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How to kill a mockingbird

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“Men generally think me much a foe
To all mankind. Why should I? they to me
Never did wrong or violence. By them
I lost not what I lost; rather by them
I gained what I have gained, and with them dwell
Copartner in these regions of the World,
If not disposer—lend them oft my aid,
Oft my advice by presages and signs,
And answers, oracles, portents, and dreams,
Whereby they may direct their future life.”

(Paradise Regained, 1671: I,387-396)

Abstract

Age, lack of nourishment, predators and extreme weather conditions have the habit to kill mockingbirds. In the event of organizations wanting to kill a mockingbird, how then should it go about? This short article analyses, how organizations can kill a mockingbird in the event, such an action is deemed relevant.

Can organizations kill a mockingbird? Decision making theory and the ecological theory converge in the agreement of the possibility and feasibility. How they kill the mockingbird vary, but in principle, the outcome of organizational actions is the death of a mockingbird. With the advent of highly complex forms of organizations and the rise of networks as defining structures of contemporary society (Clausen & Tække 2018), our formal concepts of organization are challenged to cope with the current theoretical developments in the social sciences (Baecker 2011).

In the Pulitzer-prize winning novel “To kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee, published in 1960, the attorney Atticus is asked to defend a black man accused of raping a young white woman. As the trial concludes, Atticus proves the innocence of the Black man Tom, and yet he’s convicted by the
jury. When Atticus’ son, astonished by the outcome, ask his father how the jury came to such conclusion considering the evident innocence, Atticus answers “I don’t know, but they did it. They’ve done it before and they did it tonight and they’ll do it again and when they do it—seems that only children weep.” (Harper Lee 1982: 216).

As readers of the book, our position of observation is a different than that of Atticus, who is embedded in the legal code of legal and illegal actions with its decision-making programs of a trials, resulting in either a sentence or acquittance (Luhmann 1975). In Tom’s case, his conviction infuses the legal proceeding with the moral code of good and wrong. The convicting jury followed the program, yet ignored the evident innocence, thereby sentencing Tom by legal means and convicting themselves by their moral wrongdoing.

The implication for readers of the novel is clear. The jury killed justice, symbolized by a mockingbird, who sings only for joy and pleasure and does no harm to other animals, thus converting themselves into (legal) predators1.

The local court continues to operate by legal means, expelling moral reflections to the outside of the courthouse. Consequently, legality is ripped of its shroud of being morally just. The court as organization with its inner structures, procedures and rationalities unfolds in all its nakedness and brutish operational ignorance of the world, from which it draws its cases and returns convictions and sentences. There is no denying, that organizations operate continuously. If they didn’t, they’d be relegated to the past as defunct and dismembered organizations, such as firms gone bankrupt, closed schools, banks and cricket clubs. The operations of the organization its epistemological hypokeimenon – its basic premise of existence (Luhmann 1996: 32).

As we have the specific interest of analyzing, if and how organizations can kill mockingbirds, this forces us unto a double Hegelian reflection on concretization and reflexive abstractions (Hegel 1996). The act of killing has the element of brutal singularity, yet must be repeatable with other mockingbirds, as long as mockingbirds are available for killing. Our analysis bridges the gap by (1) stating the general principle of decoupling of organizations with their mockingbird-containing environment and (2) describing the measures by which the organization overcomes the decoupling from their environment.

The concept of organization used in the analysis is a formalized variant of 2nd order cybernetic decision premise theory (Weick 1979), 3rd order cybernetic modelling of organizations as observing systems (Mancilla 2011) and social systems theory (Luhmann 2000, Baecker 2011).

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1 The legal complexities of limits of convictions in case of shell-shock stricken British soldiers in the trenches of WW1 are similar. Court martialed, they were sentenced to death for cowardice or leaving their post, blindfolded and shot. Were the convicted soldier’s wives eligible to pensions? Were the convicted soldiers allowed to be buried alongside his comrades, who died in battle or of diseases? The implications continue to resound (Corns & Hughes-Wilson 2001), as the consequences of Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder emerge as neural effects of the exposure to conditions of modern (trench-) warfare.
The first struggle is to overcome the separation between itself and the surrounding world.

