in Montreal and the brutal «awakening» of an older worker who failed to «go down fighting» in Algiers<sup>(16)</sup>.

Among other characteristics of this phenomenon we retain:

- (1) The denial of speech: to talk is to cheat, to steal...
- (2) The denial of personal status: the degradation of the person through what one does and the manner in which one is treated...
- (3) All the cases of mental degeneration, neurological and physical that we observed in the workers of all ages come to mind, i.e. early senility, nervousness, twitches, pulmonary diseases, cutaneous allergies, cardiovascular problems, mythomania, megalomania, ... without mentioning the diverse behavioral perversities and ... alcoholism!
- (4) Finally, many disillusionments appear to us to be an active enough factor here; from the firm to the government by way of management, the foremen, the administrators, the shop-stewards... This is nothing more than hostility, indifference or malevolence. Even «climbing», «establishing oneself» is no longer interesting, for playing the game is in the end too costly. The worker finds himself backed up against the wall, trapped...

We do have a couple of hypotheses, completely intuitive, about how this ethos «functions» within our two breweries:

The first suggests that everyone has a chance to «find himself», a sort of «repersonalising» by identifying with his peers. This hypothesis developed from the observation of daily, numerous «confirmation rituals» where the common «ethos» is shared and continued. These «rituals» would consist essentially of verbal and gestural exchanges signaling that the «speaker» is still part of «the group» and «reassuring» himself that he is being listened to. These exchanges

invariably express «ethos» strengthening elements such as, «another day at the grind», «how long til' quitting time», «it's going as well as can be expected», «things never get better»...

Another role our «ethos» might play is permitting, up to a certain point, a form of acceptance of one's lot. Certainly sharing makes the situation more bearable and maintaining of a common emotional flow assures solidarity amongst the employees. In fact, this second might be seen as a multiple function. It implies socialization, collective conscience and group consolidation all simultaneously.

What's more, this «ethos» guarantees a certain autonomy of being (a form of action) which can be translated into more «concrete» actions such as the volunteering for the most degrading tasks.

Basically, what we have just analysed is a very common phenomenon found principally in prisons, deportation camps, and segregated minorities. Socially speaking, it is nonetheless strange that we are led to approach factory workers as segments of humanity that are subjugated to violence. We become even more convinced on considering the «paroxysm cases» wherein the development of violent feelings and death drives are evident. Claude, Amar, Patrick and Halim... are workers in Montreal and Algiers driven by the desire to kill others or themselves... because of that they experience at work!<sup>(16)</sup>.

#### Dimension VI: The problem of organisational variables and representation systems

By «organizational variables», we mean essentially the consequences of the actions (or the image) of those directors whose influence is felt directly within the factory. Firstly, we note that their conception of their conception of their role, with the foremen and management personnel, displays a common and extremely strict production-oriented vision, in both breweries. Management in Montreal

though, appears much more «lucid» since it is conscious that things «are not going well» with the workers.

Then there is the problem of management style itself. In both cases the style is very similar in that it displays a strict linear - authoritarian philosophy of management.

Thirdly, we would say that the motivation or punishment/reward systems are either completely Taylorian, in the primitive sense of the term, or, as in Algiers, based on a combination of «nepotism-taylorism», with the first predominating. The accent in Montreal on «christmas visits», «gifts», and «letters from the management»... shows a very simplistic and inconsistent conception of motivation when we associate it with a management type based on fanatical discipline, a multiplicity of restrictions and the adversity of foreman/employee.

In any case, it is evident from the interviews with the different directors that they are stuck with the «poverty» of their philosophies, the extreme narrowness of their convictions and the archaism of their concepts. It is, by the nature of the violence exercised, a XIXth century factory system!

All one has to do is to examine their idea of a «good foreman», or even more so, a «good worker» to be convinced of it. The first should be an overseeing policeman and the second should be like «soft putty» that can be moulded (a «young» and «omniconsenting» worker is ideal for the administrative director in Algiers). In every case the worker is a «child», «irresponsible», a «bum», a «ragger», a «good-for-nothing», and an object from whom one must «draw the maximum»... Taylor himself did not even go that far!

Can one imagine such managerial convictions in a system that is supposedly non-capitalist and fundamentally aware of the workers lot? Why then, do they «encourage» this type of foreman? Why do the head offices of these firms (prosperous, established and prestigious) designate such directors at the dawn of the XXIst century?

According to both examples, the «field» is still enjoying «the roaring 20's!»... Whatever the official long term goals, if we look at the «improvement projects» of either management, we are even more surprised, «control with a lighter hand», «encourage togetherness», «have competitions», «a company newspaper», «seek identification». This is either guilelessness or cynicism - hardly believable! We are just starting to touch on measures that date back to prehistoric «Human Relations»!

This all contributes in a certain manner to the creation and maintenance of a dramatic gap between the representation systems of the three levels: management, foreman and worker.

Management creates a suitable image for itself, full of certainties and dogmatic approximations. The general tone of this image is «profitability first», maintained by the worship of provisions and figures, and a maximal distance from the workers, whom are basically «unreliable». This is accompanied by a cheerful speech on «forming-a-united-family».

The foreman is the direct adversary of the worker, where in the latter is «ignorant», «incapable», or «dissolute». Here, it is the worship of production reports and surveillance harassment that count.

The shop-stewards find themselves immediately on the «other side» from the workers. Their role in this system of symbol-production is, particularly in Algiers, to repeat incessantly - echoing the management and the political power - slogans and antiquated work codes.

As far as the workers are concerned, all that is left for them to do, is to forge their own discourse. They do so through what they see, experience and feel. This leaves them to draw but one conclusion: the blatant fact that they have been made fools of.

