



The Psychotic University*

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abstract

Building on my earlier reflections on the 'Psychotic Organization' (Sievers, 1999; 2006), I would like to focus here on the psychotic dynamics of the contemporary university – the German university in particular – which is, at present, undergoing major changes resulting from a fundamental reform of European higher education. This paper is guided by the working hypothesis that the present initiation and implementation of university reform is, to a large extent, inducing defences against psychotic anxieties on the side of university organizational role holders and thus favouring a psychotic organizational dynamic. To the extent that the psychotic parts dominate, the university itself becomes broadly or even predominantly psychotic. I will elucidate the psychotic university dynamic concomitant with the 'university reform' by elaborating the following four phenomena: (1) University reform fosters an organizational culture dominated by a totalitarian state of mind. (2) Economic values and practices have become the guiding paradigm of university reform; this praxis is reproduced in the theory and teaching of economics. (3) University reform is partly founded on magic thinking. (4) It is characterized by the view that knowledge, rather than thinking and understanding, is primary. An elucidation of the inevitable resulting traumas appears towards the end of the paper.

[The] weakness [of accepted scientific method] may be closer to the weakness of psychotic thinking than superficial scrutiny would admit. (Bion, 1962b: 14)

The capacity to think... appears to come from a relation to reality that is frustrating. (Long, 2008: 130)

We should not be surprised if we miss the mind in the atmosphere I describe here – it cannot be implanted into a dead condition. (Heinrich, 1987: 5)

Foreword

During the last decade, the European landscape and organizational climate of higher education has significantly, if not dramatically, changed. Prahl (1978: 10f) correctly viewed the legitimacy of 1970s universities – despite their being institutions of society and thus affected by predominant societal developments – as not exclusively derived from the demands of society. This, however, is no longer the case with the present reform of higher education in most European countries.

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I all too well remember how discontented and deeply disappointed most of my British colleagues were in the early 1980s about the drastically changing state of their universities. These changes were due to Margaret Thatcher's *Kulturkampf* against higher education, which was guided by the neo-liberal aim of "a free market driven by student demand" (Kemp, 2004: 295). Compared with increased evaluation, accreditation and the concomitant control over research and curricula in the UK, the German university landscape seemed like a paradise. At the same time, however, I had the apprehension that what was taking place in British higher education might – in the not too-distant future – come to Germany.

Referring to Walter Benjamin's (2003: 392f) metaphor of the *Angelus Novus*, it appears to me that since 1999 a storm has been 'blowing from Paradise' that has driven the university 'irresistibly into the future'. While, for Benjamin, this storm is called progress, the storm hitting European higher education can be called, by analogy to the classification scheme used in meteorology, the 'Bologna storm'. As in Benjamin's storm, the latter is equally nurtured by the illusion of progress.

And as with real hurricanes, the origin of this storm dates back some time and lies in another area. The 'Bologna storm' had its origins in 1998 as a fresh wind blowing from Paris. On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne, "the four ministers in charge of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom" met and signed the 'Sorbonne Declaration' (1998; cf. Kellermann, 2008: 2), postulating the creation of a 'European area of higher education' through "progressive harmonisation of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles... through strengthening of already existing experience, joint diplomas, pilot initiatives, and dialogues with all concerned" (Sorbonne Declaration; quoted in Kellermann, 2008: 13).

Kellermann (2008: 2) indicates that, while the Sorbonne Declaration, in "appreciation of traditional values of the university, is proclaimed to support the relative freedom and flexibility of students and citizens in accordance with humanistic aims, the Bologna Declaration [1999 – signed by the ministers of 25 EU-countries] subverts these values by promoting human capital, employability und mobility as ways of improving economic competition". At its Lisbon meeting in March 2000, the European Council further enforced the economic aim of the Bologna Declaration by asserting that, with this reform of higher education, Europe would "become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world" (Lisbon Declaration; quoted in Kellermann, 2008: 2).

Based on the Bologna Declaration, the present reform is, as Kemp (2004: 294) states,

[a] process which will reshape higher education more radically than anything we have experienced since 1945, including 1968. What matters is the 'comprehensive implementation' of the 1999 Bologna resolutions, by which all courses of study in Europe and, therefore, in Germany, are trimmed down to the bachelor-master-format. What also matters is the combination of such a standardization process, typical for the EU, with the instruments of neo-liberalism.

The Bologna Declaration was not only propagated and broadly forced through as a 'revolution' in Europe's higher education system: it contributed "to eroding national control over education planning and policy" (Charlier and Croché, 2005: 7). As Krautz

(2007: 144) points out, the European Ministers who met in Bologna had no official mandate for the declaration and their meeting resembled a ‘private coffee circle’. It gives pause for thought that these ministers had no authorization from their respective states nor was the declaration ever discussed (much less ratified) in the German parliament (*ibid.*). As a matter of fact, the Bologna Declaration never became a treaty or a directive but remains ‘soft law’ (Charlier and Croché, 2005).

