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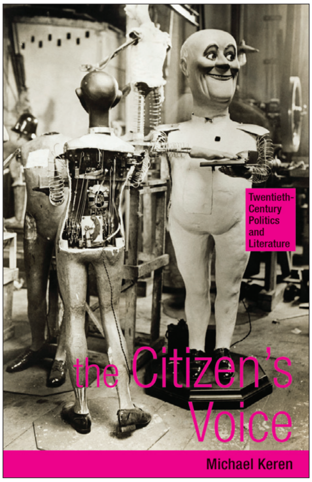

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE: TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLITICS AND LITERATURE

by Michael Keren

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A Bureaucratic Nightmare

Modernity is associated with bureaucracy. Bureaucracy – the routinization of public action in hierarchical structures – has always existed in human societies, but while in ancient Egypt, China or Czarist Russia it was associated with traditional and charismatic forms of leadership, in modern times it has become dominant in itself. Max Weber, the theorist of bureaucracy, considered such dominance inevitable. He believed it was necessitated – paradoxically – by the development of mass democracy. The need to assure equality before the law in mass democracies, in contrast to the democratic self-government of small societies, he wrote, calls for "the abstract regularity of the execution of authority."[1]

Weber, inspired by Bismarck's Prussia, spelled out the components of a model of bureaucracy and presented it as the climax of the "routinization of charisma." He showed how authority was defined by rules and regulations confining public activity to fixed jurisdictional areas. The regular activities required for the purposes of the bureaucratically governed structure, he explained, are distributed in a fixed way as official duties, the authority to give commands required for the discharge of these duties is distributed in a stable way, and methodical provision is made for the regular and continuous fulfillment of these duties by recruitment of qualified personnel.

Only persons who have the generally regulated qualifications to serve are employed, and they are placed in a hierarchical structure. The structuring of authority in a hierarchy, which can be found in any bureaucracy, is supposed to lead to an orderly system in which lower offices are supervised by higher offices and the governed people appeal decisions of lower offices to higher ones "in a definitely regulated manner."[2] The strict regulation of a bureaucracy assures its smooth operation beyond the contingencies, or life span, of the individuals comprising it. Regulation is enhanced by the submission of instructions and other organizational communications in writing and by the preservation of the organization's files in their original form.

The abstract nature of this model is striking. As Weber, born into a political family, knew quite well, bureaucratic life always involves conflicts of interest, power struggles, arbitrary decisions, and informal communications, which makes it hard to conceive of authority as routine and regulated. Yet this model became a cornerstone in twentieth-century organizational theory apparently because it provided a structure that promised to solve the problems caused by the mixture of the private and public spheres. Weber was explicit:

> In principle, the modern organization of the civil service separates the bureau from the private domicile of the official, and, in general, bureaucracy segregates official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life.[3]

Weber expected the separation of the private and public to assure that goal-oriented public action replace private greed, and public property be used for the advancement of society rather than for the benefit of individual officials. He was aware that public property had often been robbed by corrupt political officials and leading entrepreneurs, but believed that ultimately a bureaucratic authority structure would prevail in which "the executive office is separated from the household, business from private correspondence, and business assets from private fortunes."[4] In that structure, economic and political enterprises are managed by well-trained experts and specialized office managers. These experts devote their full time and attention to the organizational tasks, and are familiar with rules of management that are "more or less stable, more or less exhaustive, and which can be learnt."[5] To him, this form of structuring authority seemed permanent:

> Once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy. Bureaucracy is *the* means of carrying "community action" over into rationally ordered "societal action". Therefore, as an instrument for "societalizing" relations of power, bureaucracy has been and is a power instrument of the first order – for the one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus.[6]

Nobody has doubted the power of bureaucracy, or the contention that it is practically unshatterable. The question was whether it could be controlled, and whether a hierarchical structure marked by specialization and expertise is consistent with democracy. Weber himself was ambivalent about the ability to reconcile bureaucracy and democracy. On the one hand, he welcomed the leveling of social differences when officials are recruited on the basis of merit and expertise; it liberates modern administration from existing social, material or honorific preferences and ranks. On the other hand, he was aware of the dehumanizing effect of bureaucratic structures:

> The individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus in which he is harnessed. In contrast to the honorific or avocational "notable", the professional bureaucrat is chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march.[7]

Although Weber and his disciples, theoretical and empirical sociologists as well as experts on management and organizational behavior, could avoid spelling out the normative implications of this effect, those destined to serve as cogs in the growing bureaucratic structures of the twentieth century could not. The question of bureaucracy was one of the hardest to cope with. On the one hand, the routinization of charisma and the construction of legal-rational systems providing a degree of stability and predictability seemed warranted in view of the rise of charismatic leaders like Lenin and Hitler. On the other hand, the evils of these leaders could be attributed not only to charisma but also to the bureaucratic structures surrounding them. The world wars, although inspired by charismatic leaders, were fought by huge military-industrial systems run by faceless experts. Moreover, while leaders are dispensable, these systems seemed permanent and raised deep worry over the increasing subordination of private behavior to organizational routine.

This is where Joseph K. comes in. *The Trial*'s main character demonstrates the horrors the individual is subjected to in the bureaucratic state: uncertainty, loneliness, helplessness, and fear. Although not confined only to bureaucratic structures, the Kafkaean condition is best described in relation to them.

Franz Kafka was born in Bohemia in 1883. He studied law and was employed in those cold, gray offices constructed at the turn of the century to house its bureaucracies. His main position was with the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague where he prepared such reports as "the bulletin for 1907–8 on compulsory insurance in the building trade and on motor insurance."[8] In order to fulfill his unexciting job, he took courses in workers' insurance, the structure of ministerial departments, and statistics. One of his biographers, Ronald Hayman, described the office building in which he worked as "so massive and dignified, that the poor invalids and workmen summoned to collect pensions or receive compensation for injury usually looked bewildered and intimidated from the first moment of glimpsing the porter with his enormous beard."[9] No wonder the "routinization of charisma" seemed uninspiring to the insurance clerk.

Kafka was a member of the "Prague Circle," a group of writers, most of them Jewish, who lived in Prague, "a very metropolis indeed thanks to its being bilingual, to its variety of creeds and classes, and thanks to its often having played a decisive part over the centuries in the determination of the fate of Europe."[10] Jewish intellectuals in Prague enjoyed its cosmopolitan nature. They were educated in general German-language schools, lived a bourgeois life, and were mostly removed from traditional Jewish learning and customs. Within this cosmopolitan setting, they encountered three competing national movements active in Prague – Czech nationalism, German nationalism and Jewish nationalism (Zionism). The encounter with nationalism within a cosmopolitan setting influenced them in a unique way. Prague Circle novels, such as Max Brod's *Reubeni Fürst der Juden*, Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, or Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, portrayed a more sober model of the nation-state than those found in contemporary works describing modern European nationalism with romantic overtones.

The Prague circle viewed the nation-state not as a "promised land" but as a leviathan whose messianic rhetoric was secondary to *realpolitik*. In national movements seeking independence, the state is usually defined as redeeming to individuals and whole societies, but as Brod's fifteenth-century false prophet Reubeni learns in an imaginary meeting with Machiavelli, as Werfel's German pastor Lepsius, attempting to help the Armenians in World War I, learns in a meeting with Turkey's Minister of War, Enver Pasha, and as Kafka's Joseph K. learns from his own endeavors, the messiah does not reside in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. That apparatus stands by itself, devoid of any redeeming power.

This attitude, stripping the bureaucratic apparatus of the state from the romantic overtones attributed to the state by modern nationalism, made a difference in 1914. As stated before, Europe's intellectuals greeted the breakout of World War I with enthusiasm, believing that victory by their respective countries would liberate Europe from the political and intellectual deadlocks it found itself in. The Great War was expected to solve the political and intellectual problems of Europe. It led instead to Europe's decline and to the rise of totalitarianism. Like a contagious disease, it spread to all continents and seas. It was expected to be a short, swift war but lasted four years and wiped out a whole generation. Nations fought each other to the bitter end, and that end was bitter for all of them. This is why so many emerging from it beaten and broken could find inspiration in Kafka who did not share in the enthusiasm of 1914.

