

***ESPRIT DE CORPS,***  
**WORK TRANSFERENCE AND DISSOLUTION:**  
**LACAN AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORIST**

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**Summary:** Compared to the major impact Jacques Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis has had on the widest range of disciplines in the arts and humanities, and in the social sciences, its reception in organizational studies has been relatively slow. This is often explained with reference to the fact that Lacan's writings are difficult, and that he himself was never concerned with the study of organizations. In this paper, it is demonstrated that Lacan did have a profound interest in organizational life, and that it prompted him to formulate a number of key principles for establishing an "alternative" organizational structure, in which hierarchical authority is balanced against a communal, libertarian and solidaristic system of exchange. It is shown how these principles are indebted to Bion's work with leaderless groups, and to Bion's "first Northfield experiment" from the early 1940s. During the 1960s Lacan endeavoured to integrate these ideas in what he designated as a "circular organization", which would operate on the basis of a series of small working groups called cartels, and on positions of "suspended authority". It is also argued that Lacan's eventual dissolution of his own School may not have constituted a simple case of organizational failure, but a necessary act of transformational change and permutation. The essay concludes with the proposition that a proper appreciation of Lacan's significance for organizational studies should start with a critical analysis of his own contributions to the study of organizational life.

**Key words:** Organizational Theory, Jacques Lacan, Psychoanalysis, Leaderless Groups, Cartel, W.R. Bion.

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*Introduction*

Thirty-five years after his death, the work of Jacques Lacan remains clinically disputed yet theoretically vindicated. In times of evidence-based treatment plans, health economics, cost-effectiveness evaluations and the ubiquitous neoliberal rationality of market competition, the clinical practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis is very

much on a life-support machine in institutional mental health care settings, especially in the Anglophone world. In addition, most clinical psychology and psychotherapy training programmes have relegated it to the dustbin of cultural history as a pseudo-scientific paradigm. By contrast, Lacan's theories have gone from strength to strength in academic departments of literature, cultural studies, modern languages, linguistics and rhetoric, media and communication studies, women's and gender studies, philosophy and film theory. The versatile applicability of his concepts as solid tools for critical analysis is also demonstrated in the widest range of disciplines outside the traditional human and social sciences, and seems to gain more and more momentum on a daily basis, with architects, legal scholars, criminologists, educational scientists, theologians and classicists now also engaging with his work (see e.g. Beattie, 2013; Caudill, 1997; Cho, 2009; Hendrix, 2006; jagodzinski, 2005; Miller, 2007; Milovanovic, 2003).

Since the late 1990s, Lacan's notions have also started to gain momentum in organization research, critical management theory, business studies and public administration scholarship, on both sides of the Atlantic. Many of the new Lacanians in these fields have demonstrated how key Lacanian concepts such as the mirror stage, the divided subject, the object *a*, desire, *jouissance*, fantasy, and discourse can be used productively in order to understand, *inter alia*, how organizations function and become dysfunctional (e.g. Arnaud, 2002), how individuals operating within organizations maintain their professional identities and develop certain types of working relationships with their colleagues (e.g. Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007; Driver, 2009b, 2009c; Harding, 2007), how authentic leadership is established (e.g. Costas & Taheri, 2012), how work-related problems such as envy, stress and burnout may be addressed (e.g. Bicknell & Liefoghe, 2010; Driver, 2014; Vanheule, Lievrouw, & Verhaeghe, 2003; Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2004; Vidaillet, 2007), how strategic and operational change management may be facilitated (e.g. Driver, 2009a; Kenny, 2009), how practices of human resource management affect individuals at work (e.g. Johnsen & Gudmand-Høyer, 2010), how executive coaching and consulting can be tailored to subjective as well as collective needs (e.g. Arnaud, 2003), how entrepreneurship discourse is predicated upon the assumption of certain "work identities" (e.g. Jones & Spicer, 2005), how staff representatives react to the threat of factory closure (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015), and how organizational processes are

conditioned by broader socio-political and economic configurations (e.g. Fotaki, 2009; Stavrakakis, 2008; Bloom & Cederström, 2009; Glynos, 2011). If Lacan has not fully arrived yet in organization and critical management studies, then he is definitely making serious headway as a theoretical force to be reckoned with.

Why did it take so much longer for Lacan to be conceptually assimilated in organization studies compared to other disciplines? It is a question that quite a few scholars working in this area have asked themselves, and to which a number of tentative answers have been formulated. In their editorial introduction to a special issue of the journal *Organization*, Contu, Driver and Jones surmised that "it may have something to do with the maturing of organization studies or equally something to do with the complexity of Lacan's work that repelled early efforts at boarding" (Contu, Driver, & Jones, 2010: 310). As a non-specialist in the field, I cannot comment on the extent to which organization studies have indeed "matured" over the years, whatever that may mean, unless one would see the "Lacanianisation" of organization studies in itself as a clear sign of its coming of age. As to the hermetic complexity of Lacan's work this is, of course, legendary and it has frustrated and infuriated many curious scholars, often dampening their initial enthusiasm and steering their projects in alternative directions. Yet Lacan's ostensible inscrutability has not prevented a plethora of people working in the arts and humanities from engaging with his work, and organizational research itself has regularly drawn upon other notoriously abstruse French theorists, such as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida, Lyotard and Baudrillard (see e.g. Burrell, 1988; Carter & Jackson, 2004; Cooper, 1989; Letiche, 2004; Letiche & Essers, 2004; Linstead & Thanem, 2007). In their introduction to a volume of papers presented at the first international "Lacan at Work" conference, Cederström and Hoedemaekers stated their own reasons for Lacan's slow and delayed reception in organization studies: "[W]hile organization studies include a broad register of phenomena, the main concern is with the study of organizations; and as far as we know, there's not a single statement in Lacan's work directly addressing organizations or the life within the walls of the corporation. Lacan had many interests – from wigs and cars, to art and antique books – but the study of organizations was simply not one of them. Second, organization studies have traditionally been occupied by questions of performance, control and how corporations can be made more efficient, effective and profitable.

