

Myths, Managers, and Formats

By

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Abstract

The principal relationships between myths, the kind of reality they generated, and the roles of formats and of top management aligned to this process will be looked at. Due to their ability to generate evolutionary corridors, both myths and their formats resulting confine the possibilities for further development.

Intro

The following is about contemporaneous sacrosanct stories, and their reality-shaping character. How they not only explain 'the world as it is' but actually mould it, through the emergence of formats. Being formats in themselves, due to their religious character which makes them sacrosanct, one may call those stories myths – holy, and therefore true tales. Based upon experiences from having worked inside the contexts of large, internationally active industrial and consultancy organizations, it shall be examined how that formatted world led to a self-referential circle: once generated, the formatted realities of that world now justified the myths which led to them, and the latter in turn led to the emergence of ever new formats.

What astonished most was the circle's autopoietical character, and its sheer power of influencing minds, deeds, and realities. Because in systemic terms, the circle developed an almost perfect operational closure which became recursively stable and through this, triggered so-called eigen-values, i.e. parameters which resulted out of the recursive reproduction of the circle's elements.¹ Formulated less abstract, for those organizations' daily business it meant that myths created their concordant realities, and that the latter served to justify the myths; with all "values" assigned to such a process. Moreover, since those eigen-values solely depend on the system's history of reproduction,

¹ The concept of autopoiesis refers to the original explanation of Maturana/Varela 1980, because it does express best what it's all about: from its Greek origin, the ability to make oneself out of own means. To the related phenomena of operational closure and eigen-values, e.g. Baecker, D. (1999):165.

² once the circle was established it was not only able to endure but to pre-form the whole system's further path of unfolding. Thus, for the participants plus the events ongoing, a developmental corridor arose which led to the phenomenon of an evolution formatted.

The paper's aim is to sketch out that circle for further discussion, and related, the roles of formats, of emergence, and of top management. How certain myths, practiced to curb down complexity – system states caused by essentially non-linear relationships – elicited the opposite, namely complexities' increase. And how the managers as priest kings reacted on it, by the installment of canonical, myth-revealing rituals to convince both their followers and themselves. It is not the point that cultural evolution as such could be interpreted in terms of formats, that former epochs hadn't had their own, genuine formatting specific for them. Or that this was a quite 'natural' outcome of occidental evolution. The point is more practical: to which degrees, and with which consequences can the evolution ongoing now be interpreted as formatting process, affecting *all* domains of our Lebenswelt in an *encompassing* manner. This shall be offered for discussion.

The Setting

Since this paper refers to experiences of a peculiar setting, its characteristics have to be looked at first. Characteristics not confined to a mere 'special case' of specific individual working conditions but reappearing in today's Globalization tendencies, in determining the dynamics and behaviour of so-called global players, large, internationally active corporations trying to conquer their markets, with the final (mythic) aim to achieve an embracing domination of their organizational cosmos, i.e. of both the own organization plus its relevant environment.

The setting's prime characteristic and moulding force was competition, following a principle that advanced to the declared core of Capitalist economy, namely creative destruction.³ Although the managers' mythic desire was to create an order having endurance, and out of this, to implement a rational, planned order truly embracing, the necessity of ongoing destruction became a managerial myth. So, in a paradox movement everything had to be changed constantly for reaching that ideal state of tranquility, the forever rational order as the ideal state of Being – by its very intention, an *end* state since an ideal cannot get improved any more. But to be reached through constant change. Creating anew became a goal for itself, and thus, developed its own dynamics with ubiquitous competition as overall emergence: between different ideal order-concepts, mindsets, firms, even between departments inside one and the same firm (deliberately intended), a world of Thomas Hobbes devoted to a struggle of all against all.

The socioeconomic terrain inside which that struggle took place wasn't very peaceful either. Former Socialist countries had to be converted into a new, and mythically ideal form not simply of economy, but of life as such: the free market. It was a process of conversion, or more precise in terms of actual daily business, of colonizing⁴ that followed one central mythical equation, namely

² Baecker, D.: *ibid.*

³ Schumpeter, J.A. (1943): 83

⁴ In fact, an entire culture – that of former Socialism – was transformed into a new form of life; that hadn't had the change to grow but which was installed via *plan*, following a strategy of deliberate destruction. Culture, Nietzsche said, is unity of style. The new style was forced upon.

free market = democracy = freedom. This myth dominated minds and deeds not only of the colonizers but also of the colonized, who hoped for a better life after the fall of the old system with its official mythology nobody really believed in, even not in times when this system was yet in full power. So, the colonized facilitated the whole process: in their urge for freedom, they wanted the myth to come true. For the colonizers – international consulting firms and large foreign investors, both of Western origin – the premium was on speed of growth, to occupy the niches left by the demise of the former system faster than the competitors, and to create new ones ahead of them.

So, next to ubiquitous competition, another overall emergence was a highly instable and volatile environment. Due to the dynamics elicited by such a development, but also due to the mythology fostering it, in speeding it up to an ever high degree. Are we, the colonized, fast enough to gain paradise? Are we, the colonizers, able to stay ahead of our competitors? What we have to do in order to grow faster than them, to enlarge our position and to avoid extinction? It was an atmosphere of nervous tension moulded by gains & losses, domination and powerlessness, triggering the relentless deed in order to survive through expansion, a Faustian drive longing for the ever more, the never stop.