Seen from the perspective of systemic psychodynamics and socio-analysis, to be outlined further in this paper, the sudden change of wind into a storm – i.e. from the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 to the Bologna one in 1999 – appears to be concomitant with a significant flight into psychotic thinking on the part of the respective European ministers. While the Sorbonne Declaration attempts to integrate the achievements of national universities from the past with the demands of the future, the Bologna Declaration seems to be driven by the megalomaniac and manic impetus of re-inventing European universities for the sake of global dominance. This is an excessive demand, which is vividly reminiscent of the rhetoric of business process reengineering in the early 1990s: “tradition counts for nothing. Reengineering is a new beginning” (Hammer and Champy, 1993: 49). While the latter movement has in the meantime widely failed and seems outdated, ironically, on the very day I was writing this introduction, the German press reported that the Hochschulverband (the German association of university professors and the new generation of academics) declares the Bologna process ‘failed’. The idea of the European area for higher education as the primary aim of the reform has been broadly missed, because the new design of study courses has not led to the expected mobility of students. “The Bologna process in Germany can only be saved if it is steered in a different direction” (FAZ, 2008).

In the following, I will first briefly outline my understanding of the ‘psychotic organization’ and subsequently elucidate what leads me to postulate that, as a result of the present reform of higher education, the (German) university system broadly has become psychotic.

The Psychotic Organization

This paper is guided by the working hypothesis that the present initiation and implementation of the university reform is, to a large extent, inducing defences against psychotic anxieties on the side of university role holders and thus creating a psychotic organizational dynamic. To the extent that the psychotic parts dominate, the university itself becomes broadly or even predominantly psychotic.

Referring to an organization – and a university in particular – as ‘being’ psychotic may, at first, raise questions, if not concerns, on the side of most readers. Therefore I would like first to explain what I mean by psychotic organization.

The notion of psychotic organization emerged from my longstanding attempt to understand and explain from a socioanalytic perspective what in everyday language is referred to as ‘organizational madness’ or the ‘normal madness’ of organizations (Sievers, 1999; 2006). In contrast to the predominant view in psychiatry and

psychoanalysis that psychosis is a psychopathology of the individual, the psychotic organization refers to a social system (or sub-system) that induces psychotic thinking in its role holders – either temporarily or permanently. When organizational role holders are unconsciously ordered to mobilize their psychotic parts, they lose their capacity to think. As a result, they tend to reduce organizational reality to the obvious and concrete, i.e. to the data and figures which are in line with their predominant unconscious fantasies.

Working with the notion of psychotic organization I rely on two critical thinkers. Gordon Lawrence (2000: 4f) regards psychosis in general as

the process whereby humans defend themselves from understanding the meaning and significance of reality, because they regard such knowing as painful. To do this, they use aspects of their mental functioning to destroy, in various degrees, the very process of thinking that would put them in touch with reality.

In my thinking I also use the British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion's (1957) differentiation of psychotic and non-psychotic parts of the *personality* in the context of *social* systems. I thus presume that the psychosocial dynamic of an organization can be of a psychotic as well as a non-psychotic kind. As with persons, the non-psychotic parts of an organization usually consist in tandem with its psychotic parts.

The perspective chosen here emphasizes the way the individual's and the organization's unconscious dynamics are interrelated, and thus offers a new approach to understanding organizational 'madness'. While psychotic organizational dynamics can be understood as socially induced – and thus as part of the 'normal organization' – the 'madness of normality' can be thought of as a social, instead of an objective, 'fact'. This 'social madness' finds its expression, for example, in the tendency of organizational role holders toward an unconscious hatred of thinking, by which organizational reality is reduced to what is or can be known on the conscious level. Though we tend to deny our psychotic anxieties, we contribute "unconsciously... to bring into being organisations which are designed to keep them at bay" (Lawrence, 1995: 17). "At the unconscious level we all know about the normality and ubiquity of psychotic anxieties, but it is quite another matter to be able to reflect upon some of the consequences of the omnipresence of these unconscious fantasies for life, culture, politics and the theory of knowledge" (Young, 1994: 50).

Considering the increasing tendency toward reification of organizations, the notion of the psychotic organization can perhaps offer useful insights into the unconscious construction and the one-sidedness of thinking on which organizations – and organization theories – are based. A deconstruction of this thinking, which brings insight into the social construction of the psychotic dynamic, may help to strengthen the non-psychotic parts and lead to genuinely new perceptions of 'organizational reality'.

The Psychotic University

Using the previous roughly sketched theoretical perspective, I turn to its application to the contemporary German university, which from my point of view appears to exemplify the dynamics of the psychotic organization.

Psychotic thinking, experiences and (re-)actions on the part of the individual and organizations alike are not pathological exceptions but quite normal modalities of life and work itself. We mainly owe to Melanie Klein (1952; 1959) the insight that the experience of psychotic anxieties is a normal part of childhood and impacts that part of our adulthood based on early childhood experiences. Psychotic anxieties of retaliation and annihilation are concomitant with the experience of being persecuted. Though Klein suggests that these psychotic experiences and tendencies are integrated into the Ego in the course of normal development and will be balanced with less destructive libidinous elements, the adult is not immune to regression into these 'primitive' psychic states. In order to ward off unconscious anxieties and fantasies, we as adults deploy the defence mechanisms typical for the paranoid-schizoid position – denial, splitting, excessive forms of projection and introjection, identifications and idealizations as well as omnipotence, aggression and sadism.