Such a starting point seems particularly incongruent with Lacanian theory" (Cederström & Hoedemaekers, 2010: xiv).

The second reason, here, cannot but persuade anyone vaguely familiar with the development and critical focus of Lacan's thought. The trials and tribulations of the corporate sector do not appear on his intellectual radar. Performance and productivity, although they could be adduced as accurate translations of Freud's notion of *Leistungsfähigkeit*, which occasionally crops up in his writings as a possible goal for the psychoanalytic treatment (see e.g. Freud & Breuer, 1895d: 261), definitely do not feature highly on Lacan's agenda. Critical voices may point out that when, during the 1970s, Lacan unashamedly started to adopt the "short-session treatment", which would have earned him an estimated monthly income of almost half-a-million French francs (see Roudinesco, 1997: 397; Nobus, 2013b: 160), he was clearly interested in turning his psychoanalytic practice into a profitable business enterprise. Yet it is fair to say that whenever he broached the issues of production and profit, such as in his seminars of 1968-'69 (Lacan, 2006 [1968-1969]) and 1969-'70 (Lacan, 2007 [1969-1970]), it was not with a view to devising solid (psychoanalytic) strategies for building the economy, boosting company turnover, increasing profit margins and accumulating capital, but rather to expose the social and subjective fallacies of these very principles. If we restrict "organizational culture", then, to the classic structure of the corporate enterprise operating under economic conditions of high capitalism, Lacan indeed emerges as the anti-organizational psychoanalytic theorist par excellence.

Nonetheless, I do not believe that this in itself explains why organizational theorists have been rather reluctant in adopting his work. Other twentieth-century psychoanalysts, such as Elliott Jaques, Isabel Menzies Lyth and quite a few researchers affiliated with the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, have been critical of the instrumental rationality principle pervading traditional corporate management structures and conventional practices of organizational development, without therefore being ignored or dismissed by organizational theorists. Organization studies have not always been geared to finding ways to increase performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the corporate sector and the profit-making industries. It would be wrong to think that organization studies have always uncritically embraced the principle of the *homo oeconomicus*, and have always stood in the service of traditional business values, as the academic lodestar of liberal enterprise.

As an anti-humanist and a fierce critic of the adaptation paradigm in ego-psychology and related psychoanalytic models, Lacan was profoundly weary of any developmental, corrective and accumulative perspective on mental health, and of any clinical and theoretical outlook that regards the restoration of a patient's psychic economy and its return to a well-integrated state of stable equilibrium as a realistic aspiration (see e.g. Lacan, 1988 [1953-1954]: 25; Lacan, 2006 [1953]: 204; Van Haute, 2002). By extension, Lacan was extremely sceptical of any social system that inscribes progress and growth as the most advanced accomplishments into its discourse, because he did not believe that the outcomes (goods and services) of a production cycle can be fully recuperated into the regulatory frameworks, the economic structures and the organizational mechanisms that condition and support the process (Lacan, 2006 [1968-1969]: 15-19). Lacan's is not a theory of gains, benefits, acquisitions, yields, returns, dividends and credits, but a theory of lack, loss, waste, remainders, deficits, debits, costs and perditions. Whenever Lacan considered the possibility of gains and benefits – at a subjective rather than a social level, psychically yet also economically – it was always to emphasize that these returns are intrinsically flawed, essentially incomplete, and fundamentally dissatisfying. The most poignant example of this can be found in his conceptualization of the so-called object *a*, the object of desire, which he designated not as the object which satisfies desire, but as the object which causes desire (on account of it being a substitute and therefore intrinsically lacking object), and as the object which simultaneously generates more and less satisfaction (*jouissance*) (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 101; Lacan, 2006 [1962]: 654; Nobus, 2013a). Hence, it is correct that efficiency, effectiveness and economy – the hackneyed axioms of sustainable productivity and high-quality service delivery in a neo-liberal organizational culture – are anathema to how Lacan interpreted the force field of mental processes and the dynamics of the social bond. Yet contrary to what Cederström and Hoedemaekers claim in the aforementioned passage, Lacan did consider how the "anti-organizational" forms of lack, loss and waste could be built into the walls of an alternative organization, how organizational life could be re-built, as it were, upon the foundations of incompleteness, as a non-totalizing entity in which hierarchical authority is balanced against a communal, libertarian and solidaristic culture of exchange.