The sick, suicidal, self-hating Prague writer watched the nationalistic outbursts – the parades, the speeches, the military bands, the girls sticking flowers into the soldiers' bayonets – with apathy. As indicated in his diary, when the war broke out he had a different perspective than the cheering crowds of Europe:

> August 2. Germany has declared war on Russia – swimming in the afternoon … August 6. The artillery that marched across the Graben. Flowers, shouts of hurrah! I am more broken down than recovered. An empty vessel, still intact yet already in the dust among the broken fragments; or already in fragments yet still raged among those that are intact. Full of lies, hate and envy … I discover in myself nothing but pettiness, indecision, envy and hatred against those who are fighting and whom I passionately wish everything evil.[11]

If Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is the tale of the pre-1914 world that fell into disaster, Kafka's *The Trial*, composed in the first weeks of World War I, may be seen as the direct expression of that disaster. Thomas Mann considered two ideological options – Settembrini's belief in humanity and Naphta's search for redemption – showing both as incapable to provide a solution to the world of the twentieth century. To Kafka, however, there existed no options at all. In reading his works we are placed in the realm of the nightmares of a civilization blowing itself up.

It is hard to place the novel within known literary genres. It has been considered a book without genre, a mystification of meaninglessness, a religious crime novel, a fantasy about the guilt of "organizational man," or rather of an individual refusing to yield to the organization. Joseph K. has been analyzed as a person lacking any sensitivity to the world surrounding him or, to the contrary, as a moral, inquisitive individual. The novel had been compared to the great works of Kabbalah, even to the writings of the ancient prophets. "Kafka knew," wrote George Steiner in reference to Kafka's prophecy of the totalitarian state and its concentration camps.

> Kafka's misery as one coerced into writing, his almost hysterical diffidence before mundane authorship, are the facsimile, perhaps consciously arrived at, of the attempts of the prophets to evade the intolerable burden of their seeing.[12]

But *The Trial* is also about political theory, for it deals with power, authority, and law. Jane Bennett writes that by magnifying a set of fleeting experiences, Kafka's stories disclose a less familiar modality of power, and by depicting power as a variable field that mocks stabilizing description, the stories throw into relief theoretical frameworks brought to the text by reader or character.[13]

For instance, power is expected to be exercised by actor *A* over actor *B* and political theorists preoccupy themselves with the normative questions involved: what are the limits on the uses of power, what are the commitments of *A* towards *B*, what legitimate options are available to *B* to become liberated from the control of *A*, etc. However, in *The Trial* there is power exercised on *B* (or rather on K.) but there exists no visible *A*. Throughout the novel, power is exercised but its source is never revealed.

"Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K.," the novel begins, "for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning."[14] When the novel ends, we still have no clue who that "someone" may have been, who lied; was it a person, a group, or an organization, did it really occur, who was behind the arrest and why. Power is exerted throughout the book but the sources and components of power, or the nature of the relationship between the actors, if one exists, are never revealed.

When the source and nature of power are not revealed, there is no way of knowing if that source is legitimate. Kafka thus abolishes the relationship between crime and punishment. In a world in which power is exercised by anonymous authority structures, the punishment inflicted by these structures becomes arbitrary, if only because of their complexity. When we are summoned to court, we usually assume there is a reason for it related to our deeds. However, in *The Trial* this assumption loses ground. We have no idea whether Joseph K. is guilty or not and whether his guilt is relevant at all.

Thus, Joseph K. expresses the ambivalence individuals feel vis-à-vis the exercise of power on a daily basis. One gets into a government office and cannot predict what will be found there: Will the offices be occupied or empty? Will the clerks be busy? If they are busy, are they working on the tasks assigned to them by law? And if they are not busy, will they behave politely or rudely? When they are polite, is there some trickery or intrigue behind their courtesy, and when they are rude, is it one's own fault? When a complaint is filed against rude behavior and some clerk is punished while the entire system remains intact, does it matter? The difficulty of drawing any conclusions in the circumstances of modern bureaucracy is apparent on every page of this book, which can be read as a statement about the implications of the subjection of one individual – Joseph K. – to the routines of bureaucracy.

