

# Anxiety and innovation: working with the beyond of double subjection

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Philip Boxer  
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## Abstract

The internet, like the printing press, railways and the telephone, has changed the way economies work. We are in the middle of an unfolding story that is not only changing what we understand an 'organisation' to be, but also changing the ways in which we experience ourselves as subjects (Boxer 2011). One theme that runs through these changes is that of the loss of sovereignty, whether at the level of the person, enterprise or state. We are less able to act as if we are 'islands unto ourselves' than ever before as we encounter complex adaptive behaviours, emergence and quantum effects that challenge common sense itself.

Within these turbulent environments, the ability to sustain a primary task definition of the enterprise with its boundaries breaks down along with the sovereignty of the enterprise (Boxer 2014). Under these circumstances, the object of psychoanalytic study ceases to remain focused on the structures of affiliation to the founding acts on which the identity of an enterprise rest, extending to include the acts of innovation by which its clients are responded to one-by-one. 'Boundary' becomes the particular relation to the 'otherness' of a client-patient-citizen.

The paper proposes a return to Freud's first model – his Project for a Scientific Psychology (Freud 1950[1895]) – as a way of considering how we are subjected to both the structure of our unconscious and to what-can-be-said that can make sense to the other. It proposes that this double subjection is supported by an affiliation to an enterprise through the valencies by which the organisation of the enterprise lends support to our self-identity. This enables us to understand an enterprise to be a social formation resting ultimately on the structures with which it is identified, through which structures it interacts with the 'others' in its environment.

To those identified with such an organisation, anxiety comes not only to warn them of possible failures to perform, ultimately signalling their potential annihilation, but also to warn them of the possible failure of their structures of affiliation, giving rise to the loss of support to their self-identity and thus to existential anxiety or angst. Freud's first model provides us with a way of approaching these two dimensions of anxiety, the defence against the first involving a turning *away* from fear, and the defence against the second involving a turning *towards* existential angst. Thus the experience of loss presents a gap giving rise to angst, in relation to which also come opportunities for innovation.

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## Introduction

An individual newly joining an enterprise may experience it as a social defence system to which he or she must react and adapt. For the nurses in Isabel Menzies-Lyth's study, "in the process of matching between psychic and social defence systems, the emphasis was heavily on the modification of the individual's psychic defences" (Menzies-Lyth 1990[1960])p459. A social defence system is, however, also "a historical development through collusive interaction between individuals to project and reify relevant elements of their psychic defence systems" (Menzies-Lyth 1990[1960])p459. Menzies-Lyth underlines that the use of the organisation of an enterprise as a defence against anxiety is operated only by individuals.

This approach has brought its clinical concepts, practices and focus on what enables interventions to be effective, approaching organisational entities through addressing the individual's experience within a single enterprise, or, through the metaphoric use of psychoanalytic concepts to the enterprise itself *as if* it were an individual (Arnaud 2012). Either way, the enterprise has been presumed to exist as a sovereign entity in a way that fits with cybernetic notions and parallels the presumptions of a sovereign ego. How, then, are we to think psychoanalytically about the way in which the development of an enterprise interacts with an individual?

Consider this metaphor: an enterprise is like a coral reef and the people whose employment depend on that enterprise are like the organisms that colonise the habitat created by the coral reef. In these terms, the organisation of the enterprise used by its employees in support of their psychic defence systems is like the reef habitat used by its colonial organisms in support of their individual niches. The dynamic relationship of the coral reef with adjacent environments affects what forms of colonial organism it can support, but so too do the forms of colonial organism affect the topography of the coral reef (Moberg and Folke 1999). How does this translate into the individual-enterprise-environment dynamic?

All reef systems are open systems, but the extent of their openness to exchange with adjacent ecosystems varies, reflected by their organisation as habitats which may itself be more or less dynamic. To study such reef systems as isolated ecosystems, their internal processes must dominate over their cross-boundary conditions. Extend the spatio-temporal scale, however, and the topography of the reef itself becomes, for example, a function of the ocean swell regime. Here, the cross-boundary conditions dominate over the reef system's internal processes. Thus, "ecosystem processes can be defined and measured at many scales not just that of the whole reef, depending on the question being addressed and the observer's perception" (Hatcher 1997)p82.