In the context chosen here, I would like to elucidate the psychotic dynamic concomitant with the 'university reform' by describing the following four phenomena: (1) University reform fosters an organizational culture dominated by a totalitarian state of mind. (2) Economic values and practices have become the guiding paradigm of university reform; this praxis is reproduced in the theory and teaching of economics. (3) University reform is partly founded on magic thinking. (4) It is characterized by the view that knowledge, rather than thinking and understanding, is primary.

(1) Totalitarian State of Mind

Both the politics of the German and European reform processes and their implementation in universities are concomitant with a high degree of totalitarian thinking (Lawrence, 1995; cf. Gabriel, 2008; Sievers, 1999; Stein, 2008). "The knowledge, which the totalitarian state-of-mind represents, symbolizes certainty and the hatred of the complexity of reality" (Lawrence, 2003: 353). This dynamic leads to a totalitarian consciousness in the organizational culture of universities, and is largely not acknowledged by organizational role holders, because it temporarily liberates them from their psychotic anxieties (Lawrence, 1998: 64).

There are only a few scholars who make no secret of the totalitarian state of mind on which the present reform is based. As Krautz (2006: 393) notes, for example,

not only is it anti-humanistic but hostile towards democracy if the law of the market is claimed to be a law of nature, the polity denationalized, and higher mental activities suppressed and permanent insecurity deliberately produced, since all these are, according to Hannah Arendt, characteristics of totalitarian power.

The promoters of the reform as well as those directly affected by it broadly claim that the market dictates what kind of knowledge is relevant (cf. Krautz, 2007: 8). This is

typical for psychotic dynamics, where individual and collective exculpation is obvious, as one cannot retaliate against the market (cf. Sievers and Mersky, 2006).

These recent radical changes have put the university under enormous political and economic pressure. People working in and for the university experience stress and anxieties to an extent previously unknown. Pressure has increased to either develop management structures and strategies or to apply them wholesale and directly from the business world. These structures, it is believed, will allow planning, certainty and control. External representatives from the business world are increasingly included on the boards of universities and, in some cases, serve as vice-chancellors or presidents. Instruments used by enterprises to increase profitability, such as cost reduction, grant funding and donations by outside institutions, are increasingly adopted, in order to optimize the production process of science. For example, student length of stay at the university is reduced and ‘outputs’ (e.g. special degree programs, seminars and events, consultancy and research services) are marketed to increase profits.

Underlying these efforts is the fantasy that more financial control will result in better management of boundaries and thus reduce the uncertainties resulting from primitive anxieties. Though these anxieties cannot be eliminated, the attempt to bring them under control provides the illusion that they can be held in check. At the same time, the psychotic anxieties related to the survival of the institution and the future of academic and administrative positions result in the role of rescuer being projected into management, which it compliantly introjects. The more the pressure, the more likely the psychotic dynamic will increase and that managers – like other organizational role holders – will become caught in their own individual psychotic parts. To the extent that the thinking in and about the university takes on a psychotic quality, management is mobilized to take on a more authoritarian stance, where decisions cannot be questioned and doubts cannot be raised. This leads ultimately to a totalitarian state of mind (cf. Gabriel, 2008).

Such an organizational culture diminishes the capacity for thinking and feeling and so role holders become less able to reflect on the nature, quality and methods used to execute the task of their institution, its place in its environment, and how the management structures may be distorting their professional values and beliefs about the work of the institution. (Lawrence, 1995: 11)

As part of the German reform process, universities were ‘granted’ autonomy from the federal states. This was based on the conviction that all problems can be solved if universities are regarded as enterprises competing in the economy of the markets. Thus the capitalist way of thinking is seen as a solution to a problem that was previously considered a societal or social one. Like hospitals, universities could be best managed if they operated “like biscuit factories, or a light engineering company or an *abattoir*” (Lawrence, 1995: 13). The reality and meaning of the university are thus reduced to financial and economic aspects (cf. Knights and Morgan, 1991: 260), and, according to a simple formula, “it will either stay on the market or vanish”. The resulting competition for excellence influences management to seek shelter in rigidity, reification and ultimately the terror of a totalitarian state of mind.

The present university reform in Germany as well as in other European universities is decreed from the top and implemented by those at the bottom. It is striking to note the

lack of resistance and the high degree of resignation on the part of most university role holders. It is almost uncanny that the political background and the specific details of university reform are broadly hidden from the public and out of the consciousness of many working in universities. It brings to mind Schelling's (1809) description of the uncanny as "that which is supposed to be hidden and kept secret but has nevertheless emerged" (Freud, 1919: 249). Other authors offer similar perspectives on the university, e.g. Bennhold (2002), Hörisch (2006), Krautz (2007), Lieb (2006), Liessmann (2006), Link-Heer (2006), and Schöller (2001).

(2) Economic Values and Practices Are Reproduced in the Theory and Teaching of Economics

At present, we are experiencing the dominance of economic rationality in European educational systems in general and higher education in particular, in that they are being transformed into enterprises designed to compete on the market, in order to secure their own existence and to improve their quality (cf. Ronge, 2000). University reform is based on the goal of contributing to the health of the German economy and its competitive edge in world markets. This is reminiscent of the well-known American slogan that what is good for General Motors is also good for the US.