In this paper, I endeavour to show that it is a mistake to think that Lacan was not interested in organizations, and that this is one of the

reasons why organizational theory has been slow in engaging with his ideas. If anything, I shall venture the exact opposite claim, notably that many organizational theorists may have found his work rather difficult to digest, precisely because Lacan had a lifelong intellectual and personal interest in organizations, and invented a number of radical, proto-anarchist arrangements for running an organization. The major corollary of this thesis is that a genuine appreciation of Lacan's contributions within the field of organization studies should not proceed from a demonstration of the critical applicability of one or the other of his concepts to the various aspects of organizational life, but should start with a detailed analysis of the organizational theory that is already present and operative within Lacan's own work, and which resonates with the clinical and theoretical psychoanalytic project he pursued over a period of forty odd years.

*Esprit de corps*

In the late Summer of 1945, Lacan spent five weeks in England, during which period he visited Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, which at the time accommodated a specialized centre for the rehabilitation of former prisoners-of-war and veterans who had been based overseas. Still a psychiatrist, yet also already a psychoanalyst, Lacan was far from endorsing and promoting psychiatric interventions, but what he saw at Hatfield – the complete liberty with which the patients were allowed to move around, the absolute freedom given to them as to how they wished to spend their time, the non-hierarchical seating arrangements between officers and residents in the shared dining facilities, the group therapy sessions inspired by the psychodrama-technique of Jacob Moreno, the diverse therapeutic programme of open workshops and discussion groups, and the organized visits to local factories – made a huge impression on him, so much so that upon his return to Paris he showered heaps of praise on this quintessentially English version of "democratic psychiatry". "To evaluate the importance of this work", Lacan declared to an audience of both French and British psychiatrists at the professional group of *L'évolution psychiatrique*, "suffice it to say that 80% of the men [...] choose freely to go through this gradual reintegration process [*éclusage*], where their stay is on average six weeks, but which can be shortened or prolonged upon their demand [...] Thus, psychiatry served to forge the instrument thanks to which Britain won the war;

conversely, the war has transformed psychiatry in Britain" (Lacan, 2000 [1947]: 26-27).

Even more instructive than his visit to Hatfield was Lacan's long conversation with Wilfred R. Bion and John Rickman – "two men", he said, "of whom it can be said that the flame of creation burns in them" (*Ibid.*: 15). During the Winter of 1942-'43, Bion had been put in charge of the rehabilitation of demoralized soldiers in the so-called "Training Wing" of the Northfield Military Hospital, near Birmingham (Harrison, 2000: 186). Rather than reinforcing the Wing's iron army discipline, and actively preparing the soldiers for their swift return to military service, which had often seemed to result in an exacerbation of their neurotic symptoms, Bion decided to let the collective neurosis reign, deliberately refusing to intervene when things would get out of hand. Remarkably, within a period of a mere couple of weeks, the Wing's atmosphere changed to the point where the men would start to take responsibility for organizing their own chaos. Instead of complaining, they would start to re-focus their energies on the accomplishment of specific group tasks and the management of inter-personal relationships. Rather than treating the soldiers' neurotic conditions as individual illnesses, Bion decided to turn neurosis itself into the collective enemy, thus re-creating a positive *esprit de corps* (characterised by shared loyalty, solidarity, fellowship, and an implicit sense of duty) amongst the patients, by establishing within their ranks a mutual, common understanding of the destructive forces that threatened their co-existence. To realize this goal, and to turn the patients into "self-respecting men socially adjusted to the community and therefore willing to accept its responsibilities" (Bion & Rickman, 1961 [1943]: 13), Bion decided to act the part of an experienced officer who "knows some of his own failings, respects the integrity of his men, and is not afraid of either their goodwill or their hostility" (*Ibid.*: 13). In doing so, he imposed a concise set of simple rules, which involved (among other things) each man having to become part of one or more small groups with a particular educational, occupational or operational goal, whereby the men would remain entirely free to choose which group(s) they wanted to join, and would also be at liberty to set up their own group if their preferential activity was not already served by an existing group or if, for whatever reason, they were unable to join their preferred group (*Ibid.*: 16). Probably alerted by suspicious colleagues in the Hospital section of the clinic, some officials from the War Office paid a surprise visit to the Wing one night, and found the place in a state of

total disarray. Without hesitation, they decided that the "experiment" had to be terminated, and that the two maverick doctors should be "relieved" from their duties (de Maré, 1985: 110; Harrison, 2000: 191; Shephard, 2000: 260; King, 2003: 41).

Lacan thought this so-called "first Northfield experiment" to be absolutely brilliant. Speaking to *L'évolution psychiatrique*, he stated: "[T]he lively details of this experience [...] seem to me to be pregnant with a birth of sorts that is a new outlook opening upon the world" (Lacan, 2000 [1947]: 19). But he did not stop there. Apart from complimenting the way in which English psychiatrists had succeeded in tackling the problem of war neurosis in new and imaginative ways, Lacan also applauded the English take on recruiting army officers, especially Bion's so-called "leaderless group project", which had been conducted some years before the first Northfield experiment, under the auspices of the War Office Selection Boards. Some ten candidates eligible for being recruited to an officer's rank were placed in a group, without any specific indication as to its concrete organization or designated leadership. The group was then given a specific real-life challenge, which would only be achievable if the men found a way of channelling their individual energies towards the collaborative performance that was required for the completion of the set task. As Bion put it, during the experiment "it was the duty of the observing officers to watch how any given man was reconciling his personal ambitions, hopes and fears with the requirements exacted by the group for its success" (Bion, 1946: 78). Neither the observing officers, nor the advising psychiatrists, nor Bion himself for that matter, were acting upon a position of authoritative leadership, but rather "suspended" their leadership in favour of releasing the group's own internal dynamics, thus also questioning its propensity to expect shotgun solutions to be delivered by identified leaders. Reflecting upon the experiments and justifying the idea of "suspended leadership", Bion later commented: "The group always make it clear that they expect me to act with authority as the leader of the group, and this responsibility I accept, though not in the way the group expect" (Bion, 1961 [1948-1951]: 82). In his subsequent work with groups, Bion would consistently refuse to adopt a directive stance, instead allowing the group to evolve spontaneously and to follow its own internal laws, and only intervening when he believed he knew what was about to happen, which often left people in the group feeling puzzled and bemused.