This paper considers the psychoanalytic implications of considering a different scale at which cross-boundary conditions come to dominate intra-enterprise dynamics. Before considering the interaction of these cross-boundary dynamics with the individual, however, we need to clarify what constitutes the enterprise-environment interaction.

## The enterprise-environment interaction

The enterprise-environment interaction was less essential to the socio-technical challenges facing the machine cultures of the post-World War II era, 'machine culture' describing an enterprise culture focused on maximising machine performance (Rice 1958), p241. At that time, the primary task of an enterprise was defined as the task that the enterprise had to perform if it was to survive (Miller and Rice 1967) p25. Thus, when A.K. Rice originally wrote about the Ahmedabad experiment (Rice 1958),

the primary task of the workers at Calico Mills involved managing a group of looms. The nature of the technology of production constrained the ways in which this primary task could be defined (Miller 1959).

By the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, primary task was that organisation of an enterprise that could form the basis of sustainable competitive advantage (Porter 1985; Keichell III 2010). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however, technology does not in the same way constrain the enterprise providing, for example, in property insurance or in caring for the elderly mentally ill. The constraints come more from the nature of each situation and circumstance, for example, in organising remediation or a care pathway. The design of the organisation in each case is constrained by the situation and circumstance rather than by a prior assumption of a primary output, such as of woven cloth in the case of Calico Mills.

Effective remediation or a care pathway must be organised on a one-by-one basis, in the sense that models are built one-by-one out of lego bricks, the primary task of the remediation or the care pathway in each case depending on the nature of the individual situation and circumstance for which it is designed. The enterprise providing remediation or care in this way must be capable of simultaneously organising many different responses through the use of some repertoire of possible services and treatments, not all provided by itself. The cross-boundary conditions dominate the intra-enterprise dynamics.

In the place of one supply-side definition of primary task, therefore, the enterprise must support many simultaneous demand-side definitions, each one potentially defining its response differently, for example, in healthcare, through the provision of different care pathways (Porter and Teisberg 2006). Given this proliferation of demand-side definitions of its primary task, an enterprise providing such a service must define its survival differently to the supply-side definitions brought to us by Miller and Rice (Miller and Rice 1967).

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century pull towards having to respond to customers one-by-one**

The need to do many different things at the same time is not unique to insurance or healthcare enterprises, being apparent in any industry impacted by digitalisation (Hagel III and Seely Brown 2005). Enabled by the increasing ability to connect everything digitally, including things as well as systems and people (Warrior 2013), it demands a shift in an enterprise's locus of innovation from its supply-side to its demand-side (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2003). In the place of markets, digitalisation enables a focus on the demands of customers, each within his or her context-of-use (Anderson 2006). In these environments, cross-boundary dynamics dominate internal processes, a 'market' becoming a convenient construct serving supply-side interests, enabling demand-side complexity to be ignored (Kay 2003).

This demand-side focus means that an organization subject to these competitive pressures must place greater emphasis on its ability to create new and multiple forms of collaboration in order to create value (Hagel III, Seely Brown et al. 2010). As a result, it must itself operate within networks of other operationally and managerially independent enterprises, forming ecosystems with which it must nevertheless collaborate in varying ways (Luo, Baldwin et al. 2012). Within these ecosystems, an enterprise must adopt 'shaping strategies' enabling organised networks to become the new economic 'entities' shaping competition (Iansiti and Levien 2004), their 'relationship economics' being organized around the contexts-of-use in which demands arise (Zuboff and Maxmin

2002). In the case of the care enterprise, a care pathway becomes just one pathway through an organised network.

These organised networks rely on task systems that have become increasingly modular (Langlois 2007), the agility of the organised network being the variety of pathways through the network that it can support (Boxer 2012). An enterprise aligns these task systems to customers' demands through contractual networks (Baldwin 2007) and creates dynamic complementarities with other enterprises (Aoki 2006), its identity becoming increasingly independent of institutionalised boundaries. In this environment, the horizontal task linkages that can be established across these organised networks become dominant with respect to institutionalised vertical accountability linkages (Baldwin 2007). Cross-boundary conditions dominate intra-enterprise dynamics. This produces the conditions in which the dynamic behaviour of the ecosystem exhibits complex adaptive behaviour (Kurtz and Snowden 2003).