Economic values and practices have become the guiding paradigm of university reform; this praxis is reproduced in the theory and teaching of economics. As the management theory scholar Ghoshal (2005: 75; cf. Bowles, 1997; Burrell, 1989; Gabriel, 1998; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992; Hales, 1974) writes: "many of the worst excesses of recent management practices have their roots in a set of ideas that have emerged from business school academics over the last 30 years". Above all, Milton Friedman's (1970; 2002) formulation of (neo-)liberalism – and its inherent 'philosophy' of radical individualism – is the most prominent example. During the last decades, Friedman's position has not only infiltrated all disciplines related to management but has been accepted by a range of social science disciplines, e.g. economics, jurisprudence, sociology and social psychology (Ghoshal, 2005: 84). And the current university reform is only the most recent example of (neo-)liberalism influencing broad areas of politics.

It is actually not a new phenomenon for universities to be tied to the German Federal Republic's economic development. An extensive debate on educational reform during the 1960s was initiated by Georg Picht's book *Die Deutsche Bildungskatastrophe* ('The German Education Catastrophe', 1964). According to Picht, the state of emergency in education was directly linked to the perceived crisis in the future of the German economy. "The present economic upswing will soon come to an end when we will lack qualified junior employees, which are an essential precondition for the production systems of the technical age. If the education system fails, the existence of the whole society will be threatened" (Picht; quoted in Schulz, 2004: 2). Similar to Dahrendorf (1965a/b), Picht advocated an expansion of the general educational system (higher education in particular) by a funding increase and more social justice opportunities. He thus started a long-lasting debate that led to the foundation of the Deutsche Bildungsrat ('German Council for Education') by the Federal Republic and its Federal States in 1965. This council developed a broad variety of reform proposals for expansive new educational policies.

Contrary to the reform of higher education during the 1960s and early 1970s, which did not directly impact the conception of science in teaching and research, the present university reform is explicitly determined by the primacy of economics. All that seems to count is what is profitable from a short and medium-term economic perspective and what will return German universities to the international status they had at the beginning of the twentieth century. The primary aim of higher education is to provide a sufficient workforce for German enterprises in order to succeed in global competition. This has not been part of a broader societal debate, because the decisive reform guidelines were not developed from inside the scientific system, but from outside, i.e. by insufficiently legitimized EU meetings and massive lobbying by business interests. As Krautz (2007: 151) elucidates, the strategies – as well as their justifications – propagated by the Bologna arrangements were not an accident but were instead an opening salvo.

The basics of German higher education reform were actually previously worked out by the Zentrum für Hochschulentwicklung (CHE – ‘Centre for the Development of Higher Education’). CHE was founded by Reinhard Mohn (of the Bertelsmann corporation and foundation) and the then-president of the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (‘Standing Conference of University Vice-Chancellors’). They were published by Müller-Böling (2000a; cf. Bennhold, 2002), the director of CHE under the title ‘Die entfesselte Hochschule’ (‘The University Unbound’) one year after the Bologna agreements. Müller-Böling (2000b) propagated what soon became the guiding slogans ‘for the upcoming millennium’ and the ‘reality’ of present German universities. He wrote that not only are “a holistic approach and a new model required... The university of the future will be distinguished by an international outlook and an orientation towards competition; and it will know what efficiency means”.

The very choice of the book’s title and its allusion to the unbound Prometheus suggests a program that – consciously or unconsciously – closely resonates with the optimistic interpretation of the role of technique in history as a means of progress offered by Landes (1969) in his *Unbound Prometheus*.

The extent to which the ‘unbound university’ is an expression of non-thinking and thus of a totalitarian state of mind is evident by the fact that its author does not offer a theoretical model for thinking. “The CHE describes itself as a ‘think tank’... Of course, it produces thoughts” (Bennhold, 2002: 9). The book advocates its own interests as the only truth and claims that there is an unavoidable necessity for the reforms to be undertaken. The demand is quite obvious: “it will be implemented come what may” (Krautz, 2007: 151).

I do not see it is a coincidence that all the key decision makers, i.e. Müller-Böling (the director of the CHE), the present Minister for Innovation, Science, Research and Technology (who is also Vice-President of the Federal State of Northrhine-Westfalia), and the Vice-Chancellor of ‘my’ university are all professors of Business Administration. You, the reader, may see this as an expression of my own paranoia or persecution mania, however, the choice of these role holders is, for me, quite some evidence that universities of the future must ‘trim their sails’ in order to relieve the federal states of their financial obligations.

To the extent that contemporary economic and management theories, with their causal and functional explanations, reduce reality and the world to what is economically thinkable, comprehensible and feasible, professors and students are reduced to mere *homunculi oeconomici*, i.e. what can be fit – either as human resources or consumers – into profit and loss accounting. To the extent that university reform substitutes the ‘good’ of education (*Bildung*) for knowledge as a commodity, education is ultimately turned into a commodity itself.