Lacan strongly commended how English psychiatrists had made a major contribution to the war effort, but he was even more appreciative of the "democratic" principles supporting Bion's innovative recruitment device. Firstly, rather than someone in an established position of authority recruiting and selecting the new officers, candidates are being given the opportunity to demonstrate *in vivo* what they are worth, and therefore to somehow self-select, in a situation of strict "fair play". Secondly, although the officers and psychiatrists assess individual contributions to the group task, they themselves only testify about what they have observed to a selection panel, so that theirs is only one voice among many, and the final decision is to a large extent based on what is conveyed in a "witness statement". Thirdly, the objectivity and validity of the entire process are not driven by the controlled administration of psychometric tests or the use of conventional quantitative measures of physical and mental capacity, but rather by the careful elicitation and rigorous evaluation of strictly subjective phenomena (Lacan, 2000 [1947]: 22-24). It is these very principles that Lacan would endeavour to situate at the heart of the psychoanalytic training programme in the *École freudienne de Paris* (EFP), the organization which he himself founded in June 1964, some eight months after his exclusion from the International Psycho-Analytic Association (IPA).

#### *Work transference*

Neither in his written texts, nor in any of his seminars did Lacan explicitly refer to Bion's work again, yet his most important contribution to organizational theory, namely his own foundation of the EFP and the fundamental pillars upon which it was built, was clearly inspired by Bion's experiments with leaderless groups and at Northfield. It should be mentioned, in this context, that up until the point when the EFP was established, Lacan had had a fair share of trouble with psychoanalytic institutions, not in the least with the IPA, from which he was definitively barred as a training analyst in November 1963 (Miller, 1977; Turquet, 2014). And so the organizational structure of the EFP may have looked very differently had the institutions to which Lacan belonged during the late 1940s and 50s been more hospitable to his idiosyncratic views on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. In other words, Lacan's own perspective on what makes a (psychoanalytic) organization up to the task of fulfilling its function may not have materialized if he himself, on a

personal and professional level, had not felt the crushing weight of traditional institutional power. The key events are worth recapitulating, here, if only because they once again illustrate that, contrary to what some scholars have claimed, Lacan had a lifelong interest in organizations, clearly positioned himself vis-à-vis a certain type of organizational culture, and typically argued in favour of an organizational structure that is commensurate with the nature of the task to be accomplished.

In 1934, whilst still in analytic training, Lacan joined the *Société Psychanalytique de Paris* (SPP), then the only psychoanalytic organization in France, and rapidly made his way through its ranks, becoming a full member in 1938 (Roudinesco, 1997: 80, 86). When, after the second World War, the SPP resumed its activities, Lacan became a member of the SPP's "Teaching Committee" and in this capacity he produced a paper outlining the procedures for the selection of new trainees, as well as the indicative contents of a psychoanalytic training programme, and the mechanisms for recognizing new psychoanalysts (Lacan, 1976 [1949]). The document was fairly mainstream, apart from the fact that Lacan did not *de facto* wish to exclude non-medically trained candidates from the psychoanalytic profession, and that he also proposed a certain de-centralization of power, allowing more members to participate in decision-making processes pertaining to candidate-selection and the delivery of teaching. Then, during the Winter of 1952-'53, an acrimonious conflict erupted between Lacan and Sacha Nacht, the president of the SPP, around the organizational structure of a proposed psychoanalytic Training Institute, whereby Lacan's main reservations concerned the seemingly unassailable power of the Institute's directorate and the autocratic "examination" of the candidates' training by a sovereign group of self-appointed "officials". In the end, Lacan lost out and was forced to resign from the SPP, by which he also forfeited his membership of the IPA (Miller, 1976: 90). The minutes of the IPA business meeting of July 1953 indicate that Lacan's vehement attack on the Institute's hierarchical functioning may not have been the only problem, and that Lacan was also perceived as someone who would take unacceptable liberties with firmly established clinical rules. As Marie Bonaparte, by far the most prominent member of the SPP, put it to the IPA committee: "[O]ne of these members [Lacan] [...] promised to change his technique [of variable-length clinical sessions], but did not keep his promise" (Eissler, 1954: 272).