These, then, are the cross-boundary dynamics of the enterprise-environment interactions that are interacting with the individual. We turn now to consider these interactions from the perspective of the individual.

## Decoupling the individual from enterprise-environment interactions

One symptom of the impact on the individual of the dynamic nature of these enterprise-environment interactions has been a call for deep changes to educational and entrepreneurial systems. A study of the US Economy since the end of World War II showed that, in the last twenty years, output and productivity had become decoupled from jobs and wages – people doing routine forms of work had become increasingly decoupled from enterprise-environment interactions:

“Digital technologies have been able to do routine work for a while now. This allows them to substitute for less-skilled and less-educated workers and puts a lot of downward pressure on the median wage. As computers and robots get more and more powerful while simultaneously getting cheaper and more widespread this phenomenon spreads, to the point where economically rational employers prefer buying more technology over hiring more workers. In other words, they prefer capital over labour. This preference affects both wages and job volumes. And the situation will only accelerate as robots and computers learn to do more and more and to take over jobs that we currently think of not as ‘routine’, but as requiring a lot of skill and/or education.” (McAfee 2012)

During this time, enterprises were responding to massive changes in their environment with changed strategies and boundaries redrawn by divesting peripheral businesses, focusing on core areas while outsourcing selected activities, and merging at a historically unprecedented rate (Wulf 2012). The resultant elimination of layers in an enterprise's organisational hierarchy ('flattening') were associated with increased control and decision-making at the top enabled by massive investments in information technology:

“New strategies and vastly more complex environments require different modes of internal governance: different structures, different ways of making decisions, different incentives and different skills. Shorter product life cycles require faster decisions that are more responsive to customers. More demanding shareholders set higher fiduciary standards for senior executives forcing structural changes that reduce inefficiencies in bureaucratic organizations. Advances in information technology improve access to data and facilitate coordination and communication within and across levels inside firms” (Wulf 2012).

With these changes in how enterprises were being organised came new perspectives on the nature of competition as dynamic specialisation (Hagel III and Seely Brown 2005) and a more

dynamic understanding of the way markets themselves were organised to serve particular interests (Kay 2003; Langlois 2003). Michael Porter, a dominant influence on competitive strategy during the 1980's and 1990's, concluded that a fundamentally different approach was needed to creating value, one that gave priority to creating value for the customer as well as for the supplier (Porter and Kramer 2011), for example, with radical consequences for the organisation of healthcare (Porter and Teisberg 2006). Put together, these changes reflected an unprecedented period of technological change setting loose unprecedented demands for innovation across every industry, whether privately or publicly owned. In the reef metaphor, cross-boundary conditions were having a huge impact on the organisation of the reef/enterprise ecosystem.

The effects of the decoupling can be seen in the persistent levels of high unemployment in Western economies, with jobs that can be mechanised or computerised being gradually lost. One view is that this is leading to new kinds of job being created for 'new artisans'. These 'new artisans' are workers who "combine technical skills with interpersonal interaction, flexibility and adaptability to offer services that are uniquely human" (Autor and Dorn 2013). Another view is that this argument is itself a manifestation of neoliberal thinking and that neoliberalism is the ideological corollary of this decoupling. With neoliberalism, the well-being of each citizen can best be advanced by "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005). In effect, each citizen becomes a consumer personally responsible for the state of his or her life in an environment presented as if it were 'natural' (Harcourt 2011).