The dominance of economic priorities in universities (Ahlers-Niemann, 2007) and science strongly suggests that the present university reform is deceived by psychotic thinking that compensates uncertainty with alleged certainty, euphemistically substitutes freedom with autonomy and reduces knowledge to a mere commodity necessary for the so-called ‘knowledge society’. The psychotic thinking on which university reform is based, however, mirrors not least the psychotic thinking that broadly accompanies the global economy and the global financial markets in particular (Sievers, 2003).

(3) Magic as an expression of psychotic thinking

University reform seems to reflect magic economic formulas – evaluation, quality assurance and aggravation, accreditation, efficiency, competition, balance of knowledge, financial support from foundations and companies, project management etc. (cf. Finetti, 2007: 8; Liessmann, 2006: 90; Müller-Böling, 2000a). I see all of these as expressions of magic thinking rather than of science.

According to Freud, magic is governed by the ‘omnipotence of thoughts’. And “it seems that we lend the character of the ‘uncanny’ to those impressions which confirm the omnipotence of thoughts and an animistic way of thinking, while in our judgment we have already abandoned them” (Freud, 1912-13: 374, note 2; 1919: 263, note 2). The description of magic that Freud takes from Sir James Frazer very much reminds one of the economic ‘spirit’ of the initiators and promoters of university reform:

Men mistook the order of their ideas for the order of nature, and hence imagined that the control which they have, or seem to have, over their thoughts, permitted them to exercise a corresponding control over things. (Frazer, 1911: 420; quoted in Freud, 1912-13: 371)

For the child, action that is guided by magic as a modality of thinking is oriented toward preventing catastrophe. Psychiatric patients tend to commit certain actions or think certain thoughts in order to prevent something terrible from happening. They thus give themselves unconsciously more power than they actually have.

Winnicott (1935/1975: 132; quoted in Kirsner, 1990: 42) states that the manic defence is embodying “omnipotent manipulation or control and contemptuous devaluation”. Among other things, the manic defence is characterized by “denial of inner reality, a flight to external reality from inner reality, holding the people of the inner reality in ‘suspended animation’, denial of the sensation of depression... by specifically opposite sensations”. Rycroft (1972: 86) adds the tendency toward “identification with objects from whom a sense of power can be borrowed”. This seems to be exemplified by the decision of ‘my’ department of business and economics to use the English term ‘school’ to describe itself and to name this school after a famous economist.

Gray (2003: 19) attributes to science a kind of magic character; he writes: “science is a refuge from uncertainty, promising... the miracle of freedom from thought”. Science as a social force or ideological phenomenon has, as _i_ek (2008: 69) indicates, “the function to provide certainty, to be a point of reference on which one can rely, and to provide hope. New technical inventions will help us fight diseases, to prolong life and so on.”

The magic thinking underlying university reform, i.e. the omnipotence of thoughts as “the personalized and institutionalized *production* of knowledge” (Finetti, 2007: 7, italics added), is taking the place of science. To the extent that the illusion of omnipotent knowledge takes on a magic character and allows apparent certainty to dominate the world, the traditional notion of science becomes superfluous. The traditional view of science is that it is concerned with cognition, understanding, reflection, questioning, insecurity, (self-)doubts, not-knowing, searching and ultimately theory building, in the sense of a *scholarship of common sense as epistemology of disciplined imagination* (Ghoshal, 2005: 81; cf. Weick, 1989). This has formed the basis for the many scientific contributions, (hypo-)theses and insights of Freud, Marx, Darwin and countless other great thinkers. Without this perspective, their contributions would have been unimaginable. Instead of an epistemology of disciplined imagination,

the dominant cultural myth for scientific thought stresses precision, control, and accuracy. The fear of error and inexactitude are strong. Generalization with insufficient empirical evidence is taboo. Discipline and objectivity are very important; mistrust of intuition, introspection and subjectivity are ferocious... Scientific knowledge is part and parcel of a strategy of ‘guiltification’ – direct emotional involvement or hands-on associative thought are undependable. Rejection of the body invalidates direct perception and devalues experiential knowing. Without confidence in human will and reason, deep scepticism results about the ability to gain knowledge in the life-world. (Letiche, 2004: 157)

(4) *Primacy of knowledge instead of thinking and understanding*

Almost fifty years ago, Adorno (1959/2006) objected to the fact that education (*Bildung*) had become “a socialized *Halbbildung* (superficial education or half-cultivation), the omnipresence of the alienated mind” (*ibid.*: 8). “In the climate of *Halbbildung* the subjects of *Bildung*, reified as commodities, survive at a cost to their internal truths and their living relationship to living subjects” (*ibid.*: 25).

From a socioanalytic perspective, Adorno’s connection of *Halbbildung* to psychotic processes is most fascinating.

