Heterophony and the Postponed Organization Organizing autopoietic systems

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Abstract
Organisational systems communicate and create themselves through decisions and therefore consist of nothing but premises for decision making (Luhmann 1993, Seidl & Becker 2006). Organisations are founded on principles of exclusion: *Everybody is excluded from organisational communication except those who are members of the organisation* i.e. who are included in the decision-making (Luhmann 1982, 1994, 2003, Andersen 2003b). Membership limitation, without subscribing to a rigid definition of membership, is therefore central to the autopoiesis of organisation.
Key words: heterophony, Luhmann, functional systems, codes.

INTRODUCTION

Functional systems are societal systems such as the law, political economy, education and art. They apply to the society as a whole, and contain no membership requirements. In principle, everybody can participate. By contrast organisations, they are functionally closed in regard to their definition of their own function in society. Functional systems have evolved over centuries. One of their basic evolutionary conditions has been the creation of *symbolically generalised media* (Luhmann 1989, 1997). Such symbolically generalised media are *general* in the sense that they can function as media to any kind of communication and about anything. For example, everything can be communicated in terms of money. Everything in principle can be priced. Symbolically generalised media are *symbolic* in the sense that each system is condensed around a single symbol. If we take the economic system, the symbol is coins, bank notes, and (currently) credit cards. The code of the system is understood as a basic and unambiguous binary preference between positive and negative values. Codes are, so to speak, packages of binary expectations. The fact that the codes are binary, means that the whole world can be made comprehensible through the dichotomy of the code. In the eyes of the economy, the world can be summed up in have/not have, in 'what I have and what I do not have'. Society differentiated into such functional systems is a society differentiated into heterogeneous communications systems that depend on each other but are unable to communicate across the system boundaries. Each system is a totality that operates autopoietically (Luhmann 1990). They can observe each other, but never communicate with one another. Law communicates in the code 'legal/illegal', economy in 'have/not have', education in 'better/worse', politics in 'power superior/inferior' and so on. Organisational decisions cannot be communicated unless they fit into one of the media of the functional systems. Accordingly, organisations and functional systems constitute each other's external environments, but organisational systems are always linked to at least one functional system by capitalising on the symbolically medium of that functional system. Organisational systems operate with a horizon of premises instead of a code of their own, which is precisely what allows for a multiplicity of codifications.

A *monophonic organisation* is primarily linked to one functional system and

has, therefore, one primary codification regulating it. The code formed by the organisation when describing and programming itself is fixed and stable. Within a monophonic organisation, what initiates a given code is structurally fixed, e.g. in the form of the economy, or the legal department, or politics, etcetera. The organisation is internally differentiated in such a way that its sub-systems can hold different codes without this leading to a clash in codes. But an increasing number of organisations do not have a primary link to one functional system - i.e. unambiguous expectations no longer regulate the choices of premises in their decision-making. An increasing number of organisations form several codes without a stable hierarchy. The relationship between organisational system and functional system is arbitrary and is even perceived as such within the organisation. Accordingly we *define* an organisation as being *heterophonic* when it contains more function systems without any of them having ultimate primacy (Andersen 2003a, Andersen 2000). The organization always has a multiplicity of codes available to it, and the horizon of its premises is volatile, fragile, and intrinsically temporary.

From a second order perspective, heterophony means that an increasing number of media are available to an increasing number of organisations. Not only are the media available to communicate functionally delimited themes but also for the overall self-description. The heterophonic organisation does not have the option of "departmentalising" its functional systems so that a particular subsystem can only concern a particular organisational sub-system. The heterophonic organisation is characterised by a continuous failing attempt to create primary codification. Each symbolically generalised medium has a binary coding --- plus for continuation and minus for breaking and reflection. Each time the code changes, new light is shed on what has been decided --- 'decisions' are heterogeneous, unending and multi-interpretable. Even the medium for decisions about decisions, cannot be

presupposed or stabilized.