Organizations separate the environment from its operational identity. The boundary marks what is inside and what is relegated to the outside. The boundary is not a specialized function, delegated to some department inside the organization, creating a continuous flow of PR or strategic leadership. If that would be the case, other operations would not be able to relate to other operations by recursive networks of relations. Every operation delineates the limit of the organization in their own peculiar way. In the formal language of Spencer-Brown, we mark the inside of the organization from the outside environment of the organization by a distinguishing vertical line as a mark “|”. In addition to the vertical line, we add a horizontal line “‾‾‾‾”, attached to the top of the vertical line, defining the inside from the outside. The result is, what we call a form: ‾‾‾‾| 

Inside | Outside

The Inside and the outside cannot at any given moment of the operation exist on both sides. On the operational level, the organization always occurs as the inside by drawing the boundary to the outside world2.

Organization ‾‾‾‾| Environment

Dividing the world between oneself and the environment, the mockingbird is relegated to the outside. If it were to be on the inside, it wouldn’t be a mockingbird, but organization, and a killing action would result in a partial suicide3. The result is

Organization ‾‾‾‾| Mockingbird

To overcome the boundary, a decision to kill must be made. The actual killing is either an act of the organization, thus inside, or an act of the Mockingbird, thus, on the outside and not an action of the system, as every action occurs inside. Both the the killing and the death appear as inside actions.

Death ‾‾‾‾| Kill

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2 Spinoza struggled with the indetermination of observation of the world and Godly principles in the determined world creation. He solved it by duplication of the world by the mind: the observing mind as both inside the world and yet outside, indetermined in its selection of observation. The mind is the result of the determined operation, “willed by God”, generating observational indeterminacy (Spinoza 2004). In classical philosophy, the problem was circumvented by temporal means of the human free will, guided by the holy spirit (Clausen 2017, 2014).

3 This is not to say that organizations don’t “kill” parts of themselves. They do continuously, but such a deliberate action needs the not introduced concept of internal differentiation. A dismantling of parts of the organization in case of sell-outs, fusions or strategic changes to the organization of the organization include a doubling of identity: I, who continue to be me, and YOU, who still are, but will become not-ME.
No kill is possible without a death, and even Christ died on the cross on Golgatha\(^4\). The organization operates the distinction inside:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{Organization} & \text{Mockingbird} \\
\hline
\text{Death} & \text{Kill} \\
\end{array}
\]

The first struggle is overcome by observing a linkage between the decision to kill the mockingbird by observing the emergence of death because of the decision to kill. Otherwise, the kill can only be attempted killing, which enables reflexive discussions on how and why death didn’t occur, sparking further decisions on ceasing the will to kill or by devising new procedures for killing the mockingbird.

The second struggle is to overcome the highly uncertain case that the organization decides to kill and implement the killing of a mockingbird.

On the operational level, organizational operations are equal in their co-production of the organizational boundary. Organizations create internal structures to cope with the complexities of the world in which it operates. Small workshops hire legal support, external accountants and are sensible to a very limited scope of the market and its customers. Structures of internal hierarchization and departmental differentiation enhance the capacity to cope with external and internal conditions. Large, transnational corporations have the capacity to initiate large-scale decision finding sequences and implementation procedures to kill the mockingbird. Environmental protections, legal limitations, accounting and budget implications, transportation and workload balance, effects on performance measurements on KPI-indexes, assessment of strategic relevance and which means should be applied all spark potential for continuous debates on how to go about.

Organizations discussing or deciding and implementing a kill of a mockingbird can’t be sure of environmental continence. Other organizations can either sell you a service of killing mockingbirds as pest control or pleasure activities for hunters training aiming skills.

Empirical research (Rogers 1986, Noel et al 1979) can trace decision making processes in organizations. Comparative analysis of empirical collection of the volume of decisions and reflections in relation to specific organizations can visualize the results in a mocking-scale.

The second struggle is overcome by limiting resources allocated to decision making process for the organization to continue its operation beyond the emergence of death. Otherwise, it may have decided to kill or not to kill, but have ceased operations before the future act of killing is turned from future into presence as the actual operation of relating death with killing and relegating it to the past, where the killing becomes part of the organizational history, be it as an awarded diploma,

\(^4\) In the Christian dogmatism, Christ died on the Cross: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” cf. John 19:30 KJV, from where he rose from the dead, John 20:9 KJV.
as a stuffed mockingbird on the desk in an office or as a struggle to conceal the act of failure or success of killing a mockingbird.

The third struggle is to overcome the boundary to the environment by operationalizing the environment as other organizations.

We described the act of killing as an endogenous operation in the organization. Coupling to other organizations in the world operate by organizational relations or personal networks (Clausen 2010). In its formal notation, the other organization exists inside the organization, sticking to the concept of boundary production as the outcome of every organizational operation.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Organization} & \text{Environment with other organizations and mockingbirds} \\
\text{Org. B} & \text{Org. A} \\
\end{array}
\]

Observing itself in relation to other distinct organizations, yet bound by multiple mutual couplings and bindings is the perspective of 3rd order cybernetic organizational observations (Mancilla 2011).