The conspicuous affinity of a state of mind, like the *Halbbildung*, to unconscious psychotic processes would, however, be an enigmatic, prestabilized harmony, if the systems of delusion, aside from their importance in the economy of the single individual, would not also have their objective societal function. They replace that essential insight, which is obstructed by the *Halbbildung*. Those who dispense with the continuity of judgement and experience are supplied by those systems with schemata that allow one to cope with reality, rather than reaching reality itself, and help one compensate for the anxiety of what is incomprehensible. The consumers of psychotic finished goods thus feel protected by all those who are equally isolated, those, who, in their isolation und radical societal alienation, are connected by their common delusion. (*ibid.*: 52)

In his philippic *Theorie der Unbildung* (‘Theory of Un-Education’ or ‘Non-Cultivation’), the Viennese philosopher Liessmann (2006) writes that Adorno’s

diagnosis of *Halbbildung* is 'antiquated' in so far as "it is not Halbbildung... which is the problem of our epoch but the absence of any normative idea of Bildung, in which something like Halbbildung could be seen" (*ibid.*: 9). To the extent that the generation and acquisition of knowledge in the 'knowledge society' is propagated as the unique aim of the university, it is – due to the particularity, fragmentation and simultaneous availability of this knowledge – "no longer possible to refer, even in a critical sense, to a binding ideal of Bildung" (*ibid.*). University reform like other areas of our lives is based on the dominant thinking "that reduces Bildung to training and degrades knowledge to a business ratio of human capital" (*ibid.*: 10). The main emphasis of university training is put on such knowledge, which should be up-to-date by the time the student enters his/her first job. Thus old 'knowledge' becomes lost, loses its relevance and – as Trotsky once said about anarchism – ends up on the dung-heap of history. Sadly, this appears also to be the fate of wisdom and history themselves, which – both as concepts and modalities of thinking – become ultimately outdated. "Modern science is oriented towards innovation. It is not supposed to guarantee origin, holy memory and legitimacy but has to anticipate that which does not yet exist" (Koschorke, 2004: 145).

Knowledge that has been lost in information, as T. S. Eliott puts it (in *Choruses from 'The Rock'*) has become a substitute for *Bildung* in the knowledge society and has thus degenerated into a commodity, which no longer has anything in common with cognition, truth or insight, let alone with independent thinking. Knowledge can be bought and increases the value of the buyer, who, at the same time, can sell it to the market for as high a price as possible. Ownership of knowledge is supposed to be ordered and controlled individually and socially through 'knowledge management', and it is available to others only if they are prepared to pay the actual monetary price for it. The only societal function of knowledge (and science) is its economic value, whereas society as such is left to itself. Hopefully others will worry about it and take responsibility for it. "Unbildung today is... an abandonment of the attempt towards understanding. Wherever one is talking about knowledge today and whatever is meant by it, it certainly is not understanding" (Liessmann, 2006: 72). "What has become the reality in the knowledge of the knowledge society is the lack of Bildung, which has become self-assured" (*ibid.*: 73).

Insofar as knowledge – and not truth or meaning – is the key currency of science, it loses, like money, its symbolic function and becomes a commodity in and of itself (cf. Sievers, 2003; Wolfenstein, 1993). Even the relatedness amongst actors inside and outside the system of science is restricted to a relationship of commodities. Insofar as the concomitant reified and totalitarian thinking aims exclusively at increasing knowledge and ultimately money, other non-commodity dimension of reality are denigrated and excluded.

Höpfl (2005: 65) observes that the Business School is a factory geared towards Tayloristic basic assumptions of standardization, measurability and controlling, and Carter and Jackson (2005: 88) note that it is 'the seminary of capitalism'. This suggests a tendency that will, in the foreseeable future, presumably become reality for the university in general. Knowledge in the university is no longer generated through search processes but is an object of production processes or stock keeping, in which the scientists/professors take the role of producers or traders and the students of consumers

(cf. Chattopadhyay, 2004; Lapassade, 1971/1976: 112ff; Long, 2004: 116f; 2008: 154ff). Thus, to put it metaphorically, the university is in danger of become a bottling plant for knowledge, in which old knowledge is recycled or disposed of to be replaced by fresh new information!

In the economic sciences – and increasingly other scientific disciplines – knowledge itself has become the functional equivalent of pretence of knowledge. As Ghoshal (2005: 77ff) indicates, in reference to Friedrich von Hayek's Nobel Lecture in 1974 (Hayek, 1989), many of the axioms of economic science are not based on knowledge but on unchecked assumptions, which are passed off as unshakeable truth – and which underlie the present university reform.

While no social science discipline makes a stronger claim to objectivity than economics, no domain of the social sciences is more values-laden in both its assumptions and its language than economics and all its derivatives, including much of modern finance and management theories. (Ghoshal, 2005: 83)

This emphasis on knowledge as the decisive element of a knowledge society – and as a substitute for the traditionally broader notion of society – is concomitant with psychotic thinking. This becomes especially evident if one considers Wilfred Bion's ideas on knowledge (Bion, 1962b) or thinking (Bion, 1962a). Though Bion, the British psychoanalyst, refers primarily to his own discipline, his ideas apply equally to the humanities – if not science in general.