Myths

In its final terms, a myth can be understood as a holy and therefore true tale, giving guideline to those who believe in it; in explaining the cosmos they live in, irrespective of its concrete shape: the world of a work organization and its relevant environment, of a particular social group, or even of a whole society. Important is myth's cosmological character – myths explain the logos of the respective cosmos, how it came into being, what the reason of its existence is, and what its 'natural' order consists of essentially: why the world is as it is, and derived from that, what our, and the others, positions and roles inside such a world have to be. Myths provide meaning, also in seemingly myth-cleared, secularized worlds like work organizations, and therefore, are identity-creating.⁵

Myth is believed to be true *because* it is believed to be holy, and not vice versa. 'Holy' means that for those who believe in them, myths have a sacrosanct character since they establish the base of every identity, emotional inner order, and this is what makes them to certainties of faith.⁶ The connection between truth and holiness leads to a self-referential circle: as contingent truth, myths have not, and cannot, be argued because they are holy. It is this holy character which makes myths to be more than just a story. A story can be doubted, a holy tale not. The latter does not merely tell something *about* the world (you can tell a lot) but *explains* it. By its essence, this is the very intention every myth has: explanation, and through that, guidance, providing inner orientation for those who believe in it. Of course, such an explanation owns no 'objective' meaning; myth is not scientific law. But an emotional one – it is faith. E.g., for the colonized believing in the free market-myth, it was a certainty of faith that their world will become free through the establishment of a new cosmic order, and that this would lead to *real* personal freedom and hence, to a real better life. For the colonizers, it was a certainty of faith that their mission is to install such an order, and to do so via creative destruction. To question it would have been a sacrilege avenged by severe punishment. Irrespective of their cultural and social origin, for both groups, the myth promised a new cosmos

⁵ See Campbell's four functions of mythology, in: Myth West (German ed. of 1996), pp.590-93

⁶ Rappaport, R.A. (1999), in his chapter "sanctity, unquestionableness, and the truth of things", 293f.

where humans can be really human because they get really free. Judged from a rational perspective, this might sound doubtful. But myth isn't rational. For the believers, it was truth, and without this inner emotional safety, they wouldn't have had the strength to go through colonization.

The example reveals two important features of myth which are assigned to its holiness: First, that every myth owns a narrative core with only marginal capabilities for variation.⁷ Irrespective of its variations and embroideries, the above myths' narrative core was the promise of real freedom, and by that, of real humanity; established by a new cosmos driven by free market forces. Keeping constant over time and variation, the narrative core lends myth a literal religious character: its believers are re-bound to it,⁸ take it as a sanctity which, naturally, becomes immune to criticism then. Second and related, it shows the contingent character of the mythic truth, not only for ancient 'traditional' cultures but also for contemporaneous forms of organized life. The founder of myth research, Schelling, stated that myths are tautegorical, and that each human community is made up by "a community of consciousness" of its members. Upon what else the latter should be grounded "than in a shared vista of the world, and this again, where from it [the vista] can be given to the people, and originally embedded inside them, if not in their mythology?"⁹

Also in recent work organizations, despite differences at different hierarchical levels privileging different myths (not to speak about the 'private myths' of individuals), there exists such a community of consciousness, finally shaped by top management. Because it were those top managers who shaped the organizational experience of all others, in providing the frame conditions for plain everyday life inside the corporation corridors, and emergent, for the experiences in the relevant Lebenswelt¹⁰, the world where that life actually took place. In a literal sense, as Schelling said, myths form the Weltbild of people, their vista of the world, their mindset of what it is all about, the above 'emotional inner order' included. This makes up myths' final power. As long as they were believed in and as such, serve as literal cosmological tales, in telling about the logos, the meaning of the respective cosmos: what we, the participants, religiously think this cosmos is, and therefore, what our mission inside such a cosmos has to be.

In short, and with special respect to their practical appliance, myths own an axiomatic character. Axioms are those principles the inherent truth of which becomes immediately revealed, is clear out of itself: is self-evident, in occidental terms; from Greek axioma, denoting *demand*, or *claim* to be fulfilled, interesting notions in the context dealt with here. An axiom is a principle "...that neither is in need of proof, nor has to be proved at all, and which serves as a base for the proofs of further principles..."¹¹

Those 'further principles' can be certain values and norms, guidelines for the actions of managers, or for how to judge things; the common point is that they are derived from myths, and that the latter generate and maintain a community of consciousness.

⁷ Blumenberg, H. (1996):40

⁸ "Religious" comes from Latin *religare*, to re-bound something to something else, in the meaning of providing anchorage, of some grounds to root in.

⁹ From his lectures on Philosophy of Mythology, quoted in Cassirer (1973):211. To the tautegorical, see Cassirer's Myth of the State, in: Verene, D.Ph., ed. (1979):235

¹⁰ Like the notion of Weltbild, untranslatable. But important: a Lebenswelt denotes the unity of perceiving, feeling, thinking, and acting inside real space. Imagine to take a coffee at an Italian piazza.