After the first split in the French psychoanalytic community, Lacan spent ten years delivering his weekly seminar at Sainte-Anne Hospital, as part of the analytic training programme of the newly created *Société Française de Psychanalyse* (SFP), whilst practicing as a psychoanalyst, entertaining people at his Summer house in Guitrancourt, and generally having fun. At the SFP, he did not occupy any important administrative or managerial positions, yet generally supported the new organization's request to be considered for re-admission to the IPA (Etchegoyen & Miller, 1996: 48). However, throughout this period, Lacan also fired on all cylinders when considering the psychoanalytic establishment's practices and procedures, whereby he did not let an opportunity go by to ridicule the institutional hierarchy and its rigid, dogmatic attitudes towards analytic practice and training standards. Already in the 1953 "Rome Discourse", he suggested that the SFP's Training Institute was erected on the basis of a "disappointing formalism that discourages initiative by penalizing risk, and turns the reign of the opinion of the learned into a principle of docile prudence in which the authenticity of research is blunted even before it finally dries up" (Lacan, 2006 [1953]: 199). With undisguised sarcasm, he went on to compare the Institute's conception of analytic training to 'that of a driving school which, not content to claim the privilege of issuing drivers' licenses, also imagines that it is in a position to supervise car construction' (*Ibid.*: 200).

Lacan's finest moment came in 1956, in a paper published on the occasion of the centenary of Freud's birth. Dissecting the so-called "situation" of psychoanalysis and the contemporary condition of psychoanalytic training programmes, he painted a hilarious satirical picture of the spurious distribution of power in the psychoanalytic establishment, in the great tradition of Swift and Rabelais. In "The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956" (Lacan, 2006 [1956]), which remains one of Lacan's least studied papers, but also one of his most vehement repudiations of the hierarchical structure of (psychoanalytic) organizations, he designated those people who are in analysis as Little Shoes. They more or less comply with institutional and clinical rules, do not dare to speak up for themselves outside the sessions, and generally follow the path imposed by the *soi-disant* Sufficiencies, that is to say those who have successfully finished their analytic training and have been given full access to the psychoanalytic profession – psychoanalysts, as the Institution would call them. On the whole, Lacan asserted, the

Sufficiencies do not say much either, because self-sufficient as they are they do not feel the need to start a conversation or engage in discussion. But then there are also the Beatitudes, in whom we can easily recognize the so-called "training analysts", and who have been appointed by the Sufficiencies, and put in charge (as superior members of the organization) of the Truly Necessary, i.e. those Little Shoes who do not come to see a psychoanalyst because they want to be relieved of some pressing personal problem but because they want to train as psychoanalysts. In carefully laying out the stakes of his elaborate exposition, Lacan conceded that no psychoanalytic society can exist without Sufficiencies (practicing psychoanalysts), with the caveat that as a professional rank this position can only ever be reached asymptotically and therefore never be fully attained, so that Sufficiency is but the momentary occupation of a certain clinical position and not the definitive realisation of a certain professional stature – analysts only ever being able to approximate the category of Sufficiencies as perennial Truly Necessaries. Put differently, for Lacan, analytic training is never fully finished, and no one should ever have the right or the duty to say that he or she *is* or has effectively become a psychoanalyst. Critical as the presence of Sufficiencies may be for the survival of psychoanalytic organizations, Lacan was particularly disapproving, here, of the sovereign power they seem to have, not only in selecting the Truly Necessary (analytic trainees) and distinguishing them from the Little Shoes, but also in appointing the Beatitudes (training analysts) from their own kind, and deciding which of the Truly Necessary can become Sufficient on the basis of what the Beatitudes have managed to achieve with them. In short, Lacan disputed the doctrinal authority with which the psychoanalysts in the organization would concentrate all power within their own ranks, and exposed the psychoanalytic establishment as a ritualized, ceremonious and formulaic institution, not dissimilar to the self-perpetuating leadership of the Catholic priesthood.

Could Lacan have anticipated, here, that the very organization whose self-serving rigidity he had exposed would also proceed to getting him formally expelled as a training analyst some seven years later, with the help and agreement of former allies in his own institution? Maybe not. Fact of the matter is that at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the IPA, the institution's Central Executive decided that the SFP could only maintain its status as a study-group of the IPA, with a view to progressing to full recognition as a freestanding, constituent society, if and only if a certain Dr Lacan was removed from his

functions as a training analyst (Miller, 1977: 41-45). Pierre Turquet, the author of the report recommending that Lacan be defrocked, was a British psychiatrist who was working at the time as a consultant at the Tavistock Clinic, where he did research on organizational behaviour and group relations. During World War II he had been a major in the Royal Army Medical Corps, where he had contributed to the development of the War Office Selection Boards. When Lacan had shared his impressions of British psychiatry with his colleagues of *L'évolution psychiatrique* after his return from England, Major Turquet had been a member of the audience. Following the IPA's guideline, a majority of psychoanalysts in the SFP eventually decided that the master should be brought down. Much like the Sufficiencies had at one point promoted Lacan to the status of a Beatitude, they were also clearly capable of "de-selecting" him if they themselves were at risk of losing their official recognition as Sufficiencies. On Wednesday 20 November 1963, the day after the deal was agreed, Lacan delivered the first and only session of his seminar on "The Names-of-the-Father", ending with the pregnant words: "I am not here in a plea for myself. I should, however, say, that – having, for two years, entirely confided to others the execution, within a group, of a policy [the request to be re-affiliated to the IPA], in order to leave to what I had to tell you its space and its purity – I have never, at any moment, given any pretext for believing that there was not, for me, any difference between yes and no" (Lacan, 1990 [1963]: 95). Of course, less than two months later, Lacan continued anyway, or rather he started again, with a new seminar, in a new location and with a new audience. The topic was "the foundations of psychoanalysis", later to be modified into "the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis". At the beginning of the first lecture he could not resist reopening a barely healed wound, and so he started with the question "*En quoi y suis-je autorisé?*" – "What gives me the authority to do this?" or, as the English translator of the seminar renders the phrase: "Am I qualified to do so?" (Lacan, 1994 [1964b]: 1). Clearly, the problematic "authorization" in question did not simply concern Lacan's position as a lecturer, but referred more specifically to his teaching about the foundations of psychoanalysis. The question should thus be understood as: "What authorizes a psychoanalyst who has just been officially removed from his training position in a psychoanalytic organization to lecture on the basic principles of his discipline?"