Following Bion's (1962b) distinction of knowledge in the sense of knowing (*K*) and not knowing (*minus K*) and his assumption that 'thoughts' arise "epistemologically prior to thinking and that thinking has to be developed as a method or apparatus for dealing with 'thoughts'" (*ibid.*: 83), much of the knowledge propagated in the knowledge society – as well as in the current university reform – is not knowing or *minus K* (*-K*). While for Bion, "'K' is not a piece of knowledge but the process to get to know" (Thorner, 1983: 593; cf. Bion, 1962b: 65), *minus K* is, according to Sandler (2005: 384), "a knowledge linked to advocacy and law, to convince people, the realm of propaganda". *K* requires "tolerance of doubt and tolerance of a sense of infinity" (Bion, 1962b: 94). "Knowing includes not knowing. Or, to experience truth includes to experience lying" (Sandler, 2005: 378). *Minus K* is an expression of a 'disorder of thought' (Bion, 1962b: 66). "The desire for knowledge demanding the possession of everything without concern for the object is greed and arrogance and its self-destructive results lays open the stupidity that is behind the desire for knowledge at all cost" (Thorner, 1983: 598).

This leads to the assumption that *K*, in Bion's sense of wanting to know and the search for insight and truth, has broadly lost its function in the knowledge society and is substituted with *minus K* (cf. Erlich, 2006: 119). University reform propagates knowledge as a surrogate for the search and experience of truth and reality. As Bion indicates, knowledge as *minus K* is broadly concomitant with a hatred of thinking and an expression of the psychotic part of the personality. Such a hatred of thinking reduces one's capacity to think and thus leads to an extreme loss of reality. A hatred of thinking not only reduces reality to what can be known consciously, but also further belittles and disparages those who regard thinking as part of their professional task. Ultimately, this leads to teaching that is reduced to the mere passing on of knowledge, which makes

thoughts and thinking superfluous. It is thus not too much of a surprise that students often develop a hatred of learning (Cummins, 2000).

Under the dictate of *minus K*, knowledge in the university tends to become psychotic itself and thus fosters and enacts the psychodynamics of the system. It appears as if “the conspicuous affinity of a state of mind, like the *Halbbildung*, to unconscious psychotic processes ... in the economy of the single individual” to which Adorno (1959/2006: 52) refers, has at present, in the age of *Unbildung* and university reform, found its objective, societal ‘system of delusion’ in the capitalist economy of science and the university itself. To the extent that the primary task of universities is to produce knowledge – and thus that which is comprehensible – (cf. Finetti, 2007: 7), “the anxiety of what is incomprehensible” (Adorno, 1959/2006: 52) becomes broadly obsolete. What was previously incomprehensible no longer exists, and the finite deduced through knowledge replaces its infinite character (cf. Lawrence, 1999). To the extent that knowledge becomes a substitute for consciousness, any concern for the unconscious – much less to acknowledge it as an object of research – becomes superfluous.

Conclusion

The idea that university reform leads to the development of the psychotic university and thus is concomitant with traumatization seems to be an open secret. As Müller-Böling (2000a: 30; quoted in Krautz, 2007: 151) indicates, the implementation of the reform will not only be full of conflict, but ‘traumatic’ experiences in the universities will have to be accepted as collateral damage. Even though Müller-Böling does not have a socio-analytic perspective, his reference to traumatic experiences seems to hit the ‘nail’ on the head.

While the ‘vision’ of the ‘new’ university is aimed at the ‘profits’ that can be generated for science and the regained status and success of German universities in the world markets – higher efficiency, shorter length of stay of students, their success in finding employment, sufficient financing etc. – one has the impression that any exploration of the inherent losses is superfluous. Nevertheless, the potential ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ losses concomitant with university reform and its exclusive focus on knowledge and the knowledge society appear to be devastating. In addition to the objective losses of thinking, understanding, not-knowing, the meaning of experience etc. indicated above, it seems to me that there are decisive subjective losses for many university role holders – first and foremost the senior and junior academic staff members. Though many of these role holders may agree that much in the ‘old’ university – above all teaching – requires a major reform, it seems that many of them carry an ‘automatic anxiety’ in the sense that much of what has been good, important and valuable for them and which constituted a decisive part of their professional identity as scientists or scholars is now massively denigrated (cf. Heinrich, 2001: 138) and possibly doomed to end up on the dung-heap of history.

Automatic anxiety is, for Laplanche and Pontalis (1986: 64), in reference to Freud, “the reaction of a subject when it finds itself in a traumatic situation, i.e. exposed to an inundation of stimuli from inner or outer sources with which it cannot cope (...).

Automatic anxiety is a spontaneous response of the organism to this traumatic situation or its reproduction.” The traumatic situation thus is understood as “an inundation of a great many intensive stimuli” (*ibid.*). Even though such anxiety is a common experience concomitant with change in general – particularly organizational change – it appears to me that above all the psychotic and totalitarian thinking typical of university reform leads to an inundation of stimuli, with which many role holders in the ‘old’ university cannot cope and which leads to their traumatization.

It is an open question as to whether university role holders are able to acknowledge this traumatic experience – in order to learn from it – or whether they consciously or unconsciously adapt by activating their own psychotic parts. My hunch is that the uncanny of the university (and university reform) is not broadly concomitant with the experience of horror. Therefore, it is not possible for the uncanny to announce ‘the destruction of the Heimliche’ (‘Homely’) and thus ‘the dissolution of the familiar’ (Pfreundschuh, 2003). It appears that the uncanny broadly remains an ‘unthought known’ (Bollas, 1987: 1989; cf. *_i_ek*, 2007: 67), i.e. knowledge in an organization that is shared by everyone but whose meaning and consequences cannot be thought and remain unspeakable and unthinkable.