¹¹ From Hoffmeister, J. (1955):101

Which leads to a central feature that characterizes contemporaneous myths: they form a community of consciousness although they are not consciously thought. Because opposed to their traditional counterparts, they are not made explicit.¹² Rather, they represent what has been called an unthought known, "...that is known at some level [of consciousness] but has never been thought or put into words, and so is not available for further thinking."¹³

Nevertheless, in the daily context of work organizations, they can be communicated – indirectly, in form of basic assumptions underlying statements and actions. Assumptions about the respective cosmos' nature and our mission which remain implicit, are never outspoken clearly. Although they remain implicit, myths are able to channel both social and physical evolvement, in being able to *format* it; an aspect to return to.

...and Managers

The combination of being unthought and axiomatic makes myths dangerous, especially for those who are in charge with the molding of reality. Because it's easy to see that it depends on the kind of myths which kind of reality does emerge then, as result of their application. This basic causal nexus gets enhanced through a peculiarity of the nowadays mythic: unlike its traditional counterpart, and in addition to be unthought, it is a disguised one. Although they too simultaneously explain and provide "the fundamental facts of life"¹⁴ like their traditional forerunners do, modern myths adopt a rational clothing in that they claim to have an objective, quasi-scientific character. Which makes them even more sacrosanct than their forerunners since this disguise is almost perfect, in those myths' practical performance. Unless questioned, nobody using them thinks of them of myths but of proved since scientifically backed up principles. To provide examples from the (still) dominant management mythology, embodying its pillars at the same time:

Rooted in a central occidental myth of Monotheist origin, namely that mind dominates over matter, the still prominent managerial myth is that man is able to create a world based on his will & conception. No matter what the matters are – things, people, capital, or other managerial "issues" – and no matter the initial circumstances we meet when we have to manage; other cultures, for instance, with their own right to live. Also no matter how we manage, what our style in question is – we can do it in a democratic way, or authoritarian, or...the myth behind style, driving our intentions and performance, it does remain. And for sure, no matter how the others, the non-managers think about it – the affected, for instance, or academic scholars and other critics.

And it is *man* who manages, because a patriarchal mythology finds expression here, a one longing for embracing domination. To subdue the world's phenomena under one's will that forms them according to conception, to the master plan (whereby the very wording reveals the Weltbild behind). The major trait and aim of such a mythology, domination, is assisted by other myths derived from it, the myths of rationality, and of management¹⁵; namely the conviction that everything can, and *must* be managed according to rational principles. That there is nothing which defies a rational grip, that it is therefore possible to erect rational worlds which are not only habitable for human beings but

¹² To further details, see Gehmann, U. (2003)

¹³ Quoted from Lawrence, G. (1999):7, after a conception from Bollas, Ch. (1987)

¹⁴ Bowles, M. (1996)

¹⁵ To more details on the management mythos, see Bowles (op.cit.)

their only place to live – in mythological terms, *cultura*¹⁶ as man's cosmos vs. *natura* the wild, the un-planned, the yet uncivilized.

To reach this is the final intention of both those myths, their mythic aim and hope at the same time. So, their common narrative core is about domination through rationality, and aligned to it, those myths' reification in order that they come true, become reality: to erect a truly human cosmos which is the one of the rational order, of the world as an organized artifact. Like in a town state, a Polis as man's ideal place to live, to separate an Inside = the man-made order, from an Outside = the rest, the others, that what does not own our genuine structure and way of life.

For keeping 'chaos' outside¹⁷, that primordial nature's remainder which is not domesticated yet, an exuberant entity threatening us, completely self-organizing and growing according to its own rules alone, the reign of *Physis* in the original Aristotelian sense, defying to be structured from an outside management. That what is not *planned* and hence, not *controlled*. No matter what the respective primordial actually embodies, in the concrete case: markets still unconquered, rebellious employees, systemic entanglements caused by the dynamics of interactions; or even the own managerial psyche, the inner self with its emotional tensions caused by obeying to the dictate of the rational order.

All that is not predictable and therefore, does cause anxiety; wherefore it has to be brought under control, for taming all forms of life we encounter. Etymologically, 'management' comes from the Latin *manu agere*, to hold the things firmly in my hand; followed by the Italian *maneggiare*, to keep horses at bay, to make them do what we want.¹⁸ Based on the mythology outlined here, management is more than just a term. It is an idea, an *eidos* basically occidental of how to encounter the world in general: make it obedient to our plans for erecting it anew.