If the question was not entirely rhetorical, Lacan nonetheless decided that the "problem [be] deferred" (*Ibid.*: 1). But not for too

long. At the Summer solstice of 1964, Lacan created his own School, the *École Française de Psychanalyse* (EFP), subsequently to be renamed as the *École freudienne de Paris*. In the opening paragraphs of its "Founding Act" he emphasized that the organization (*l'organisme*) had been established in order to accomplish a programme of work (*un travail*), with three distinct aims: 1) restoring the cutting-edge truth of Freud's discovery; 2) returning the practice of psychoanalysis to its proper duty (*devoir*); and 3) denouncing the deviations and compromises that blunt and degrade psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1990 [1964a]: 97). Although he did not refer to Bion's distinction from the early 1950s between a productive work group and three inert basic-assumption groups (Bion, 1961 [1952]), Lacan thus set out with the explicit goal of forming a "work group", whose working objective or primary task (*objectif de travail*) consisted in a "movement of reconquest" (*mouvement de reconquête*) (Lacan, 1990 [1964a]: 97). In order to ensure that the group would remain focused on the designated task and would not (as Bion would have had it) resort back to one or more "basic assumptions", Lacan proposed that the work be carried out by small groups of minimum three and maximum five people, *and* an additional person – the so-called "plus one" – who is in charge of selecting the concrete work topic, facilitating the discussion and determining the outcome of each individual group member's work (*Ibid.*: 97). After some time, the small groups would be expected to permutate, insofar as the individual members would be encouraged to leave in order to join another group. Lacan decided to call the small group a "cartel" – a name he glossed etymologically as being derived from the Latin *cardo*, meaning "hinge" (Lacan, 1990 [1964a]: 101; Lacan, 1976 [1975]: 221). It is important to note, here, that the cartel constitutes a temporary collective effort around the accomplishment of a set of specific individual tasks, from which the entire organization may benefit. Being a member of a cartel (the essential work group) was also a necessary and sufficient condition for being a member of the School (Lacan, 1990 [1964a]: 100). In addition, Lacan stipulated that whoever is put in charge of "directing", be it the work of the cartels or (at a higher level) the work of the entire School, would not be seen as occupying a chieftom (*chefferie*), on account of which he or she would then be given access to a higher rank. *Mutatis mutandis*, nobody in the School, regardless of rank and status, would be perceived as having been demoted if she or he engages in "base-level work" (*Ibid.*: 97-98). Every individual enterprise (*entreprise*

*personnelle*), regardless as to which position the individual occupies within the School, would moreover be subjected to institutional criticism and control, so that no hierarchical stratification makes someone inferior or superior, and a "circular organization" (*organisation circulaire*) is created (*Ibid.*: 98).

The idea of the cartel was exceedingly simple, and is redolent of the leaderless groups Bion set up when having to select new Army officers at the start of the second World War, with the proviso that in Lacan's School the cartels were not designed to select or recruit individuals, nor to facilitate any kind of therapeutic results, but to contribute to the accomplishment of the School's primary task. As such, the Lacanian cartel drew both on the leaderless group and Bion's "work group", whereby institutional leaders are placed in positions of "suspended" authority.

Although the concept and structure of the cartel was discussed extensively in the EFP, it did not prove nearly as controversial as Lacan's proposals for safeguarding the quality of the work and guaranteeing its transmission. If the cartel is the format and the mechanism by which the work is executed, then a certain regulatory framework is required to ensure that the work is captured, evaluated and communicated, internally as well as externally. What is required here, Lacan stated, is a "work transference" (*un transfert de travail*), which requires putting in place a system that enables the work to be transferred from one person to another, from one group to another, from the groups to the School, and from the School to its external environment (*Ibid.*: 103). The notion of *transfert de travail* may very well be a hapax in Lacan's work, but should clearly be understood in connection with what, in his 1958 text on the direction of the treatment, he had already defined as *travail du transfert* (the work of transference) and *travail de transfert* (transference work), both terms adduced as translations of Freud's concept of *Durcharbeitung* (working through), which is meant to capture the most advanced part of the clinical psychoanalytic process (Lacan, 2006 [1958]: 498, 526; Freud, 1914g: 155). Traditionally, psychoanalytic institutions had guaranteed the transmission of their work, which in this case refers both to how psychoanalytic knowledge is being passed on generally, as well as to how new psychoanalysts are being trained, via a strict set of rules and regulations, controlled by an "executive board", which sits at the top of the institutional hierarchy. Possibly inspired by what he had observed in England during the Autumn of 1945, and emboldened by what he himself had experienced in his tumultuous

relations with representatives of the SPP and the IPA, Lacan decided to organize his own School in a radically different way, although for many of its members this would prove to be an unfeasible, potentially deleterious initiative.