For Bion, psychosis is an inner state in which verbal thinking is not possible, due to the predominance of destructiveness (Wiedemann, 2007: 81). In face of the conditions and coercions of university reform, many role holders thus may find themselves “under the spell of a horror that the individual cannot talk about” (Weilnböck, 2004: 254). This appears to me as less a horror from a grey, traumatic past; “what is shocking and arouses fear in us” are rather the “unforeseen consequences of our own actions” (*_i_ek*, 2007: 61). In this context, one must face the possibility that we willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, contribute to the degeneration of the university as the ‘universal’ and the ‘whole’ into a market oriented ‘partial’, a subtly veiled totalitarian culture reminiscent of the German university after 1933. Following *_i_ek* (*ibid.*: 64) further, this horror results from “the fear of what is impossible”, the fear that “what we are afraid of”, i.e. that “what cannot happen [or is not allowed to happen] ... nevertheless will happen.”

That this is an impossibility, in a paradoxical sense, may be a source of hope for the university and its role holders, in the sense that only the impossible *may* happen (Derrida, 2001: 73). This is suggested by Derrida’s notion of the ‘university without conditions’. For Derrida, such a university is a thought, an ‘institution’ “free of any restricting preconditions” (*ibid.*: 9); “it declares *its faith in truth*, it *takes a vow of truth*” (*ibid.*: 10). The university without conditions has “the right to say anything, be it fictional or a test of knowledge, and the right to say anything and to publish it” (*ibid.*: 14). This is “a university that would be what it was always supposed to be or what it constantly was entitled to be, namely, from its founding, vested with a sovereign autonomy, with unconditional freedom as an institution, sovereign in its speech, its thinking and its script” (*ibid.*: 33) – and where the professors declare their commitment “to accept a responsibility which is not absorbed in the act of knowing or teaching” (*ibid.*: 40).

One should, however, realize that the university without condition has never existed and probably never will. And it also does not have “its place inevitably or exclusively inside the walls of what at present is called a university” (*ibid.*: 77).

Derrida’s university without condition is apparently a utopia – but also a ‘real’ one. Despite the fact that the university since its very beginning in the eleventh century has never been without conditions, this ideal may help us keep in mind what a university might possibly be. It seems that any attempt to approach this idea will – to a larger or smaller extent – result in a psychotic dynamic, either in a destructive or a constructive sense.

While it would go beyond the frame of this paper to further elaborate, there can be no doubt that universities, like organizations in general, have always had psychotic parts and will continue to have them, no matter what their configuration. German universities, as a reviewer of an earlier version of this paper rightly pointed out, have apparently “gone through countless, extremely painful and deeply decisive events and radical changes, which again and again have led to the decline or the dissolution of particular universities.” All this has generated unprocessed and broadly unconscious traumata. A historiography of these traumata, including a look at the psychotic dynamics and their defences, would place the contemporary university into a historical context. This exploration would also reveal the historical impact of money and profit on the university and its psychotic parts, in particular.

While this paper has emphasized the destructive side of psychotic dynamics in the present context of university reform, it should be said that the psychotic parts of the personality and the organization alike might also be sources of creativity. New thinking more often than not requires a capacity – or as Bion (1970: 125), in reference to the poet John Keats (1899: 277), put it, a ‘negative capability’ – on the side of the thinker to be available for ‘psychotic thoughts’, i.e. thoughts of the so-far unknown which at first sight appear bewildering, crazy, scary, unspeakable, devastating and delusional (cf. Pazzini, 2005). To endure such thoughts and ultimately reintegrate them, through thinking, into the non-psychotic parts both of the thinker and of the system in which s/he holds a role is a ‘capacity’ of the depressive position in the Kleinian sense. Such a capacity allows the role holder to experience, acknowledge and endure the pain and anxieties that are related to the experience of guilt, grief and the desire for reparation. While the anxiety of the paranoid-schizoid position is dominated by the fear of being destroyed, it shifts in the depressive position to a fear of destroying others. Thinking and working from the depressive position requires a capacity for sympathy, responsibility and concern for others, and an ability to identify with the subjective experience of people one cares about (Klein, 1964: 65f).

More than three decades ago, Eric Trist (1972: 181) stated that in order to foster positive societal growth, “a more thorough working through of the anxieties of the depressive position” must take place. This point also applies to the present context of university reform: “A society based on a denial of the deeper – and darker – aspects of the human psyche will be more one-dimensional than the present and there will be no joy in it” (Trist, 1976: 1019). To the extent that ‘the university’ would allow itself to develop into a place where the impossible could become possible, i.e. where everything

could be called into question (cf. Derrida, 2001: 14) – including these deeper and darker parts of the human psyche referred to by Trist – learning, teaching and research certainly would be less one-dimensional than the present science business that is in danger of destroying science itself for the sake of knowledge (Koschorke, 2004) – not to mention the loss of ‘joy’ and passion.

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