...and Formats

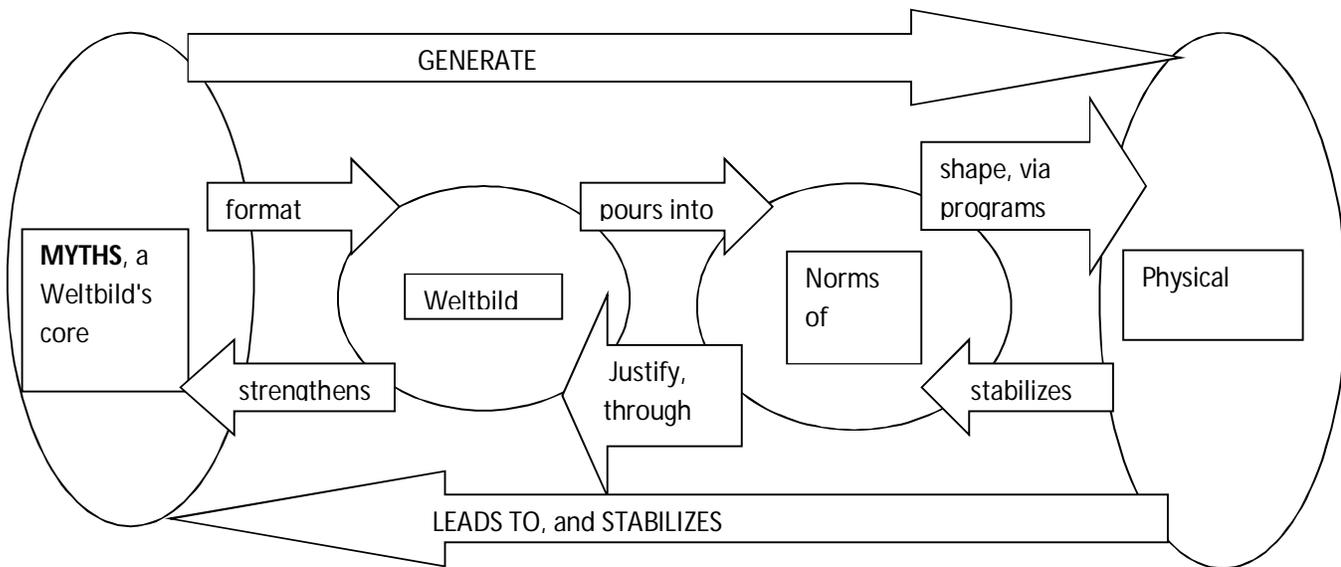
To stay correct in mythological terms and following the management ideal of a clear-cut, constructed order, the relations discussed so far can be represented also schematically.

¹⁶ Interestingly in mythological terms, 'culture' stems from Latin *agricultura*, meliorating the wild, that what hasn't been brought under man's hand yet.

¹⁷ Since the myths of a culture refer to its archetypal ideas, Chaos is meant here not in its scientific, but in its (original Greek) mythological meaning as being the ontological contrary to Cosmos, order.

¹⁸ Burkard Sievers, personal communication. *Eidos* means "idea", "form", an *inner* image as mental pattern; (e.g. Gloy, K., 1995:25) and as such, is related with the idea of the *utopian* to come. E.g. Eaton, R. (2001):11

Fig. 1: Myths-Reality as dynamic self-referential system



Myths, in being formats in themselves, are able to format the *Weltbild*, one's basic vista of world which rests on them; especially as regards those involved in such a world's actual shaping (e.g. managers), that vista in question pours into certain norms of conduct applied in the performance of shaping; it is in that way how myths are actually able to "create" the world "suited" to them (to use mythological connotations). If the procedure is successful, the so-shaped reality stabilizes the norms in question, which again "justify" the *Weltbild* nourishing them, altogether with its constituting myths. This is what the scheme essentially tries to convey. And this is what makes the whole system, once started successfully, to turn into a self-referential circuit which becomes operationally closed¹⁹ then, generating its respective "eigen-values" mentioned in the beginning: expressed by the large arrows, as a whole, the system becomes autopoietical, is able to sustain itself out of its *modus operandi*.

Whereby some important notes have to be made. First, despite their simplistic representation made in line with today's management usage, the relations depicted here are not at all trivial. For instance, when you imagine what alone does happen in the domain of "physical reality" after the initial dynamics is set free, and now has the possibility to further unfold itself. Or in the domain abbreviated as "*Weltbild*", what actually does take place here in form of assumption-generation, psycho-mental performance, and so on. Not to speak of the concrete interactions going on *between* these two domains after the process started. To provide examples that the *reality* of the entire system is not at all trivial.

Second, "physical reality" is not meant in its strict physical dimension – of certain artifacts as the outcome of managing, and of social performance in general – but includes other dimensions relevant for a social system, too, like the web of interactions, etc. 'Physical' is only an abbreviation, recurring to the above idea of *Physis* as an entity which develops its dynamics out of its own, "grows out of itself", literally translated.

¹⁹ To the notion of *operational closure* as being constitutive for so-called CAS, or Complex Adaptive Systems like for instance social ones as "complex, i.e. non-linear interaction contexts driven by rules", see Kappelhoff, P. (1999c):17f.

Third, leading to the topic of formats, both development and sustainability of any cultural system could be portrayed in terms of the overall process indicated by the above scheme, a process which in itself owns a formatting character.²⁰ But this is not the most important aspect. Because in the scheme's logic, it is evident that it depends on the peculiar kind of mythology, the initiating force for the whole circle at some hypothetical time zero when the respective culture started, what kind of 'physical' reality does emerge then, alongside with the formatting processes going on in side both kinds of reality, the mythological and the physical one. And that the so-formatted physical reality leads to the rise of new myths "explaining" it which, combined now with those already existing, format this reality further on. Whereby two principal dimensions have to be seen, to imagine the impact of such a dynamics as a whole: on the one hand, there is the process itself, the ongoing of formatting; and on the other, the result, namely a format as a peculiar kind of order.