### *Dissolution*

Working from the basic axiom that a psychoanalytic institution cannot function without psychoanalysts, Lacan came up with the provocative claim that a psychoanalyst derives his authorization only from himself (*le psychanalyste ne s'autorise que de lui-même*) (Lacan, 1995 [1967]: 1), by which he meant that only someone's own analytic experience, i.e. the analysis that someone has undertaken, can equip him or her with the necessary "qualifications" to practice psychoanalytically, and not the successful completion of a "pseudo-academic" training programme, let alone the endorsement by an institutional hierarchy. Although many people (mis)interpreted this principle as Lacan effectively suggesting that anyone should have the right to call himself a psychoanalyst – with potentially disastrous consequences for the clinical standards, the public image and the future of the discipline – in practice he argued in favour of the recognition of one single criterion for evaluating whether someone could be considered a psychoanalyst, and be authorized to practice: the personal experience of having been through the process of psychoanalysis.

Nonetheless, when presenting this principle to the EFP in October 1967, Lacan also considered the possibility of the School formally recognizing that someone had effectively been trained as a psychoanalyst and was working psychoanalytically, whereby he outlined two avenues for this recognition. First, the School may decide to bestow the title of "Analyst Member of the School" (AME) upon those practicing psychoanalysts who have demonstrated their analytic ability, in whatever form, and without the psychoanalysts themselves asking for this recognition. Second, analytic trainees and practicing analysts may themselves ask for institutional recognition, in which case they are required to speak about their own psychoanalytic journey, individually and independently, to three "passers" – members of the School who are roughly at the same point of their own trajectory and therefore "equals" – who subsequently transmit what they have heard to a decision-making body (the so-called "cartel of the pass"), which then deliberates as to whether the candidate should be



given the title of "Analyst of the School" (AE) (Lacan, 1995 [1967]: 1).

Lacan made it clear that these titles should not be interpreted in a hierarchical way, as the AMEs being superior to the AEs, or *vice versa*, but simply as different "steps" (*gradus*), each with their own duties and responsibilities. At the same time, he also reduced the power traditionally accorded to the training analyst, inasmuch as he no longer wished to differentiate between a training analysis and a "regular analysis". Lacan did not see the need for potential analytic trainees to be treated differently from "normal patients", and did not want the training analysts to have the power to decide, or even to advise on how and when trainees should be recognized as psychoanalysts. In this non-hierarchical structure, and the radical decentralization of institutional power that Lacan attempted to bring about, here, we can once again detect an echo of Bion's groundbreaking experiments with leaderless groups. The recruitment and selection of new psychoanalysts is not left to people in a position of authority, but candidates self-select, insofar as they simply draw on their own analytic experience in order to apply their skills, demonstrate their capacity or satisfy independent observers. Much like the selection panel had operated in Bion's leaderless group experiments, the actual decision-making body does not evaluate the candidates directly, but relies for its judgment on a set of non-partisan "witness statements". What matters is not whether someone has passed a requisite number of tests with flying colours – say a portfolio of examinations and coursework and the minimum amount of analytic sessions with a training analyst – but whether someone's subjective analytic experience shows sufficient clinical promise for that person to practice psychoanalytically.

So did it all work? In light of the fact that Lacan decided to dissolve his own School some fifteen years after it was created, one may be tempted to respond with a resounding "no". However, much like the Stalinist atrocities may not in themselves be a sufficient reason for confirming the intrinsic failure of the great communist experiment, Lacan's dissolution of the EFP may not as such be a reliable indicator of the fact that the entire organizational edifice was built on extremely loose foundations. It is clear that, despite Lacan's well-meaning attempt to diffuse institutional power, the EFP did not live up to the grand expectations that were raised on the day of its first inception. In transforming traditional hierarchical patterns of operation into a "circular organization", Lacan was firmly convinced that the

work of the School could be accomplished, and that doctrinal inertia could be averted, yet the institutional "consistency" that he believed would come with experience did not materialize, or gradually transformed itself again into a more conventional series of arrangements, with teachers and pupils, thinkers and disciples, leaders and followers, masters and slaves.

The problem, no doubt, was to a large extent Lacan himself, who would always be the superior "plus one", the one who would not only stand out from the others on account of having been the one to found the School (and therefore also being the only one who could subsequently legitimately disband it), but the one who was *de facto* intellectually unassailable, clinically infallible, institutionally unimpeachable. Much like Bion in his Northfield experiments, Lacan recognized that the School expected him to demonstrate his authority as the leader of the organization in his capacity of Director of the School. Much like Bion, he accepted this responsibility, without therefore always complying with what the group was expecting of him. Yet this position of "suspended leadership", which constitutes an alternative position of agency – closer to that operating within the discourse of the analyst than that which is at work in the discourse of the master, following the distribution of functions in Lacan's famous "theory of the four discourses" (Lacan, 2007 [1969-1970] – gradually changed into a new, uncritical attribution of power. During the late 1960s and early '70s Lacan regularly complained about the large following he was attracting, and the seriousness which seemed to animate his audience and the people working in his School. Lacan's innovative mechanism for securing the institutional recognition of psychoanalysts who wish to be recognized as such, which came to be known as the "procedure of the pass", gradually showed its fractures. Witnesses were not believed to be as non-partisan and independent as could be hoped for. Testimonials were believed to be contaminated by the witnesses' knowledge of the identity of the candidates' own psychoanalysts. New artificial hierarchies started to emerge, and the work transference did not always manifest itself as creatively and productively as Lacan had wished for.