When one organization relates to another organization for completion of the deed, it both kills and yet projects the killing to the environment, that is, to another organization, thereby devising another procedure to overcome the first struggle (Bergstrom 2011). Switching to a 3rd order perspective, the organization exits its autistic perspective on the world with itself in the center and everything else relegated to the environment.

Thus, this 3rd order cybernetic perspective infuses a generative paradox, as the organization observes itself as the (relevant) environment of other organizations, with whom it either entertains couplings5.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Environment} & \text{Organization A} \\
\text{Org. B} & \text{Coupling} \\
\end{array}
\]

Killing the mockingbird is transformed into agreements, contracts of delegation and reports of success and failure. The decision to kill a mockingbird is externalized to another organization and projected into the future as an operation in a future presence, that both is part of the organization and yet isn’t by its delegation through structural coupling. On the other hand, the organization might

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5 Structural couplings such as contracts are both endogen operations and external projections, invisibilizing the paradox of the impossibility to transcend the organizational boundary by means of operation (Clausen 2017, 2013). In functional systems, the code is divided by the designation value/reflexive value. In the case of the economic system, the designation value “payment” makes the operations of the system continue, whereas the non-payment infuses the system with a reflexive capacity to reflect upon how to turn non-payment into payment. I.e. can you buy and pay for love from another woman? Can you buy the love of God by virtuous deeds or funding philanthropic activities?
deem it necessary to collaborate with other organizations to secure the availability of the mockingbird to be killed, so as not to find the mockingbird killed already.

Organizations in need for a mockingbird must at least adress the uncertainty of success in observation of death with its own observations and relocate action capacity according to a site, a time and acting capacity to identify a mockingbird as a mockingbird - not a raven or an angel - and to apply the relevant measures to observe the death of the mockingbird following the performed killing.

The third is overcome by infusing a paradox of non-identity between the organization and others, constructing synchronizing couplings, infusing futures of success as time-binding between organizations and adjusting according to the expectations of environmental deliveries of mockingbirds to reduce the extreme uncertainty of the decision’s interpenetrative efforts on the (biological) environment.

Just as in the case of the court in the novel, organizations create their symbolic mockingbirds as a doubling of reality, on which decisions of killing or survival is imprinted. Justice is killed, yet it continues to exist.

Can Mockingbirds be killed by organizations? The short answer is no. Yet – it happens6. How is it possible to kill a mockingbird, if it isn’t killable by organizations? By killing the symbol. Organizations don’t consist of people or weapons or windshields. Organizations consist of decisions, distinguishing between decision premises and possibilities of actions, continuously reproducing itself as a self-similar identity by generating continuity in internal structures, processes and programs, positions, as well as defining the environment as consistent in its everchanging condition.

The only way to do, what organizations cannot do, but do nevertheless is to invisibilize the impossibility, by which it reduces the uncertainty of the successful kill of a mockingbird by observing the death as an attribute of endogenous operations in the organization.

Every symbol reproduces its diabolical opposition, the diabolical reflection marks the impossibility of effectuating the killing of a mockingbird by other means than a communicative act as authors of the operation of death. Organizations enter a coupling with its biological and technical environment to enforce its will on it – cleaving the world into a mode of existence turning upon itself. Mockingbirds would probably prefer to continue to live, but the world is split and turned against itself by the decision.

When organizations kill inside, as in the case of the jury in the courthouse convicting Tom for raping a white woman regardless of his innocence, or kill outside, where singing mockingbirds cease to sing, they cannot withdraw from the diabolical reflection of continuation of existence as non-continuation. That is the true devilish paradox of current organizations in a modern society structured by networks of communications and differentiation of organizational systems both temporal, social and factual.

6 https://galapagosconservation.org.uk/mockingbird-report-2/
This short paper has shown, how a hack of the autopoietic theory and Spencer-Brownian formalization provides diabolical perspectives on killing mockingbirds, even though impossible inside the systems-theoretical doctrine of “perfect continence” (Spencer-Brown 1994: 2) with emptied environments (Luhmann 2000). The Devil is always in for a surprise, be it in companionship with management (Baecker 2011) or singing mockingbirds, be it as a contractual partner (Goethe 1994) or an adviser with powers given (Milton: Paradise Regained, II,391-5; I,387-396).

The infusion of the paradoxical form of the Devil is the real hack of creation, making killing a mockingbird possible.
Literature