In the heterophonic organisation incomparable values clash and no single value is able to capture and represent unity. An attempt to install some sort of super-value would only increase the complexity. The super-value would merely descend to the level of the other values and thus add to the complexity. The fundamental strategic problem for the heterophonic organisation is how to create and/or recreate an horizon of premises. Ultimately the very referential capacity for the concept 'organization´ evaporates. Not a polyphonic organization, not even a heterophonic organization, but pure "heterotopia" remains.

Heterophony and hetero-contextuality

Although it is impossible to establish a super-code within the organisation, it *is* possible to communicate about communication. Communication cannot be established across codes, but codified communications can thematize one another. However, no matter how reflexive the communication is, each communication is still relegated to its own code, its assumptions inclusive blind spots and its meaning boundary. Hence, communication is not only heterophonic, but also *hetero-contextual* (Günther 1978). There are at least as many constructions of the world as there are codes of observation. In the figure below, we try to chart the way communications appear from each other's point of observation. We have tried to represent the way 'love', 'economy', 'mass media' and 'pedagogy' appear when observed through one another's codes. We include only five functional systems and hope this is sufficient to allow the reader to grasp our line of thinking. The code through which communication takes place is decisive for the way an item is constructed. We have chosen not to fill in the field where a particularly coded communication observes itself, as this entails self-reference and paradox. For example, in the case of law, law observing

law is faced with the paradox of whether the code 'right/wrong' is itself 'right' or 'wrong' (Luhmann 1992).

The relationship between heterophony and hetero-contextuality pertains to everything that can be thematized within the organisation, including the organisation itself. Self-observation of the organisation is not beyond codification, but always appears as an operation inside one the codes of one of the functional systems.

Context presented as an observation matrix

	Law Observed	Love	Economy	Mass media	Pedagogy
Law as observer	XXXXX	Love is observable as a disruptive fact and occasionally an actual legal fact: motive	Economy is observable as legal fact in relation to the evaluation of motives, and entirely pervades the notion of the subject	Mass media are observed as public control but also as the risk of a derailment of the legal communication and the possibility of a just decision	Pedagogy is observable as legal recognition of formal qualifications
Love	Love can observe law as its ultimate contrast	XXXX	Love can observe economy as the boundary of anticipation	Mass media are observable as a space within which one can declare ones intimacy in public	Pedagogy is observable as a specific forming of love "in loco parentis"
Economy	Economy can observe law as possible forms of transactions and punishment as the price of a particular kind of behaviour	Love is observable as a product which can or cannot be bought	XXXX	Mass media are observable as a space where market developments can be traced as news	Pedagogy is observable as priced competencies which therefore becomes a sparse resource
Mass media	Law is observable as a particular journalistic genre and provider of news	Love is observable as a particular journalistic genre etc.	Economy is observable as a particular journalistic genre etc.	XXXX	Pedagogy is observable as a particular journalistic genre etc.
Pedagogy	Law is observable as a necessary but problematic evaluation authority for learning	Love is observable as the precondition of engaged learning	Economy is observable as an obstacle or means of learning	Mass media are observable as a specific social medium for education	XXXX

Shifters

We have described in more or less explicit terms why organizations cannot define and command their own simple decision premises. Organisation is more founded by communicative premises, than it is able to determine them. But what then initiates the communications and sets them on certain tracks and not others? A key assumption is that there is no fixed (bureaucratic) relation

between premises and codes in organizational interactions. There is only communication and the "mechanisms" or elements of communication are always systems relative. Therefore, we must seek our answers inside communication. We could focus on communicative interactions, i.e. on actual moments of communication. However, even if this is the plane of actualization, it is not the level of explanation. Even observation of this level of interaction, demands a systems gaze. What we need to conceptualise is how the functional system determines which events initiate it, as well as the conditions for shifts in code. First there are merely the codes that initiated communication and the switching points between the codes, which we call 'shifters'. A shifter initiates codified communication. Shifters do not exist outside the functional system. Functional systems contain shifters that initiate communication (Jakobsen 1982: 153 ff.). Shifters are systems relative. Any functional system needs an initiator, and the initiators or shifters do not reside in the environment of the system but belong to the system, and must be produced by the system on its boundary. Shifters ensure that the functional system localises events in its environment as possible occasions to initiate communication. Shifters define occasions for meaning.

