

The Development of Auditing: A Key Ritual of Scientology

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What is Auditing?

Auditing is a religious form of psychiatric therapy. It is practised in the Church of Scientology, a New Religious Movement founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1954. The practice originated as a secular form of psychiatric therapy in Hubbard's bestseller, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, but has since developed into a religious ritual. Comparable to counselling, auditing aims to remove the negative influence of previous experiences of trauma in the brain that lead to psychoses that prevent the individual from reaching their true potential. According to Hubbard's Scientologist writings, engagement with auditing will allow the individual to achieve the state of 'Clear', and no longer be troubled by their psychoses.



Auditing in Contemporary Scientology

Once auditing developed a religious angle, it led to the establishment of the Church of Scientology. In addition to its original purpose, auditing became a process capable of providing spiritual fulfillment in an aim to separate one's 'thetan' (soul) from the physical aspects of the universe. Scientologist auditing is now conducted using a device known as the E-Meter, which is believed to allow a trained auditor to accurately detect the traces of the individual's psychoses and establish when they have been removed. Despite this development of auditing in the Church of Scientology, its contemporary practice is more nuanced than it may seem on face value, particularly due to the increasing number of communities practising auditing outside the institution of the Church of Scientology.



The Free Zone

The various groups or independent individuals who practise auditing and Scientology outside of the institution of the Church of Scientology are collectively known as the 'Free Zone'. A considerable number of Free Zone practitioners are former members of the Church of Scientology that have become critical of the organisation for issues including the fees charged for auditing sessions and distortions of L. Ron Hubbard's teaching. The notable example of Ron's Org, a Free Zone organisation formed in 1984, is dedicated to protecting Hubbard's core principles, and accuses the Church of Scientology of intentionally charging unreasonable fees for their auditing services, thus neglecting the true goal of auditing.



The Aims of this Research

- This project will consider the transition auditing made from its psychiatric roots to its contemporary practice, determining the contributing factors to its trajectory.
- I will analyse the current practice of auditing in various Free Zone communities whilst considering its varied nature in comparison to how the process is conducted in the Church of Scientology.
- My research methodology will include interviews, during which I will meet with various Free Zone practitioners to gain an understanding of the role auditing plays in their religious community, and how they practise the process in an often unregulated environment.
- This will enrich the sociological study of New Religions by providing a more thorough and contemporary understanding of the key ritual of a relatively unexplored movement in academic scholarship.