Is it then surprising that the prevailing system of social relationships is a system charged with hostility, malevolence and

distrust, where everyone is forced to defend the particular attributes of his own «world».

#### CONCLUSION

As far as «openings» in theory are concerned, we were able to establish that the origin of the problem in question rests with the failure of the classic presentation of the individual in the workplace. We are not alone in holding this opinion; many authors such as, J.Y. CARO<sup>(17)</sup>, A. GORZ<sup>(10)</sup> and H. BRAVERMAN<sup>(12)</sup> share our point of view. We maintain that the failure is twofold: firstly, from a theoretical point of view, where the mechanistic and economical visions of human behavior are dominant; and secondly, from an operational point of view, where social conflicts remain incessant in the workplace and throughout the industrialized world.

The sciences of organizational behavior (necessarily involved) have therefore missed their objective, both in intellectual and in field terms. One of the leaders in the field, F. HERZBERG<sup>(18)</sup> therefore suggested that the industrial reality will have to be interrogated differently...

Being faithful to a long tradition, we propose that the act of working is an act of the whole being, irreducible into simple economic characteristics, and attributable to the totality of the being of the person. We are not inventing anything, we are giving to this act its fundamental ontological dimension.

At the same time, however, we face the necessity of solving the methodological problem: how might one effect this analysis?

Earlier, we alluded to the ethnological method in our analysis. It is advisable here to mention complements of the analysis that are suitable in order to better justify the passage from the ontological meaning of work to the implementation of direct observation.

Having acknowledged the ontological component as being basic to the act, the rest of the process falls into place almost on its own. We call it the phenomenological process; which integrates purpose and experience. Space limits us here to describe the evolution from phenomenology to participant observation, but let us say simply that it goes beyond a «simple description», incorporating the «study» of behavior and the particular «experiencing» of that behavior<sup>(19)</sup>. This is what R. LAING calls «social-phenomenology». Briefly, it describes the basis for understanding «the being of man» and the foundation of the «science of persons» which would prevent «reifying» man as most social-scientific methods do.

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CONFERENCE ON INDUSTRIAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT

ON SEPTEMBER 5-6, 1986, AT THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
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This interdisciplinary conference will explore the causes, consequences and solutions of industrial crisis problems. Crises caused by major industrial accidents, product injuries, environmental degradation, and risks to health are frequent and damaging. Such crises cause severe problems for corporations, government agencies, workers and communities. The conference seeks to consolidate existing understanding of industrial crisis problems, develop a research agenda relevant to contemporary societal needs, and establish a network of academicians, and decision-makers in industry and government who are interested in resolving these problems.

We invite contributions to the conference, which illuminate different aspects of industrial crises. Papers may include case studies of crises and their resolution, and theoretical and/or empirical analysis of crises and organizational responses. We also welcome state of the art evaluations of available knowledge about relevant aspects of industrial safety, disaster research, emergency management, technology transfer, industrialization processes, environmental sciences, risk management, etc. Policy-oriented analyses of corporate, industrial, and economic development issues, and of government and industrial policies for preventing and coping with crises are encouraged.

Co-sponsoring the conference are:

The Graduate School of Business Administration, New York University  
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The Institute of Environmental Medicine, New York University  
The Trinity Center for Ethics and Corporate Policy, New York, NY

A partial list of conference participants includes:

Jim Burke, CEO, Johnson and Johnson, Inc. \*  
Phillip Landrigan, Director, ESC, Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
Barnard Goldstein, Former Assistant Administrator, EPA  
Anthony Mazzocchi, President, Workers Policy Project  
Ian Mitroff, H.Q. Distinguished Professor of Policy, USC  
Rafael Pagan, CEO and Chairman, Pagan International, Inc.  
Charles Perrow, Professor of Sociology, Yale University  
Paul Slovic, Decision Research, Inc.  
William H. Starbuck, ITT Professor of Creative Management, NYU

\* Invited to participate, confirmation awaited

Those wishing to make conference presentations are invited to send a two page abstract, before March 15th, 1986, to:  
Prof. Paul Shrivastava, Management Department, Schools of Business,  
New York University, 611 Tisch Hall, 40 West 4th St., New York, NY 10003  
Tel. No. (212) 598-2204

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INVITATION

SCOS CONFERENCE IN HULL 1986

Further to discussions in Antibes and Trento about the possibilities of a meeting in Europe during 1986 for those who cannot or will not attend the Montreal Conference: We may be able to organise such a meeting in the UK, at the University of Hull. In order not to clash with the Montreal Conference, we are suggesting the beginning of September (or late August?). This is a convenient date with regard to the UK academic year, but we do not know how it fits in with other people's requirements.

As regards content, our inclination is towards dealing with theoretical issues rather than reporting empirical research, and to consolidate some of the issues which have already been raised in the forum of SCOS. The emphasis would be on themes rather than on individual papers, and on discussion rather than presentation - that is, discussion of issues, not of specific papers. This does not mean that people should not prepare and present formal papers if they want to, but that this would not be the main form of our activities. With regard to this, we would not want to have 'multi-tracking', but would want a fairly flexible structure. Our overall aim would be to switch the focus from information to communication.

Examples of possible themes which might be discussed, and which have

already been raised at SCOS meetings, might be power, legitimization, fragmentation, ideology, metatheories, cynicism, immortality, language, etc., as they relate to organisational symbolism.

One possibility would be to dedicate half a day to each particular theme, such as cultural fragmentation, with someone making a short introduction (perhaps someone who has a specific interest and familiarity with that topic), acting as a fuse to a more general discussion, which would not necessarily be in plenary session, depending upon the inclinations of the participants. Our ideal would be to create a sort of pavement cafe ambience.

THESE ARE ONLY SUGGESTIONS. Can we have some feedback and/or counter suggestions? Also, comments on time and venue would be welcome.

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