We hardly know anything about Joseph K.; even his full surname is not revealed. Our introduction to his private sphere does not include revelations about feelings, emotions, or desires. K. is an individual but our exposure to his individualism is limited due to his symbiosis with the bureaucratic structure he is part of. More than representing a real person, the anonymous Joseph K. is a parody of "political man" as the term was understood in nineteenth-century European civilization, that is, a person who has grown up in an orderly polity that assures a predictable set of norms. A key phrase can be found at the beginning when K., subjected to a surprise arrest, wonders what authority resides behind this arrest, as if authority in a modern context can be established at all:

> Who could these men be? What were they talking about? What authority could they represent? K. lived in a country with a legal constitution, there was universal peace, all the laws were in force; who dared seize him in his own dwelling?[15]

The expectation that the rule of law will prevail is not abandoned: "Who are you?" K. asks the man who appears one morning in his bedroom, as the totalitarian state would a few decades later. But as it turns out, this question is irrelevant; individuals have no chance to make sense of the authority surrounding them and the laws by which it operates. This is not because the bureaucratic structures in which authority is routinized are extraordinary but because they are not. The question "who are you?" is ignored, as though the appearance of a public official at one's bed one bright morning has become a routine.

Communication between Joseph K. and other individuals is confined to the constraints of hierarchy, with no meeting of souls:

> 'You can't go out, you are arrested.' 'So it seems', said K. 'But what for?' he added. 'We are not authorized to tell you that.'[16]

The confinement of human relations to organizational roles is total; everybody is part of the organization. Communication is conducted between individuals but it leads nowhere because individual concerns are not open to negotiations. Joseph K.'s communications are smooth and polite, but this only highlights their constrained nature. The bureaucracy is a stronger force than the clerks comprising it:

> Do you think you'll bring this fine case of yours to a speedier end by wrangling with us, your warders, over papers and warrants? We are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through a legal document and have nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high authorities we serve, before they would order such an arrest as this, must be quite well informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner.[17]

The authorities may be informed about the prisoner, but the prisoner has no way of knowing whether they really are and what it is they know or don't know. This subjects Joseph K. to the limited authority of lower clerks who make no difference in the long run but whose behavior becomes the main determinant of his fortune, as is often the case in prison where one's fate depends on the mood of particular guards:

> If you continue to have as good luck as you have had in the choice of your warders, then you can be confident of the final result.[18]

Upon his arrest, K. does not understand this truth and must be told that the warder–prisoner relationship is now dominant in his life:

> 'But how can I be under arrest? And particularly in such a ridiculous fashion? 'So now you're beginning it all over again?' said the warder, dipping a slice of bread and butter into the honey-pot. 'We don't answer such questions.' 'You'll have to answer them,' said K., 'Here are my papers, now show me yours, and first of all your warrant for arresting me.' 'Oh, good Lord,' said the warder. 'If you would only realize your position, and if you wouldn't insist

> on uselessly annoying us two, who probably mean better by you and stand closer to you than any other people in the world.'[19]

This is undoubtedly true. There is nobody closer to K. than the officials he negotiates with. No social group exists that mediates between him and the bureaucratic apparatus. In the past, traditional and charismatic authority structures allowed individuals of high rank or class to overcome legal and other constraints through contacts with "their own." K. is tempted to establish such contacts but they no longer exist: "A few words with a man on my own level of intelligence would make everything far clearer than hours of talk with these two," but the system knows better. One's social contacts become unreliable once the law has put its hand on a person, however powerful and well-connected that person feels he is:

> 'Hasterer, the lawyer, is a personal friend of mine,' he said, 'may I telephone to him?' 'Certainly, replied the Inspector, 'but I don't see what sense there would be in that, unless you have some private business of your own to consult him about.'[20]

Not only does K. lack personal contacts and group connections to help him; he cannot count on popular support either. This is apparent when he has his "day in court" and is given the opportunity to say it all, to express what every person exposed to the overwhelming power of anonymous bureaucracy would want to say:

> '[T]here can be no doubt that behind all the actions of this court of justice, that is to say in my case, behind my arrest and today's interrogation, there is a great organization at work. An organization which not only employs corrupt warders, oafish Inspectors, and Examining Magistrates of whom the best that can be said is that they recognize their own limitations, but also has at its disposal a judicial hierarchy of high, indeed of the highest rank, with an indispensable and numerous retinue of servants, clerks, police, and other assistants, perhaps even hangmen, I do not shrink from that word.'[21]

But a small disruption at the corner of the room in which this statement is made diverts everybody's attention away from the speaker who remains, as we so often do, in his isolation. The small disruption is enough to divert attention from K.'s sermon because his personal views were never important to anybody in the first place, but the disruption is significant in an additional way; it signifies the main feature missing in the Weberian bureaucratic model. Joseph K. is never exposed to grand events, just to small disturbances. This is where the nightmare of this novel originates. Bureaucracy does not use dramatically coercive means – it mostly operates according to routines set by law. Only small disruptions occur – someone is not found where we expect him to be, someone is found where we don't expect her to be, or something just doesn't seem quite right.

For instance, K. finds on a judge's desk books containing pornographic material and there is no way to tell whether this is intentional, a matter of neglect, a hidden message, or just one of the complexities of a modern world. It is the tiny disruptions that matter. In this particular case, it was caused when a man pulled a washerwoman into a corner by the door and clasped her in his arms. Big organizations may get out of control for reasons, known as "human errors," that are no less trivial.

The bureaucratic organization has godlike dimensions; it dominates the earth. Like God, it exists everywhere and no human activity is free of its control. In contrast to the palaces of traditional and charismatic leaders, it lacks splendor and glory, but this only strengthens the sense of dominance. In his search for the Court of Inquiry, Joseph K. expects to find a building recognizable at a distance by a sign or by some unusual commotion before the door, but instead finds himself in a street with houses almost exactly alike on both sides, high gray tenements inhabited by poor people. The inquiry takes place in a setting we hardly associate with a court of law (although it fits quite accurately the actual location of courts in many cities of the world):

> [M]ost of the windows were occupied, men in shirt-sleeves were leaning there smoking or holding small children cautiously and tenderly on the window ledges. Other windows were piled high with bedding, above which the disheveled head of a woman would appear for a moment.[22]

Nor is there splendor and glory in the offices. In his exploration of the empty courtroom, K. finds "a long passage, a lobby communicating by ill-fitting doors with the different offices on the floor."[23] It is in such unimpressive offices that we rule ourselves in the age of the routinization of charisma; this is where the law is housed. At times we draw political leaders in a glorious fashion, as Titoreli, the painter, who was ordered to paint them, tells Joseph K.:

> 'You have painted the figure as it actually stands above the high seat.' 'No,' said the painter, 'I have neither seen the figure nor the high seat, that is all invention, but I am told what to paint and I paint it.'[24]

Behind the judge, a large figure is drawn, with a bandage over her eyes and wings on her heels, the goddess of justice and the goddess of victory in one. That figure represents the end of political philosophy as it proclaims the ultimate combination of power and justice that has culminated in modern bureaucracy. The quest for a normative authority structure, which began with Trasymachus's claim that might is right, has been completed, as modern bureaucracy is both legal-rational and normative. Yet we are not allowed any illusions as to who the figures exercising that authority are. Facing a picture of a judge, possibly his judge, K. sees a man in a judge's robe seated on a high throne-like seat, but the judge does not appear in a dignified composure. Instead he appears in a violent and threatening position and we find out he is none other than a low-ranking official "sitting on a kitchen chair, with an old horse-rug doubled under him."[25]

This, then, is the nature of the modern authority structure – a system of unimpressive clerks located in ugly offices whose routine activities disrupted by minute incidents represent "the law." As in the famous fable appearing in *The Trial* about the inability to enter the sphere of law, we are both exposed to and removed from the nature of modern authority. The authority structure is defined by the law – "you see, everything belongs to the Court"[26] Joseph K. is told – but its disruptions, being so minute, come as a surprise, and hence the organizational apparatus goes astray. And when this happens, the individual – not the organization – is the victim. As a lawyer informs K., there is no chance for individuals to reform the system because the individual is destructible while the system is not:

> One must lie low, no mater how much it went against the grain, and try to understand that this great organization remained, so to speak, in a state of delicate balance, and that if someone took it upon himself to alter the disposition of things around him, he ran the risk of losing his footing and falling to destruction, while the organization would simply right itself by some compensating reaction in another part of its machinery – since everything interlocked – and remain unchanged, unless, indeed, which was very probable, it became still more rigid, more vigilant, severer, and more ruthless.[27]

The ability of bureaucracy to remain intact stems from its total nature – it encompasses the public sphere *in toto* with no civil society to mediate between the individual and the organization and evaluate the normative behavior of both. The individual does not face the organization but is interlocked into its hierarchical bureaus. The book begins with Joseph K.'s arrest when he himself rings a bell that brings representatives of the law into his room, and it ends with his death inflicted by a bizarre cooperation between him and the two policemen killing him:

> In complete harmony all three now made their way across a bridge in the moonlight, the two men readily yielded to K.'s slightest movement, and when he turned slightly toward the parapet they turned, too, in a solid front.[28]

K. is not just subjected to organizational routines, he is part of them; when his uncle comes to visit from the country, he arrives at K.'s bank accompanied by two clerks bringing his nephew some papers to sign. In *The Trial* we find no domestic or social system – just bureaucratic routines. Not only are all individuals faceless, the disappearance of the private sphere is symbolized by such details as the smartness of the clerks' clothing. The court's clerk of inquiries is smartly dressed because the staff took up for him; to which some of the clients even contributed. In other words, the entire "social system" is mobilized. Sometimes an individual may grumble about the need to fulfill a role but the roles are always fulfilled.

This, of course, commands a heavy price that is not spelled out but is apparent on every page of the book. The merger of the individual and the organization, with no mediating social groups, leads to uncertainty and despair. Joseph K. is weak and helpless – when a student grabs the Examining Magistrate's wife he has an urge to play savior but both the woman and K. rationalize her captivity:

> 'And you don't want to be set free,' cried K., laying his hand on the shoulder of the student, who snapped at it with his teeth. 'No,' cried the woman pushing K. away with both hands. 'No, no, you mustn't do that, what are you thinking of? It would be the ruin of me. Let him alone, oh, please let him alone! He's only obeying the orders of the Examining Magistrate and carrying me to him.' 'Then let him go, and as for you, I never want to see you again.' Said K.[29]

The last sentence indicates a degree of frustration over the failure of the rescue operation through the victim's fault, but K. soon rationalizes it:

> There was no reason, of course, for him to worry about that, he had received the defeat only because he had insisted on giving battle. While he stayed quietly at home and went about his ordinary vocations he remained superior to all these people and could kick any of them out of his path.[30]

However K. rationalizes his condition, he is still miserable. Our exposure to the limited private sphere of one cog in the bureaucratic wheel may thus be seen as a call for a dialogue between individuals and the social groups mediating between them and the inevitable bureaucratic structures. Joseph K., facing the organization with no family, friends, or social and political support groups, is desperate. His world is sad and shallow, as symbolized by the view from his office window where one sees nothing but "a slice of empty housewall between two shop windows."[31]

Kafka, who suffered loneliness in the offices he worked in, did not assume an easy adjustment to the bureaucratic world. True, K. yields to that world in every respect ("he suffered the two of them to discuss him as if he were an inanimate object, indeed he actually preferred that"[32]) and may be seen as responsible in existentialist fashion for his condition, but his despair is hard to ignore:

> One winter morning-snow was falling outside the window in a foggy dimness – K. was sitting in his office, already exhausted in spite of the early hour. To save his face before his subordinates at least, he had given his clerk instructions to admit no one, on the plea that he was occupied with an important piece of work. But instead of working he twisted in his chair, idly rearranged the things lying on his writing-table, and then, without being aware of it, let his outstretched arm rest on the table and went on sitting motionless with bowed head.[33]