Imagine what happens with a culture rooted in rationality as universal cosmic principle; and connected, which is guided by a myth of domination in the shaping of its concrete life circumstances, its genuine Lebenswelt in all the latter's domains. The more since formats, once they came to life, are able to generate additional ones, that is, more of themselves. These are those formats which were not wanted, were not the kind of order we longed for. But nevertheless, despite their unwilling generation they remain to be formats and as such, are too forming our Lebenswelt; like the planned ones do which elicited the whole process. These spontaneous orders account for the overall rise in complexity²¹ bemoaned not only by management, and, more important in the quite practical terms of a 'daily' culture as the culture actually lived, are formatting today's life in an unprecedented degree. Such formatting rose up from our culture's meanwhile base, a peculiar form of economy known as Capitalism. To summarize the theses presented for discussion, the most embracing formats making up our today's form of life are the production of masses in an exponential degree, and alongside with it, of fragments; accompanied by new forms of power exerted by the masses generated. In short, it is about the relationships between mass and power, and their emergences.

It began with a planned format, the standardized production of masses, our economies' physical backbone until the present. With the onset of Industrialization, it became possible to produce masses on large scale, and accompanying, to subdue nature in a degree never known before, humans included. But it happened in two directions, since during the process, also an unplanned mass-production gained ground because "masses" are not confined to the production of items to be sold, or to the delivery of inputs necessary for that. Mass production also includes the problems arising out of the planned procedure, caused by unplanned formats of various kind centering around mass phenomena, formats which emerged as so-called spontaneous orders and soon exerted a power of their own. Because the delivery and consumption of resources – of information, capital, materials, energy (both physical and psychic), and last but not least, of people – had to get organized in a formatting manner, too, in order to obey to the original one. Which gave rise to new formats of working and living, formats which became such ubiquitous that they even could become formulated as a new common unthought known (we remember Nietzsche, culture is unity of style): Mass Society, a society of, and for masses.

²⁰ E.g., as outlined by Assmann, J. (1997), especially in his chapters 2 and 3.

²¹ For relevant aspects of the complex, see Mainzer, K. (2004), with general features given at p.3f.

Based on the monotheist myth of domination, the whole process started with the power over masses. It was triggered by the rise of the natural, "exact" sciences and connected, of new technologies which both elicited the idea of the world as machine (*machina mundi*), and which led to the birth of the myth of a world as artifact, the embodiment of a truly human, literally man-made cosmos.²² In mythological terms, world, the former Outside opposed to the Inside of the man-made order symbolized by his Polis, will be transformed into an Inside, too. Since it is understandable by *rational* means – giving birth to the myth of rationality – because it does embody a piece of art which, in its essence, is a *technical* product of God; planned, designed, constructed. Later on, God was replaced by man; and even later, by the industrial man²³ who tried, in an effort to perform a second creation, to apply mechanical means²⁴ on large scale: for the production of controlled masses, reaching from cars to computer programs. As regards the formatting character of such operations, decisive is their principle, not their numerical magnitude: real life phenomena are *fragmented* via analysis²⁵, then *itemized* according rational criteria in order to *standardize* them, and after this algorithmic procedure, the so-created standards are synthesized to the final product. The new, pragmatic form of an occidental dialectics leading to the power over masses.

Which is in use still today since the procedure, purpose-oriented and domineering as it is, can be applied everywhere, on everything – materials, money, information, people. It can be used even for the production of meaning, that domain believed to belong essentially to a *conditio humana* – via certain motivation programs to keep the people working, i.e. translated: to keep them tracking the purposes. Because the procedure is algorithmic, which ensures its formatting character: apply the same means with the same measures, and you will get the ever-same results. And the wish behind the myth of domination and derived, behind a one of management is, as unthought known: make the world algorithmic. Expressed in the latter's diagrammatic representation, from the portfolio matrix of the Boston Consulting Group down to other attempts to catch real diversity into the artificial cosmos of only a few quadrants.

As regards its mythic aim, the procedure's center is *standardization*, to impose the grid of the pre-constructed not just upon matter, but upon the living. Because also alive entities need to get standardized, for planning them, which again is a prerequisite for dominating and controlling them (e.g., employees). All in all, such a format's success lies in *abstraction* – from the individual case with its peculiarities, that means finally: from real life. And abstraction functions best if it becomes *quantified*, which led, as emergence, to our today's world as number. To return to the simplified cosmos of the above scheme, reflected in the managerial norm of conduct to "figure it out", an operation the success of which gave rise to a new myth: that what cannot, or will not be caught in figures is not worth to consider, is irrelevant, turns into a quantite negleable. E.g., the forest here with its ecological specifics, but the wood of which we could sell for value x by cutting it down. That means: the forest *as such*, as living entity, owns no value but only its valuation. Or take the employees with their aspirations, fears, and personalities; they don't matter, are "dead wood" (another managerial saying) to be cut off for raising the shareholder value. Because in line with the domination myth and the mythic wish resulting out of it, namely to perform a *creatio continua*, everything is treated like matter, gets cast into the status of *objects*. Since matter, material, quantity

²² An overview of this so-called Mechanistic Weltbild gives for instance Gloy, K. (1995): 160-62.