Communicative shifters in different functional systems

How does the functional system make itself available for communication themes in organisation? In the communication the 'law', *rights* serve as the communicative shifter. It is not enough that something in the environment is defined as just or unjust, or that the communications contradict one another. Not until a 'right' can be articulated as having possibly been violated, can 'law' initiate itself, i.e. view the theme and reconstruct it. For example, the legal system is unable to intervene against ruthless exploitation of a specific natural resource, unless someone is able to claim this resource. There has to be a 'bearer of the rights' - i.e. a legal subject - in

order for the law to be initiated. The history of the concept of 'law' therefore also entails the history of the legal discourse (not) applying to different societal spheres. In rough terms, the development over the past three hundred years started with 'rights' as a privileges individuals had to apply for and justify through status. Rights were viewed as one amongst a number of personal privileges called 'citizenry'. Subsequently, rights become universalised: Initially the rights of men -- of a specific age, status and wealth --- were secured; then men of all ages; then women; and today rights are assigned to the individual from birth. Rights have become differentiated into economic rights, political rights, personal rights, etc. Moreover, collectives and groups have been assigned specific rights: such as organisations gaining the status of legal subject in a number of contexts. Finally, over the past decades we have started to assign rights to various discourses; we speak of the interests of 'nature', the interests of the 'child', the interests of the 'city', the interests of the 'landscape', etc. It is no longer necessary for a legal subject to speak for her- / himself, as long as an advocating instance is established which can be authorised to speak on behalf of the legal subject (Teubner 1997). Thus, the law has extended its possibilities for intervention in its environment. Not only has the law been able to assign new rights to established legal subjects, it has also created new legal subjects. We have used the 'law' as our example because it seems the clearest and most obvious, as the system of 'law' contains an inherent and explicit justificatory plane. The other functional systems do not have this to the same degree

In the communication of 'love', in which the code is 'loved/not loved' and the communication is expressive, we have to observe *highly personal declarations* as shifters. Not until the declarations of the Other can be received as a highly personal declarations (positive or negative) can 'love' begin communication. Whether the declaration is perceived very directly and literally ('I love/hate you'), or as an indirect sign (she always takes the seat next to you, pays

attention to you, etc), it defines the Other as 'significant other'. It is central in communication of 'love' that the receiver is able to (re-)construct a statement of the highly personal declaration (Luhmann 1986). What counts as a 'highly personal declaration' is variable both historically and socially. There is basically no limit to what can be perceived as a 'highly personal declaration' if the receiver is sufficiently sensitive. Still, there are preferred interpretative patterns for the reading of "the other" in different spheres and times. Different signs of highly personal declarations are developed differently depending on the social sphere.

The heterophony of the shifters leads to a double de(con)struction of organization. On the plane of organizing, autopoietic systems and their idiosyncratic shifters prevail, and on the plane of existence (or the reproduction of membership), actual participation is crucial. As a consequence, decision-making is continuously challenged in terms of its 'organizational fit or appropriateness' and its 'individual or social validity'. This heterophonic condition destabilizes the organizational identity and legitimacy.

The different shifters of the function systems

System	Medium	Code	Shifter
The system of law	Existing Law	Right/wrong	Rights
The educational system	Child	Better/worse learning	Preconditions
The political system	Power	Regulator.regulated	Shared matter
The system of love	Anticipation	Loved/not loved	Highly personal declarations
The economic system	Money	Paying/not paying	Commodity
The help system	Care	Help/not help	Diagnoses

Shifter capacity

Even if systems are autopoietic and operationally closed, they are sensitive to their contexts and able to couple to other systems. The individual functional system can maintain itself as binding or initiating to other codification systems. This is its *shifter capacity*. We define *shifter capacity* as the capacity of an individual code for internal coupling to differently codified communications. It pertains to the code's capacity to make excursions into codes different from its self. The assumption is that we cannot deduce our way to a general definition of shifter capacity, but will have to study the ability of the individual systems.

