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Potential Space Ltd. Some thoughts of a confused manager upon anxieties in corporate life

This paper presents a psychoanalytic reflection on a phenomenon of considerable current interest; i.e. the defence against anxiety which is evident in the attempt of modern, global corporations to establish a future-oriented corporate myth in an attempt to achieve immortality. More and more of these corporations – so-called *Brandlands* – are being established. They seem to represent a new illusion of organisational self-importance against the background of many decades of corporate practice. Entrepreneurial organisations have largely adapted the language of myth. By soaring to the realms of gods and emperors and issuing their own ‘Ten Commandments’, companies and their managements tend to take on themselves functions which had until now been reserved for religion and the churches or for absolute monarchies.

The paper will suggest that this is a subtle collusive process or organisational concept, rooted in narcissism and designed to distract from the unpleasant actual facts of actual corporate reality, thereby averting critical introspection or reality checking. The *working hypotheses* to be explored are based upon the author’s long-standing corporate experience, of over 30 years.

1. Industry, in the form of *Brandlands*, has restructured its working spaces as ‘Potential Spaces’, real and virtual, constructing ‘Lifeworlds’ (German, ‘*Lebenswelten*’) as a way to fix *truths as constants*, instead of offering *a search for truth*.
2. These ‘potential spaces’ are established by defining meaning and presenting the organisation as immortal, in a context which controls the geographic-physical delineation of places and of culture.
3. Human beings come to be defined, on the one hand, as members of an organisation and, on the other, as consumers, through the combined effect of the following powerful interventions: new promises in relation to organisational ethics and to the functioning of social structure; the implementation of symbolic forms of presentation and structure, designed to influence experience in a way that creates new forms of societal repression.

Multinational companies have recently started to provide consumers with access to tangible objects of desire, by means of so-called *privileged places* or *liminal spaces* of cultural and social transition. Through these, they ‘communicate’ that they, the consumers, are something special – just like the objects themselves.

The focus of these efforts is on the creation of a ‘*space configuration*’, in which changed tasks in terms of organisation, contents and communication are to find their counterparts. Marketing experts define such places as spaces, in which one feels temporarily at home and which have a strong emotional charge so that they act on visitors at an emotional level.

This *modus operandi* can also be explained by the striving for self-realisation of a group of designers, acting as a ‘*Controlling Group*’. Their aim is to create new circumstances for the well-being of all humans down to the smallest detail, or to provide for them all future applications – but without any participation on the part of those concerned. The metamorphosis of the social shadow within organisations is being announced in an era of global change in relation to ontological systems: the shadow of the organisation is superimposed and reinforced by supra-regional moral and ethical ideologies, which demonstrate their own collective shadow structures.

Such worlds have an impact on the way basic, existential 'being' is constituted. The transition from old to new relations to the objects of a new world [or a new environment] is created or allowed for, as one can play around and express previously well-hidden desires without any further obligations and consequences. Limits, which one was used to, begin to cease, and novel, immeasurable relational dynamics between the conventional and the new are emerging. In the Brandlands as *transformational space* or 'potential space', we pass through a liminal phase, which is important for our perception. By means of suitable transitional objects such as vehicles, auto-related accessories or staged activities, we are given the opportunity to live through 'experiences' and 'adventures' of different qualities, which we have been granted access to.

Individuals who work in the respective organisations are subjected to considerable requirements for conformity, controlled and supervised by management in the form of normative rules, which cannot be freely chosen. Man as an artefact [clothing, semiotics of aesthetic perception] is integrated into the artefact 'workplace' and his emotional agenda controlled in a manipulative manner. One cannot recognize the creation of free space here, but rather fragmentation and the separation of work and life inside the organisation.

The situation can be understood as a psychoanalytic paradigm of presentative symbolism by means of scenic arrangements, which results in conditioned, stereotypical behaviour patterns and clichés – such as car drivers, who wish to be entertained exclusively as car drivers, by means of specific attractions and events. These new worlds have to be constantly renewed; i.e. turned into places of mass offerings and change, in order to avoid the negative impulse-reaction scheme being discovered by critical observers. It is this that the 'Controlling Groups' try to control in a way that will be sustainable over time.

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