### Neoliberalism as a symptom of the decoupling

Neoliberalism for the very rich makes perfect sense, given that the rich have the power to shape markets to serve their interests (Langlois 2003). For those less fortunate, however, neoliberalism's offer of personal fulfilment lies in the shadow of varying degrees of anomie. Anomie is experienced as anxiety about what to do in the face of a withering away of norms, norms understood as 'mental' givens. This is existential anxiety or angst involving a 'loss of meaning', a loss of a sense of direction and of knowing where even to begin to make meaning. Such existential angst is anxiety *without* an object and is to be contrasted with annihilation anxiety, being anxiety *with* an object that is performance or signal anxiety in its extreme form (Freud 1959[1926]). Neoliberalism from the perspective of this existential angst can be understood as an attempt to neutralise a critique of the shape taken by an individual's life (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Such a critique is based on the importance attached to personal liberation, authenticity and being-true-to-oneself in clear echoes of the 1960s. This critique is taken up by neoliberalism as a rhetoric that is vague in theory and has no ability to deliver in practice. Markets are not, in fact, 'free' even though claimed to be (Harcourt 2011), and the citizen is never wholly able to exercise sovereign rights over the shape of his or her life, even though largely treated by enterprises and the state as if he or she is (Bloom 2013).

Looked at from the perspective of social defences, while neoliberal management practices may have created some kinds of job (while destroying many others), in the public sector it has done so in a way that has standardised and mechanised care to the point at which the care provided can only be described as provided in bad faith (Rizq 2012). It is as if the perverse enterprise (Long 2008) is offering a social defence in the form of jobs that can serve as psychic retreats (Steiner 1993) in a way that displaces social anxiety onto the enterprise itself with its rules, systems, structures and procedures (Hoggett 2013). With some of its more recent political manifestations as 'austerity', we

may even see neoliberalism as banally evil in the sense that its adoption as an ideology enables individuals knowingly to inflict the suffering of anomie on others (Alford 1997). Returning to the reef metaphor, it is as if the response for changing cross-boundary conditions has been to intensify the focus on protecting the existing organisation of niches within the reef/enterprise ecosystem.

The neoliberal focus thus remains on the individual while the interactions of the enterprise with its adjacent environments remain the concern of others, or are kept safely 'other' through narcissistic idealisation of the enterprise itself (Schwartz 1992) and through envious attack as a narcissistic defence against unbearable otherness (Stein 2000). It is in this sense that neoliberalism may be seen as a symptom of the decoupling. It is a way of giving meaning to what-is-going-on that at the same time conceals what-is-'really'-going-on. At the level of the enterprise itself, neoliberalism can result in an organisational miasma, in which there is "an incapacitating ethos of self-criticism, an inability to maintain boundaries between public and private lives, a silencing of organisational stories, a compulsive scapegoating and, above all, a paralysis of resistance" (Gabriel 2012). It was this paralysis of resistance that was the focus of Menzies-Lyth's work on social defences.

### **Menzies-Lyth's work on social defences as co-opted to this symptom**

Menzies-Lyth's original study of a nursing service (Menzies-Lyth 1988) is criticised by a Registered Mental Nurse. This Nurse argues that while standardisation of a nurse's work may be used as a defence against performance anxiety and may be useful in training, its purpose cannot be primarily to serve as a defence (Registered Mental Nurse 1988[1960]). Menzies-Lyth acknowledges this at the time by drawing on Jaques' work (Jaques 1956), pointing out the effects of removing discretion from the way a job is defined: "nurses felt insulted, indeed almost assaulted, by being deprived of the opportunity to be more responsible" (Menzies-Lyth 1990[1960])p456. She nevertheless concludes, "resistance to social change is likely to be greatest in institutions whose social defence systems are dominated by primitive psychic defence mechanisms (Menzies-Lyth 1990[1960])p461.

In a later paper she elaborates on this, arguing that to be effective, changes emerging from work with individuals and small groups need to be counter-balanced by changes in surrounding areas (Menzies-Lyth 1990)p468. The focus remains nevertheless on the individual within the context of the overall aims of the enterprise (Armstrong 2012). Thus, it turns out that the Registered Mental Nurse makes not so much a criticism as a prophecy. The omission of a way of thinking psychoanalytically about the interaction between the individual and the enterprise-environment dynamics enables the 'defences against anxiety paradigm' (Stein 2000) to be a perfect candidate for co-option in support of neoliberalism. Co-opted in this way, the problem that needs solving is the individual's attachment to forms of psychic defence. A 'social defence system' becomes a way of referring to the organisation of an enterprise as it is used by the individual in support of their psychic defences. It becomes nothing but a way of thinking about the individual's relationship to the enterprise, paralleling the organism's relationship to the reef ecosystem defined as the organism's niche within the ecosystem habitat. To escape from this co-option, we need to look more closely at the psychoanalytic nature of the individual's interactions with cross-boundary dynamics.