The law contains legal conditions for shifting in the form of procedures for extra-legal discourse, in the same way that it contains a potential recognition of the value of the conflict resolution of other discourses. There are procedures for the interruption of legal communication in legal proceedings, e.g. for the discussion of the mental condition of a defendant in a medical communication; and for the subsequent return to the legal communication after the medical digression. There are even institutions, which focus entirely on this shift of codes, namely that perform medico-legal examinations. But motives and psychological factors only exist for the law insofar as it has developed a language for motivational meanings.

Moreover, the time dimension in 'law' is retrospective, which means that everything appears within an objectified space. Membership, that is the expected right to communicate (inclusion), is externalised from the communication itself. In addition, the legal codification inevitably re-enters the differentiation right and wrong, which makes it possible to observe for instance the psychological codification, without a shift of code.

The communication of love can recognise external conditions of love, but the articulation of intimacy is not open to shifts of code, since most shifts of code would imply a disintegration of the universality of the relationship. The status of the actant is not external to the communication. This applies to time and space, which can be included in 'love' only as signs in the expressive presence. Accordingly, the shift back to the code of love, from other codes, is most problematic. From the perspective of the code of 'love', a reference to 'rights' by the other person can almost only be read as "not loved". Since the codification is characterized by highly inclusive expressive communication, and hence allows for everything to become a sign, any shift in the code risks negation. In addition, the code does not allow for re-entry, which makes it inflexible.

Shifting capacity and risk are summed up in the following diagram:

Code	Shifting capacity	Risk
Right/wrong	Great	No risk
Loved/not loved	Small	Risky
Paying/not paying	Limited	No risk
Better/worse learning	Limited	Risky
Regulator/regulated	Great	Limited

In effect, the individual codes continuously (re-)define the horizon for the shifts of code, both through their capacity for initiation and through their degree of inclusion and exclusion of the "alter". Each codification defines its participants. But in the heterephonic organisation there exists no pervasive definition of the "alter". Thus in heterophony there is always risk involved in the shifting capacity. The movement between inclusion and exclusion may disrupt the boundary and jeopardize systemic identity. Each code has legitimized Others in mind and by implication Others it cannot support.

In an organisational context, the *legal codification* holds the expectation that the Other is both a legal subject as well as an organisational participant. Membership is given in (and through) communication and is not necessarily threatened by temporary shifts of code. This is completely different in the *codification of love* (as the opposite extreme). In the codification of love, "the other" is either completely involved or not relevant at all; and any statement can define in- ex-clusion. In this situation, a person who becomes "non communicado" is perceived as a non-person, or to put it differently: In an organisation that is articulated in the code of love, one is a member as long as one participates in the communication. The risk of exclusion is high and the possibilities of playing around on the boundary are limited.

Since we define 'organisation' as a decision system or machine based on membership, what is particularly interesting is the way in which the code (re-)defines membership, that is, in- and ex- clusion as relevant "alter". Codifications define profound differences not only with respect to who can

become "alter," but also with respect to what it means in time and space to be "alter." In other words, heterophony means that different memberships, or qualitatively different participations in communication, are not bridged. But what does this mean for the concept of organisation?

'Organisation' as a semantic trick

The communicative space of organization is functionally heterophonic in terms of observers / observed and their shifters, as well as in terms of the actant's codes and identities. 'Organisation' in the singular refers to an essence, which does not exist. But 'organisation' in the singular is highly popular today on a first-order level of identity ("We at Lego"), as well as on a second-order level (via the ascription of agency and responsibility to the organisation - "Lego is (no longer) a force for innovation"), and even on a third-order level where the organisation is observed as an observer of the social - "Lego has had to understand when to support democracy and participation." But there is little consistency in these ascriptions. The 'we' of the organisation-in-the-singular is a semantic trick, which in itself creates the 'organisation' as noun and subject. The postulated membership remains an empty speech position and will remain that way whether spoken of on first-, second- or third-order level. It is, however, a highly potent semantic trick because it can be used in an endless number of contexts and varying exchanges. First-order speaking of organization sticks to established identities, frameworks and operations; second-order speaking claims to control, modify and/or change the (some) organizational principles of identity and operation; and third-order speaking claims awareness and influence over the reflexivity, awareness and paradigms which the schemata that create, define and sustain cognition of organization depend on. The organisation emerges differently depending on the position from which it is articulated. The concept of 'organization' changes in each code:

Code	Organisational picture
Right/wrong	The organisation is viewed as a formal structure and is usually perceived as a hierarchic framework of decisions and competences. The reference to the law allows for ascription of responsibility both internally and externally
Better/worse educationally	The organisation is perceived as a project and a resource. Pedagogy allows for the ascription of the individual to a (learning) position
Loved/not loved	The organis-ation is an emotional and physical unit of reproduction like the 'family' or other primary groups. The reference to love opens up an expressive space in a shift from "Gesellschaft" to "Gemeinschaft"
Paying/not paying	The organ-isation is a form of exchange entailing a reduction in transaction costs which determines the capacity for action both internally and externally
Superior/inferior in power	The org-anisation is a sovereign domain of decisions, with a 'politics' of decision making

Organisation is observable as a *boundary object*. As an 'object' it is stable enough to be recognisable across the boarders of differently codified communications and sufficiently plastic that it can be ascribed different meanings in each of these communications (Star & Greisemer, 1989, p.393). Organisational reference does not reduce the qualitative differences between the codes. Rather, it allows for oscillation during interactions. 'Organization' is communicatively used to enable codeshifts within the communicative space, without (necessarily) excluding communication participants. 'Organization' seems to create shared referential space but it does not try to bring the autopoietic differences under control *and* thereby the continuation of communication is made possible. Obviously, this creates an enormous pressure on the ascription of meaning or rather, on the establishing of the premises for understanding. When the output of the interaction is meant to relate to concrete future interactions: which premises are to be given authority, and how are they to be stabilized in the oscillating communication?

An initial answer is that the organisational system in the singular simply collapses in the sense that it becomes differentiated into sub- and alternative systems at such a speed that 'organization' is best presented as flexible and random. 'Organization' as first-order meaning collapses. However, that assertion seems empirically unacceptable and only accentuates the need for explanation. Maybe the explanation is that a shift has happened in the very way we speak of 'organisation', a shift away from a first-order level ("We produce pins") to what we called the third-order level, where what becomes articulated are the conditions of flexibility and changeability as such.

Concluding

We no longer operate inside a hierarchy or network of positions. The heterophonic organisation is a semantic trick wherein the conditions of participation in communication are continuously emergent at still higher speeds: that is, an *oscillocracy* (Andersen & Born 2000). Without the assumptions of bounded social systems and stable horizons and/or logics of decision-making, the difference between interaction and expectation disappears. This represents a threat to the symbolical codifications that define 'organization' which are replaced by local expectations. There is no predetermined selection but instead simultaneous alternatives. The feedback mechanisms tied to structural inertia dissolve as the distinction between the receiver and the provider of feedback disappears. Communication systems are forced into the third-order. In the economy, we get a conceptualisation of "embeddedness"; the law has to become responsive; pedagogy must be individually rather than generally educational; and love becomes the only language capable of communicating (Andersen & Born 2001, Andersen & Born 2006, Andersen 2006b).

Heterophonic organisation can be perceived as a system capable of assimilating new conditions, and rather than seeing organisation as a recursive network of decisions tied together by premises, we might perceive organisation as a recursive network of communicative spaces, tied together by multiple factors that are continuously being displaced and (re-)tied together. Organisation becomes a concrete displacement machine that allows for movement into unpredictable spaces while simultaneously tying participants to a horizon of possible pasts. Any codification, any shifter and any coupling both re-territorialise and de-territorialise. The organisation is a concrete machine which consists precisely in the tying together of body, sociality and sign, in communicative space and in decisions that always contain a surplus of unpredictability. This machine no longer presupposes a drive towards hierarchy, top-down control and uniformity. Instead, every decisional event opens up a wealth of new differences, towards which it has to take a stance.

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