²³ As a mythological connotation, *industry* comes from Latin *industria*, purpose-oriented effort.

²⁴ The Greek origin of Mechanics is *mechane*, a means to *trick* out nature. Gloy, K. (op.cit.):161. Because according to Aristotle, technique is exactly that what nature isn't able to deliver.

²⁵ Mythically coining, analysis means "dissolution", literally translated.

is the only thing which counts – perhaps the most devastating emergence such a Weltbild had, and still has.

But it was successful, albeit in a twofold direction: the power over masses elicited the power of masses. Their standardized production, as a format planned, generated another one, as a format unplanned, which is our economies' second pillar: mass consumption, the need to consume the manifold products in order to nourish the first format, their ongoing production. Here again, decisive is not the numerical magnitude (the days of a society of 'mass consume' are over) but the format as such; together with the operational closure established between the two formats, the planned one of producing masses in form of products, and the second, unplanned one of consuming them. Their mutual enforcing led to the rise of a third format, the one of growth that, like the one of consumption, had emerged spontaneously: the urge for growth, the necessity for our kind of economy to grow in order to stay viable at all. If the comparison is allowed, which is a unique case in the history of the living – if human systems embody living systems, too, then only cancer cells follow this mode of survival. To pose the phenomenon into its adequate cosmic dimension, in order to reveal its magnitude.

Although this shall not be our concern here. What matters is the ongoing production of masses, deliberate or not, and the power they therefore gain, for determining an overall evolution's further path, in following certain attractors of development. Or expressed in traditional terms of occidental understanding, driven by these three formats' interactions alone (not to speak of other formats which arose out of its run), the process as a whole generated its own entelechy, in establishing the "goal", the Telos it aims at out of itself during its run. And through that, in opening up an evolutionary space, limiting the possibilities of further, and alternative, developmental pathways: the other road the whole thing could have went, the other world we could have lived in if that space wouldn't have unfolded. The three formats of production, consumption, and growth alone were already able to unfold it. Which makes the process irresistible, as a whole, despite the managerial attempts (politicians included) to influence it, not to speak about altering its overall direction. Attempts based upon the mythology outlined so far, and therefore, not suited for solving the problems which continuously grow out of that process. Because it has been this very mythology which led to its rise, as an initiating force at least.

In addition, the scope of the single dynamics making up the process as a whole is unprecedented, has reached a literal global scale, opposed to all former historical epochs. To give examples from the economic domain, formerly it was not possible that the shipment of apples from New Zealand is more economical than planting them locally; or, in summary, to live in a world where "the product does market itself",²⁶ where everything had slipped into a product-status, even enterprises, the original producers. A scope and dynamics which are not confined to matter in a narrower sense, to physical masses, neither in their planned processing, nor in their emergent generation as sheer quantities which grow and therefore, cause their respective qualities of impact; like capital accumulation, waste production, or the numbers of people variously affected by those dynamics.

²⁶ A saying of Rocco Melchiorre who was the first to develop the idea of formats.

Since evidently, the myth of domination, originally concentrated upon the domination of matter and people, had generated other matters of concern.²⁷

Probably most dangerous, also formats which are not confined to the physical sphere in its narrower sense but directly affect the human psyche, by fragmenting our daily way of life, and by that, transform our basic modality of how to conceive reality. We can start with physical fragmentation. Take the case of the internationally active firm, strong through processes aimed at fragmenting others – the mergers & acquisitions it has undertaken to dissolve its competitors – now gets fragmented itself: its management has to obey to the shareholder value-principle, that is, to an outside force. In strong violation of the myth of domination, the managers are no longer masters in their own house but dependent on investment companies which direct their plans. Opposed to its myth, management became determined by an Outside which cannot get transformed into an Inside any longer. Longer-termed strategies, former backbone of strategic management and pillar of management understanding, are abandoned in favor of short-term maximization of profit, i.e. of growth as a self-referential value. Whereby it is not sufficient just to grow, the *rate* of growth has to grow; or translated, as a new format, growth grows in an accelerating manner. In terms of the above scheme, which led to a new Physis and alongside, to new myths, the one of privatization, and of efficiency: that *everything* can, and has to be privatized, stripped off its former identity;²⁸ and hence, that everything can, and has to be more efficient. That means, in mythological and practical terms alike, more rational, simplified, 'optimized' through creative destruction. No matter if this is rational any longer, not to speak of its feasibility. Instead, it became an eigen-value of formatting powers for further evolution.