## The psychoanalytic impact of cross-boundary dynamics

Jaques' original work on social systems as a defence against anxiety (Jaques 1955) described the social system in terms of roles occupying different levels in a hierarchy corresponding to different timespans of discretion (Jaques 1956). His work at that time was concerned with getting precision in the structure of a managerial hierarchy. He later took this further, defining an enterprise as an interconnected system of roles with explicit or implicit mutual accountabilities and authorities based on the requisite organisation of the enterprise in relation to its environment (Jaques 1989). His conclusion was that it was badly organised social systems that aroused psychotic anxieties rather than *vice versa* (Jaques 1995).

This focus on the enterprise-environment relation did not sit well with the Tavistock paradigm (Palmer 2002), in which the dominant approach was person-centred, working through self-managed teams and semi-autonomous work groups (Kirsner 2004). A polarisation emerged between Jaques' hierarchical approach and an argument for the value of the person-centred psychoanalytic approach at the level of the enterprise itself, by examining the transference processes implicit in working relationships (Amado 1995). The polarisation was nevertheless between approaches that were both needed in dealing with turbulent and potentially chaotic environments in which customers had to be responded to one-by-one (Ridgeway 1997).

The dangers in pursuing an exclusively person-centred approach became apparent in work that Emery and Trist did with the top management of a merged aerospace engine maker, facing significant technological developments in its environment. They found that the team faced anxieties that were

“Existential rather than interpersonal. The issue that the team faced was one of survival. In a turbulent environment, the issue is survival. The need is to stop the flight into personal paralysis and interpersonal discord and to replace these by participation in a process of group innovation. In systems of organisational ecology, the locus of innovation is in the set of the partners involved” (Trist 1977).

The impact of cross-boundary dynamics on the individual was experienced as existential anxiety or angst, distinct from anxiety attached to individuals' performance in role. Faced with such dynamics, consideration of interpersonal anxieties constituted a flight into consideration of personal defences against anxiety.

Jaques' work on requisite organisation (Jaques 1989) faced limitations, as well. It lent itself well to enterprises in which decisions were made 'at the top' about primary task, which could determine the basis of the design of the enterprise. These conditions broke down in the turbulent environments outlined earlier, within which an enterprise had to respond to its customers one-by-one in order to remain viable, potentially facing a different primary task for each customer relationship. So too did the open-systems thinking, built into the person-centred approach of the Tavistock paradigm, break down in these turbulent environments. Emery and Trist pointed out that open-systems models could deal with material exchange processes between an enterprise and elements in its environment, under which conditions the enterprise could be defined by its primary task. This was not the case, however, in turbulent environments within which it was “those processes in the environment itself which were the determining conditions of the exchanges” (Emery and Trist 1965). In these environments, the laws connecting parts of the environment to each other were themselves “often incommensurate with those laws connecting parts of the enterprise to each

other, or even with those which govern the exchanges” (Emery and Trist 1965). So both the hierarchical and the person-centred approach faced

limitations. Looking more deeply into the nature of the challenge facing the enterprise in these turbulent environments allows us to see what the source of these limitations might be.

### The double challenge facing the enterprise

With psychoanalytic understanding comes a presumption that there is more ‘going on’ than is accessible to what may be said, referred to within the Tavistock paradigm as what is going on ‘below the surface’ (Huffington, Armstrong et al. 2004). From the early years of this paradigm, the workgroup was distinguished from its other existence as the ‘basic group’ (Rice 1958). In this other existence, the ‘basic group’ exhibited basic assumption behaviours as manifestations of its individual members’ relation to the unconscious (Bion 1959). The starting point for working with enterprises within the Tavistock paradigm was thus an entity with boundaries around an inside (Palmer 2002) and a ‘workplace within’ or an organisation-in-the-mind through which the individual governed his or her actions (Hirschhorn 1988; Armstrong 2005). The dependence of this approach on a prior definition of the workgroup limited it, however, to addressing only the individual’s relation to the workgroup as constituted ‘vertically’ by the enterprise. Consider the position of Bert, a care worker within an enterprise set up to provide in-home support to the elderly mentally ill, for example, supporting a person called Agatha. Alternatively consider the position of Lisa, a claims representative responsible for ensuring that a person called Donald recovers from the loss he has suffered while insured by Lisa’s employer. A role consultation with Bert or Lisa would focus on how s/he was able to take up a role as it had been defined by the enterprise. The consultation would not go beyond that, however, to re-define the system within which the role was itself defined (Huffington 2008).