This desperate condition extends by far the traditional structure of bureaucracy. It can be attributed to organizational reality in less obvious settings than Prague of 1914. In *The Organization Man*, published in 1956, William Whyte has shown that individuals in the democratic United States rationalize no less than Joseph K. their servitude to the omnipotent structure of post World War II organizations:

> They are all, as they so often put it, in the same boat. Listen to them talk to each other over the front lawns of their suburbia and you cannot help but be struck by how well they grasp the common denominators which bind them. Whatever the differences in their organization ties, it is the common problems of collective work that dominate their attentions, and when the Du Pont man talks to the research chemist or the chemist to the army man, it is these problems that are uppermost. The word *collective* most of them can't bring themselves to use – except to describe foreign countries or organizations they don't work for – but they are keenly aware of how much more deeply beholden they are to organization than were their elders.[34]

Scholars studying human relations in organizations worked under the assumption that there need be no conflict between the individual and the organizational structure, but to Whyte there was such a conflict: "the peace of mind offered by organization remains a surrender, and no less so for being offered in benevolence."[35] In other words, while the material conditions and self-esteem of workers in organizations had improved since Kafka wrote *The Trial*, this improvement subordinated them even more to the organization. And the more individuals were given the illusion that the organizational structures they worked in were being replaced by more friendly ones, the more valid Joseph K.'s message had become.

In the 1960s it was widely believed that corporate cultures in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan had found the way to accommodate the individual in the organization. John Kenneth Galbraith's *The New Industrial State*, published in 1967, was a landmark in its optimism regarding the emancipated industrial system. The book described the decline of the traditional entrepreneur and the rise of a "technostructure" composed of those who bring specialized knowledge, talent, or experience to industrial organizations. Reflecting a common trend according to which knowledge was seen as liberating, Galbraith was hopeful:

> The industrial system, by making trained and educated manpower the decisive factor of production, requires a highly developed educational system. If the educational system serves generally the beliefs of the industrial system, the influence and monolithic character of the latter will be enhanced. By the same token, should it be superior to and independent of the industrial system, it can be the necessary force for skepticism, emancipation and pluralism.[36]

Yet Galbraith knew that such superiority and independence had a small chance. As he himself admitted, higher education at the time extensively accommodated to the needs of the industrial system, and it was hard to expect that, as it did so, critical thinking would prevail. There was no reason to expect that the rise of knowledge elites in modern industrial societies would have an emancipating effect if only because of the tendency by knowledge elites to justify the industrial system rather than to criticize it. When knowledge was harnessed to the tasks of the modern industrial state, mainly during the Cold War, it lost the "skepticism, emancipation and pluralism" associated with it, and although university presidents never ceased to pay lip service to the liberal arts, knowledge was more associated with the conformity of the engineer than with the skepticism of the philosopher. Students prepared themselves to a life in the service of the modern industrial state by studying engineering, computer science, business administration, and law and were socialized into the modes of thought associated with these professions, which only rarely included Socratic skepticism.

No field of study was more popular than "management." In the second half of the twentieth century, the manager replaced the ideologue as the focus of human development and infinite studies of managerial techniques under such titles as " Who Moved My Cheese?" promised to improve the organizational setting in which the technological revolution of the twentieth century was steered. A managerial revolution was underway, reinforced by the enormous financial success in the eighties and nineties of high-tech companies operating in a new fashion. Until the collapse of Nasdaq, which marked the end of the illusion that high-tech companies represent an unbeatable economic domain, it seemed that a new era, nullifying Kafka's bureaucratic nightmares, had begun. That era was characterized by a restructuring of the workforce in line with the high-tech culture.