In evolutionary terms, a paradox movement results, expressed in two counter-running tendencies. On the one hand, the above algorithmic procedure of how to format things becomes applied to *each* kind of work organization, and that increasingly. Since not only enterprises, but also other organizations formerly protected from the need for creative destruction are falling now under its dictate: state institutions, the public sector, even supranational bodies. Because the myth of privatization can, and as a 'good' myth having its claim of universality, *must* be applied everywhere. What results is a tendency towards increased solidification, of standardizing organizations in making them more and more similar in structure and process. On the other hand although caused by it, there is the tendency to increasingly fragment them, to make them more and more ephemeral. For instance *the company*, formerly conceived by both management and employees as a construction of endurance, now dissolves into a volatile ad hoc that has to follow the momentary prevailing rationality of the purpose – project groups which vanish when the job is over, part-time management, www. networks. But both tendencies, contradictorily as they are in their individual direction, their inner 'entelechy', are increasing; that is, obey to the format of growth.

So far the 'outer' physical fragmentation. As regards the inner fragmentation taking place in the domain of conceiving reality itself, the outcome of such a growth is a fragmenting of former unities. Or expressed as an evolutionary tendency, a growing dissolution of former cosmological constants which were constitutive for our Lebenswelt. That the company remains; that we have to go to work from nine to five, which gives structure to our life and hence, reliability; that we can make career planning because we will stay in this company. All of this does presuppose that the company will

²⁷ Which is not meant in a mono-causal way, but in terms of the myth underlying the whole process.

²⁸ Privatization comes from Latin *privare*, to rob off something.

stay, and is not fragmented into saleable trunks vs. those to be destructed. Expressed in general terms, the growing dissolution of those constants directly affects our basal conception of world 'as it is', to recur to that mythological figure introduced earlier. The world itself, in being world, is no longer conceived as unity, as cosmos, but as an agglomeration of fragments, a process which one may call an *itemization of world*. Of course, these fragments can be clustered to structures and by that, are promising some kind of order, and therefore, some security. But these orders are nothing of endurance since ephemeral, we know that they can change any time; in both psychological and mythological terms, we know that they cannot keep their promise. So, we rely upon the fragment – which means psychologically: on nothing. Except the retreat into the private microcosm, another fragment resulting out of the whole process; a concentration tendency as counter-running movement to the overall one of expansion and fragmentation. An overall move enhanced by additional formatting processes of equal importance which too fragment reality, and which arose in the wake of the ones described, and which bear the respective consequences for conceiving the real. E.g., the huge advertising machine to fuel the format of consumption, the ever-more mass of products to be sold for sustaining the growth of production and thus, of profit (to satisfy the shareholder value). Formatting not only our TV programs but our entire perception, in figuring down the world into colorful, short-cut pieces delivered in aggressive sequences. Or the increased virtualization of world, final outcome of the myth about a mind dominating over the matters, replacing real places through virtual ones, that is, qua mythic intention: to replace the pre-given physical space of a world *as it was* through a new one entirely formed by will & conception, the man-made cosmos of virtuality; our new world *as it is* where the homepage replaced home because the latter is no longer necessary, became antiquated. And as regards the seldom cases where the old reality of real physics has to stay, it can be enriched, be transformed into an "augmented" one.

All this means formatting, exemplified by just a few highlights. Assisted by a myth of technique as offspring of the myth of rationality, telling us that every problem can be technically solved (because it is rationally understandable), a cosmos resulted that became meticulously planned in its details but fragmented in its totality. Which is no cosmos any longer, at least not for a traditional understanding that didn't comprehend the world as Promethean trick, as magic ruse to ban the Being with the help of science, technique, and management. From its Greek origin, the very idea of a *cosmos* was beauty, harmony, and order at the same time and by that, included an idea of confinement, of *measure*. Which is not meant as moral statement but just as an attempt to reveal the deep gap that opened up – between an original conception of 'world' in the occidental realm and its outcome.

...and the Priest Kings

Since outer and inner fragmentation are connected, both had to inflict not only our Lebenswelt but also the managers' self-understanding, the very meaning of what it means to be a manager. Before the onset of increasing fragmentation at least, the manager's classical role could be summarized in comprising two main functions: to provide order, and meaning. Comparable to a priest king²⁹ of

²⁹ In the text's first version, a manager had been compared with a shaman; this idea had been rejected because such a comparison would be artificial, and misleading: a shaman belongs to a cultural state not comparable to today's organized world. So, and with special respect to the mythic character of even today's management, the figure of a priest king seems far more suited to express the double function of recent managers.

former pre-industrialized epochs who combined both functions in one person, to provide order through meaning was a manager's most important duty. The provision of meaning was the prerequisite for maintaining the order of the respective organizational cosmos, since his followers, those for whom the order had to be valid, had to accept it. Acceptance is a deliberate act, it cannot be forced upon. Power, a manager once said, can only be kept if the people over which it gets exercised do actually accept it – not outspoken, of course, just existent as a diffuse unthought known; but it had to be *accepted*. Which only works if the people see some meaning in that order and hence, in the power they have to align to. Because order is literally cosmological, it does express the Logos, the overall meaning of the organizational cosmos in question.