Bert’s and Lisa’s experience of their relation to their employers was one of being constrained. If we restrict ourselves to considering what is constraining, we could include but not limit ourselves to such things as the employer’s articles of association, appointed or elected officers, organisational roles, contracts, assets, systems, documents, archives, accounts, buildings, communities, affiliated or contracted enterprises, customers or clients, and professional advisors. The objects in this open-ended list would also have many possible linkages between them, the structures they formed being as much social structures of meaning as they were physical structures. The constraining effects produced by these objects and the linkages between them ‘subject’ individuals like Bert or Lisa at the same time as the behaviours of Bert or Lisa can also ‘structure’ others’ experience, such as the care that Agatha may receive, or the remediation of Donald’s residence (Miller 2009 [1968]).

The way Bert can respond to Agatha or Lisa can respond to Donald is, therefore, structured ‘vertically’ by the way their enterprise has been set up, the services available to Agatha or Donald also ‘structuring’ their experience. In a turbulent environment, however, what Bert can do for Agatha or Lisa can do for Donald is also structured by the choices Agatha or Donald make ‘horizontally’ about what services they will accept. This presents the care or insurance enterprise with a double challenge. The enterprise subjects those working within it to ‘vertical’ constraints, assimilating them to its ways of organising its work. The enterprise is also itself subject to ‘horizontal’ constraints imposed by the choices of those to whom it provides services, necessarily accommodating itself in some way to its customers’ demands in order to remain viable.



The significance of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century pull towards having to respond 'horizontally' to customers one-by-one is that it increasingly presents enterprises with this double challenge. Bert or Lisa experience this double challenge in terms of how they respond to a cross-boundary dilemma about how to provide care to Agatha or Donald. The limitation of both the hierarchical and the person-centred approach is, therefore, that the focus of analysis is wrong in each case. The focus has to become the individual-enterprise-environment ecosystem itself. The dilemma facing Bert or Lisa is an expression of the double challenge that the enterprise must contain as part of this larger ecosystem. It is nevertheless in the context of this dilemma that the question of Bert's or Lisa's subjection to their unconscious emerges.

### In which the double challenge meets double subjection

In his paper on the two principles of mental functioning, Freud tells of a man who, following his father's death, dreams that his father was still alive (Freud 1958[1911])p225. Freud uses this to show how an individual is doubly subjected, subject to reality as re-presented by inter-subjectively agreed social structures of meaning (subject to social structures), and subject to the unconscious manifesting itself here in the form of a wish as a dreamer (subject to the unconscious). This double subjection leads to the experience of being divided: "The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak" (Lacan 2006[1966]c)p430. 'Double subjection' is a way of approaching the Freudian topology of the relation between the ego and the id in the quotation "where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud 1964[1932])p80.

In the English translation of this quote from Freud, the emphasis is on enlarging the organisation of the ego "so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id". The emphasis via the original German ("*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*") and its French translation, however, is on the 'there' where the id was in order to capture something of the nature of the id as being always elsewhere, never fully 'drained' by the ego (Lacan 1988[1975])p194. This quality of 'being elsewhere' of the radical Otherness of the unconscious, therefore, provides us with a way of distinguishing the performance or annihilation anxiety associated with performing subject to familiar social structures, and the existential angst aroused by the disruption of these structures by cross-boundary dynamics. What is at stake here is how we understand psychoanalytically the nature of this disruption.

'Double subjection' speaks to the radical Otherness of the basic assumptions group in relation to the workgroup, an individual-in-role being subject both to the social structures of the enterprise and to the structure of their unconscious. To the extent that Bert's or Lisa's role supports his or her self-identity, the organisation of the enterprise serves as a defence against performance anxiety. With the double challenge comes a potential disruption of the current organisation of the enterprise, however, any resultant disruption to Bert's or Lisa's role giving rise to existential angst (Armstrong 2007).

