

Power (*Macht*)

Power is a *→symbolically generalized medium* that makes accepting alter's actions as the premises of ego's actions probable. Power is therefore not observed as held by someone; it is a communication medium for coordinating selections and producing the corresponding expectations.

In the functionally differentiated society [*→Differentiation of Society*], power is the specific medium of the *→political system*. It can potentially also be realized in other systems, but without being able to obtain the capacity to reproduce that it has in politics.

A particular constellation of attribution is associated with the medium of power: alter's action (the action of the power holder) triggers ego's action. The normal social condition is that actions performed by alter and ego are related to one another. However, this relation becomes improbable when alter's action is a decision (a command) governing ego's action that must be obeyed. Alter acts and ego finds herself in the situation to accept or reject alter's action as the premise for her own action. Ego's acceptance is improbable because alter's command is specialized and there is no certainty of consensus or congruence of interests between alter and ego in the concrete situation. In this situation, the recourse to power allows ego's acceptance of alter's command to become probable. Power exists when alter's action motivates ego to act: therefore, power is not based on pre-defined motivations, but is itself the generator of the motivation. Power requires the freedom of alter (who could act in this way or a different way) and ego (who could reject alter's selection): only in this case is it evident that ego's acceptance of the premises of her action is linked to alter's power.

Power reproduces itself in the form of obedience to a command. It is realized when the action sequence command-obedience is combined with a sequence of threat of sanction (if you do not obey, I will punish you). Thus, the

form of power is the difference between obedience and the alternative to be avoided (sanction).

Power threatens negative sanctions based on physical violence, which must be usable in a generalized way and represents the symbiotic mechanism [*→Symbolically Generalized Media*] of power. It can occasionally use positive sanctions, but these are transformed into negatives (for instance, when dismissal is threatened). Neither alter nor ego want sanctions; however, they are more damaging for ego. For both actors, sanctions represent the alternatives to be avoided, but ego is more afraid of their realization.

On the one hand, the difference between obedience and sanction motivates ego to accept communication (it is better to be obedient than punished); power fails when ego prefers the alternative to be avoided and alter must give up or enforce sanctions (Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait despite the UN ultimatum). On the other hand, alter's power is based on the avoidance of sanctions (the UN could only have had power if Iraq had obeyed): power ends when the sanction is realized, as the use of physical force shows that no power is present. To maintain power, the use of physical force must remain an alternative to be avoided: the ability of power to assert itself is proven when it is not contradicted.

Power is symbolized: the symbols allow decisions to be determined and implemented (we must do this or that, for this or that reason), as well as making power visible (e.g., parades, flags). The symbolic side of power always plays a role—even when the use of physical force is threatened—because it always requires a decision. Even when physical force is employed, the effect of power does not lie in changing the physical state of the body, but rather in the consequences of such force for the acceptance of communication.

The code of power is the distinction inferior/superior. This is a preferential code, because it is positive to be superior and negative to be inferior. However, the code cannot motivate the acceptance of communication and, therefore, cannot motivate ego to accept her inferiority. Taking the difference inferior/superior alone can lead to fighting. A secondary coding is therefore necessary, which is provided by the law [*→Legal System*]: the code legal/illegal allows ego to distinguish between a legitimate and an illegitimate law, i.e., to motivate herself to accept legitimate communication. Without such secondary coding, the *→code* of power cannot be technicized. For this reason, the programs governing the correct attribution of the values of power are laws and legal decisions. Finally when power is political, a further code alongside

that of the law provides technologization: the political code government/opposition.

Power is reflexive since it refers to other power and only develops when it can connect to other power. Power inflates when it is used in excess (alter demands conditions of ego's action that ego cannot fulfill) and deflates when implemented too narrowly, i.e., when not all the possibilities offered by power can be exploited (when alter either makes continual recourse to physical force or must give up). [C.B.]

Power (1979); Theory of Society (2012: 212-214, 223-228, 231); Die Politik der Gesellschaft (2000: Ch. 2).