To sustain both – that Logos, and the order through which it gets expressed – rituals are needed: processes that follow formatted procedures established to convey meaning. To stage-manage meaning was the management's foremost task, via a canon of rituals put in scene at certain time intervals of mythic importance, like the date of the firm's foundation, the installment of a new priest king, or the celebration of the annual accounts. Rituals the canonical character of which was constituted by the myths they should express, a mythic meaning revealed to the public, to the mass of commons as auditorium for the priest king's performance. This was the first, and domineering function of rituals: to reveal the mythic, and thus, to establish meaning. Their canonical character representing "...the general, enduring...aspects of universal orders."³⁰ Their second function was related to it, namely to ensure what I want to coin as *reiterative self-affirmation*: that we belong to the group we belong to, that this is meaningful and hence, OK; that we therefore accept the existing cosmic order, and thus, the power exercised upon us. It leads to the inherent self-referentiality of rituals;³¹ expressing the status of groups as wholes, as well as individuals. These two functions belong to each other since they account for an organization's order, for the cosmos the participants (have to) live in – next to the web of daily operations that makes up such an order's "practical" aspect of embodying an autopoietical system. The formatted character of rituals was ensured by their first function, their self-referential character ensured the maintenance of social cohesion and therefore, of social peace.

And because holy tales can be transmitted only by holy persons, those enabled and destined to reveal the mythic, to pass it down in explaining it to the commons, it does need priest kings: rulers and holy men at the same time who reveal holy tales. About the organization's mission and nature; about management as such; about the surrounding world's nature, what it really is, in mythological terms, and what it should become, through our efforts.

Evidently, it does not depend on the kind of rituals but – like in case of the formats discussed earlier – on the peculiar mythology which concrete form such a cosmos adopts, in its real terms of daily life. Since each mythology encloses its visions to be arrived at, a future world that has to be erected, the future inherent to our kind of (occidental) mythology strived for the ideal state, to be reached through the creative destruction of an ongoing second creation, as we have seen. And that this ideal state, represented through an order of the rational, led to its formats genuine for it – which fragment it, and therefore dissolve it in a *statu nascendi* already. Applied to management, that the priest king, in being an occidental priest king, destroyed his own mythic dream *because* he was successful in imposing such an order. But successful only partially, inside the here and there of particular

³⁰ Rappaport (op.cit.):53

³¹ *ibid.*:52

circumstances and conditions – the clear-structured problem; the economy still without major frictions (the days of an "affluent society"); the environmental dynamics more or less predictable, obeying to the forecast, i.e. in mythological terms: to the plan. What to tell the people, with what to convince the audience of the ritual when everything gets increasingly fragmented, and the ideal state successively does vanish into an adhococracy?

The more since a critical threshold was overridden (the exact time plays no role, what counts is the phenomenon as such) and those formats created now had multiplied themselves, in spontaneously generating more of their kind. Because visions, like culture, need time and space to unfold, their specific time and a certain degree of local constancy – there exists nothing like a *world culture*, which is either a postmodern illusion or just a helpless euphemism; or even worse, just an advertising gag. That is, they need a climate of endurance. But exactly this is no longer given, in the need for a "speed to market" in order to survive, and the selective "pressure for growth" characterizing the markets of today.³² So what the managers shall do when they get aware that their priest kingdom is eroded away by the emergences of their own mythology? Nothing. To stick on the same, to keep it going. By applying the formatting procedure in the detail, increasingly (to raise efficiency, etc.), and very well knowing that the whole is lost because it cannot get planned any more, and that increasingly, too. That the ideal of the rational order not only was, but *increasingly will be* an utopia.

Which is coining, not just on mythological grounds. Utopia comes from the Greek Ou-Topos, the "non-place", and could denote either a distant state of being we are longing for to live in; or a place where we *cannot* live because it is in-human in a literal sense, not suited to human beings. So, for the managers in charge a paradox movement results, comparable to the run of events in a Greek drama. The more they try to turn the organizational cosmos into a manageable place, by imposing the grid of an encompassing rational order upon the things through the installment of formats, the less successful they are in doing so. As mentioned, as the whole is regarded, i.e. the inner goal of such a mythic desire; as regards details, they can be – and in fact are – formatted more and more. In terms of the drama, an Enantiodromos resulted, a counter-running movement – in modern terms but expressing the same, the run of events follows an attractor that exactly does lead to those initial conditions which the managers try to leave behind.³³ Conditions for which they have just one word: the unmanageable. Which has to be avoided by all means. Because for them, it is identical with chaos as such, and the reign of a 'chaotic' since spontaneous order would be identical with their failure and hence, with a lethal violation of their mythology and identical with a loss of self-esteem.

Except a new understanding of management would gain ground, a one not devoted to a myth of domination. And as one result inter alia, a one which would acknowledge that reaching an utopia will not only be impossible but unfeasible, for our own sake. If it hasn't been reached already, in form of the circumstances generated, and is still hold up, through their own dynamics, and by a certain mythology still prevailing. Or should such a hope be utopian?

³² Both sayings which characterize the atmosphere of a new Darwinism come (coining) from *Breathless* (Wurzer, J., 2000, pp. 84, and 92), a work trying to outline recent economic conditions worldwide.

³³ Referring to the roots of our occidental way of world perception, to Heraclitus' idea of enantiodromos, see Campbell, J. (1996): *Myth West*, p.186. He called "...this process of psychic, historical and cosmogonical turn into the opposite *enantiodromia*, the running-contrary-to". Quoted from Campbell, italics by him.

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