The effect of the double challenge facing the enterprise, therefore, will be to affect the way the individual is subjected to its social structure. The necessity to accommodate itself to 'horizontal' constraints causes, for the enterprise, a potential disruption to the vertical constraints constituting its current organisation. In the figure below, divergence in the double subjection experienced will lead to forms of role consultation relating performance to the expectations of an existing social structure. In contrast, divergence in the double challenge will lead to forms of strategy consultation

leading to a consideration of the need for new ways of competing as an enterprise. Divergence in both can be expected to give rise to existential angst.

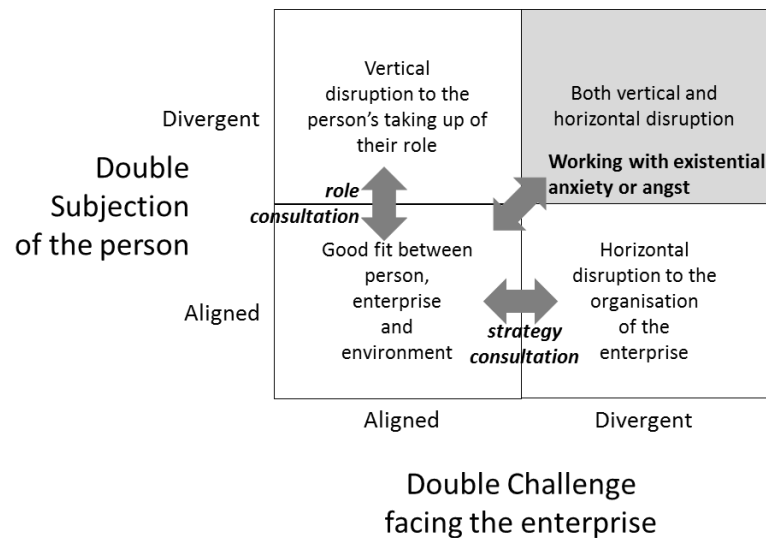


Figure 1: Double subjection and double challenge

In the turbulent environments identified by Emery and Trist (Emery and Trist 1965), the failure by an enterprise to include horizontal forms of disruptive innovation as part of its normal behaviour will prevent it from engaging in the kinds of dynamic adaptation demanded of it. This means that the forms of existential angst precipitated by the failure of existing vertical forms of subjection have to be taken into consideration. Within these environments, the new perspectives on the nature of competition as dynamic specialisation (Hagel III and Seely Brown 2005) demand that innovation becomes part of a way of doing business, no longer left to a separate world of ‘entrepreneurs’ (Foss and Klein 2012).

Let us assume, therefore, that Bert or Lisa can bear their existential angst and that the workgroup in which they work innovates, developing new horizontal ways of organising its relation to individuals in the environment of the enterprise of which it is a part, including Agatha or Donald. With such workgroup innovation, an enterprise ceases to be a pre-existent entity defined top-down, instead becoming an effect of its emergent relationships with its customers arising from the innovations of its workgroups. This requires a different relationship to the detail of what-is-going-on at the edge of the enterprise (Boxer 2004) and a different approach to the governance of the enterprise itself (Boxer 2014). Such innovation depends on Bert or Lisa being able to bear disruption to the way their workgroup and ultimately their enterprise supports their identities. To understand psychoanalytically what is involved in Bert or Lisa bearing the effects of this disruption, we need first to look more closely at the nature of its impact on their subjection to the social structures of the enterprise.

## On the disruption of subjection to social structures

The double challenge arising from cross-boundary enterprise-environment dynamics may be approached from the perspective of the individual in terms of relationships between subjectivities, in which there is the possibility of equality of relationship between those subjectivities: “subjectivity is not synonymous with individuality but is a position within a system”, and “our subjectivities are

discovered through our subjection to roles in these systems” (Long 2006)p287. A subjectivity is the individual’s experience of taking up a relation to others, subject to the social structures within which his or her roles are defined:

“[Role] mediates organizational life and allows the person to find a place or identity in relation to others. It is far more than the position within a task system because it incorporates the person who is part of many different systems. Role is a very lively concept and through taking up the authorities and accountabilities that different roles offer, we learn to become effective social beings. Understanding the roles that are taken up allows for a better understanding of the systems we are in (the organizations and systems in our experience) and, hence, the frameworks from which we interact with others (Long 2006)p287.