In a letter of 5 January 1980, Lacan announced that the School he had created some fifteen years earlier would be dissolved (Lacan, 1990 [1980a]). One could no doubt see Lacan's decision, here, as an act of despair or frustration, or as an act signalling his own admission of organizational failure, yet one could also interpret it in a different light, as the intentional initiation of necessary transformational

change. In the opening paragraphs of his letter, Lacan reminded his readership of the main reasons as to why he had decided to create the EFP: "[F]or a labor [...] which in the field opened by Freud restores the cutting edge of his truth – which brings the original praxis he instituted under the name of psychoanalysis back to the duty incumbent upon it in our world – which, through assiduous critique, denounces the deviations and compromises blunting its progress while degrading its use" (*Ibid.*: 129). "I maintain [this objective]", Lacan posited, and that "is why I am dissolving" (*Ibid.*: 129-130). Hence, the dissolution of the organisation is a necessary precondition for the work towards the accomplishment of the primary task to be sustained. In order for the "circular organization" to survive, it must occasionally be dissolved and re-created, especially at a time when it seems to have reached a standstill, and when the members may be least expecting (or wanting) it, owing to the installation of a certain professional and socio-intellectual comfort. Like the work-group that is the cartel, the "circular organization" has its life-span and must be disbanded, permuted and re-constructed in order to sustain itself as such. On 11 March 1980, towards the end of his last public seminar, Lacan invited the former members of his School to mourn, which also constitutes a kind of work, the death of their institutional home, and to become "de-Schooled" and "de-glued" (*d'écolé*), whilst at the same time announcing that a new organizational structure would be created, with the same structure of small working groups at its basis (Lacan, 1982 [1980b]: 87). If a particular development of the institutional *esprit de corps*, which had adversely affected the work transference, had necessitated the dissolution, then no dissolution should stand in the way of the re-creation of a new *esprit de corps*.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout his career as a psychoanalyst, Lacan accorded great importance to the study of organizational structures and institutional cultures, at first out of personal interest and curiosity, later on because he felt compelled to denounce the systems and practices which had contributed to his being ostracized from his own institution, and equally because he believed it was possible to actually conceive of an entirely new type of organization. Most of Lacan's contributions, here, centred on the specific organization of psychoanalytic institutions, yet all of the concerns Lacan expressed in his radical review of how psychoanalysis is institutionalized and of how psychoanalytic

institutions organize themselves can easily be extrapolated to operational, strategic and managerial issues in non-psychoanalytic, public and private sector organizations.

As a critical theorist of psychoanalytic institutions, Lacan occupied himself with the recruitment and selection of candidates (for psychoanalytic training), with the way in which (psychoanalytic) training is delivered and monitored, with how the end of the training process should be conceived, with how candidates who have finished their training should be recognized institutionally, and with typical "managerial" processes of (analytic) appraisal, evaluation and promotion. He was concerned about the stratification, the hierarchical structure, the allocation of authority, the distribution of power and the function of leadership in (psychoanalytic) institutions. He was deeply involved in setting the parameters for assuring institutional quality and standards, guaranteeing the organization's normative primary task, and securing its social and epistemological sustainability. Although he was almost exclusively focused on how psychoanalytic organizations function, Lacan examined how and where decisions are being made, how people get to participate in decision making processes, how members of the organization are being appointed, how knowledge, information and ideas are communicated and transmitted internally as well as externally, and how rules and regulations are being formulated and enforced.

All of these matters are strictly relevant to the study of organizational life outside the psychoanalytic institutions today, which implies that Lacan's ideas, context-specific as they may be, have potentially widespread significance, or may at least be employed directly in the design and delivery of a Lacanian organizational framework. Over the past decade, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has shown its value for organizational studies and many researchers within critical management studies now regularly draw on his ideas. Yet instead of applying Lacan's concepts – desire, *jouissance*, object *a*, the fantasy, the divided subject, discourse – to organizational dynamics, there is another, potentially more fruitful way of appreciating the significance of Lacanian psychoanalysis for organizational analysis, and that is to extract and assess the explicit, practical and theoretical, contributions Lacan himself made to the study of organizations. In this paper, I have not offered a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the development of Lacan's entire organizational theory. I have merely restricted myself to what I perceive to be some of its key milestones and central tenets, whereby I

have organized the narrative around three notions: *esprit de corps*, work transference and dissolution. Over the years, Lacan's recurrent "victimisation" at the hands of psychoanalytic officialdom, his uncompromising non-conformist position with regard to institutional rules, and his own institutional initiatives have been dissected in a large number of books and papers – some greatly appreciative and some overtly critical – yet most of these publications concentrate on the problematic institutionalization of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, on the issues surrounding the establishment of a psychoanalytic training programme, and on the relation between masters and disciples in the advancement of psychoanalytic knowledge. For all I know, Lacan has never been properly studied as an organizational theorist in his own right. This work still needs to be done, yet my own modest contribution to it, which constitutes no more than a brief survey of its contours, will hopefully facilitate a new appreciation of Lacan as an organizational theorist in his own right, who deserves to be studied alongside Bion and other major figures in the history of the psychoanalytic study of organizations.

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