This included the seating of knowledge workers in open spaces while giving them a sense of worth and prominence inside and outside the organization, unprecedented channels of mobility, and skyrocketing financial rewards. It also included the substantial shortening of lines of command and control, organizational transparency, and the reformulation of organizational tasks in modular ways. The new organization, replacing the old-fashioned bureaucracy, was expected to adapt better to change, uncertainty, and complexity in the organization's environment and to cater to the value of individualism. Peter Drucker, one of the main advocates of the new, open, information-based organization, puts it as follows:

> In the traditional organization – the organization of the last one hundred years – the skeleton, or internal structure, was a combination of rank and power. In the emerging organization, it has to be mutual understanding and responsibility.[37]

The new organizational setting, however, did not avoid the Kafkaean malaise. Joseph K.'s uncertainty, loneliness, helplessness, and fear hardly disappeared. Like Whyte's suburbia, workers in high-tech companies may have lived in denial and rationalized their condition as divine, but Joseph K.'s warnings have not been nullified in the open spaces of IBM or Microsoft. To the contrary, some of the features of *The Trial* have only become more salient.

First, the workplace has not necessarily become more pleasant and joyful, considering the long hours of work required in the new organizations and the enormous effort it took to try and survive in a highly competitive job market. The mass media have often portrayed high-tech workers as joyful beings but, as is well known, the discrepancy between the ways one's life is portrayed in the media and how it looks in reality often leads to stress. The success of women in climbing the corporate ladder in the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, led to great stress over the need to match the superhuman qualities attributed to them in the media, especially when such qualities were actually needed to overcome the many obstacles involved. The open spaces and other characteristics of the new organizations of the late twentieth century did not help diminish the difficulties of individuals lacking job security and operating in an uncertain environment characterized by mergers and takeovers leading to mass layoffs.

Second, the condition of confinement to the organization has not changed. Paradoxically, the more uncertain knowledge workers became about their workplace, the more hours they had to invest, which amounted to feudal servitude. Corporations and their fellow travelers in the field of management presented the mobility opportunities of knowledge workers as never-ending, but insecurity over one's future, especially when a certain age had been reached which made competition in the knowledge-based industry extremely hard, filled many hearts with Kafkaean gloom.

Third, with the increasing complexity of the world, and the burgeoning role of the mass media in that world, the fundamental problem raised by Kafka over the subordination of the individual to gigantic structures conveying moral authority whose source and validity is unknown became only more severe. Late-twentieth-century men and women found themselves in a world moralizing its actions on every level: on the international level, where a new world order marked by a global human rights regime was said to emerge, on the national level, where political leaders equipped with daily polling results promised people everything they wanted to hear, and on the corporate level where a cruder than ever financial greed was covered, mainly in television commercials, by claims of transparency, community service, ecological concern, and the like. As a consequence, individuals lost every sense of right and wrong when it came to the organizational systems surrounding them. The political rhetoric of global NGOs became as void as that of national leaders, corporate CEOs, or military officers once the competition over the public sphere necessitated the recruitment of public relations firms.

When appearance becomes as important as substance, it is impossible to identify the sources of policies, to evaluate their costs and benefits, and get a sense of how sincere their advocates are. Indeed, every policy and activity was presented as normative. Late-twentieth-century Joseph K. was not just summoned to court (although many individuals were when human negotiations over such issues as doctor–patient relations have increasingly been replaced by lawsuits). The individual faced a gigantic network of self-righteous political, economic, military, and civil organizations demanding adherence to an unclear, unstable, transient ethics. The lack of a valid source of moral authority was apparent, for instance, when military intervention by the "international community" was conducted in some instances and refrained from in others, or when the same actions by politicians, corporate executives, or celebrities were praised one day and condemned on another day, when the mood in the media had changed.

Finally, Joseph K. has often been referred to when individuals complained about their entanglement in organizational systems claiming efficiency but turning life into a nightmare as a result of small disruptions. Those required to push buttons on their telephones in order to get a service but getting disconnected instead, those subjected to recordings telling them their business was important to someone who nevertheless kept them waiting for hours, or those who acquired the newest, most expensive computer only to find out it requires "upgrading," could easily identify with Kafka's character. That character conveyed the feeling of helplessness sensed by those who faced the dial phone button, the answering machine, or the computer world alone. The more "user-friendly" the world had allegedly become at the end of the century, and the more righteous the systems surrounding us, the more timely Joseph K.'s message about the need to maintain the diminishing domestic and social affiliations enabling us to preserve a degree of mental health and social civility.

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