In this approach, “community-level systems” exist alongside vertically organised enterprise systems but are characterised by horizontal relationships reflecting inter-subjective equalities. An individual is always in roles within multiple overlapping ‘community-level systems’, therefore, while at the same time being in one or more enterprise-defined roles. The difference is that in roles defined by ‘community-level systems’, two-way horizontal relationships between subjectivities co-determine how the individual is subjected. In contrast, enterprise-defined roles are ones in which one-way vertical relations determine the way in which the individual is subjected.

From this perspective, an individual’s subjectivity emerges from their subjection to many different forms of social structure. Unconscious defences may then operate when the individual feels his or her subjectivity under threat (Long 2006)p288. From the perspective of double subjection, such threats come from an experienced loss of support to their self-identity provided by the social structures supporting their relation to the unconscious.

### **Subjection to social structures as a relation to thirdness**

Whether subjection is taken up through vertical or horizontal relations, the subjecting social structures are evidenced by the shared mental models that shape and sustain enterprises and social institutions as contexts, emerging in the inter-subjective spaces subjected to those contexts (Long 2006). From the perspective of subjection, the relation to these shared mental models may be expressed as a relation to ‘thirdness’(Benjamin 2009). Thirdness was originally Peirce’s way of referring to the mediating context within which attributions of meaning are made (Murphey 1993). Thirdness is, therefore, a way of describing the shared set of assumptions and constraints implicit in the structured relations to which an individual is subject, referred to as a shared mental model or a shared matrix of thought (Bion 1959).

Both hierarchical and community-level systems, therefore, have this property of ‘thirdness’ in the way they subject, even though the origin of the mental models in each case may be different and disjoint. With hierarchically-defined roles, the origin will be in the founding assumptions and constraints of the enterprise to which the individual is ‘vertically’ subject ultimately through his or her employment. In contrast, with community-level systems, the origin will be in the nature of the situation in which the two-way co-creating is taking place ‘horizontally’, shaped by assumptions and constraints that are felt to be appropriate to the situation itself. The disjoint nature of these two origins (i.e. founding act versus present situation) may reflect gendered ways of taking up an identity (Benjamin 1988). Understood in terms of double subjection, however, their relative authority for the individual will depend on the nature of the libidinal investment that each supports, arising from the individual’s relation to the unconscious (Stavrakakis 2007). The relationship between the hierarchical

and person-centred approaches thus becomes a question of the relationship between different forms of libidinal investment.

In these terms, the conservation of forms of thirdness that constitute resistance involve the conservation of particular forms of libidinal investment. Thus in 'treatment resistance', the resistance arises not through empathic failure, but from "the therapist's failure to understand the patient in context" (Muller 2011)p98. With 'treatment resistance', the one-way vertically-defined task know-how of the therapist has got in the way of the horizontally-defined two-way shared understanding of context between the therapist and patient. This directly parallels the cross-boundary dilemma faced by Bert or Lisa in their relationship with Agatha or Donald. In both cases, what is at stake is the relative dominance of one or the other's libidinal economy.

Thus, an existing enterprise will resist change in the sense of conserving its established vertical authority in the same way that the vertical therapeutic enterprise resists new horizontal ways of engaging in a therapeutic process. The horizontal resistance of Agatha, Donald or the patient was to the vertical forms of thirdness being conserved by the enterprise to the exclusion of other possible forms of thirdness. This vertical resistance of the enterprise may be found in response to many such horizontal disruptive innovations, in which values and processes are introduced that disrupt those of the existing enterprise (Christensen and Overdorf 2000).

### Social defences against anxiety as the conservation of vagueness

For an enterprise to be available for use as a social defence against anxiety, there have to be current forms of thirdness that will support those defences. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the theory of the enterprise developed based on largely static and 'closed' forms of thirdness. These static and 'closed' forms of thirdness to which the employees of an enterprise were subject reflected the founding assumptions and constraints that established an enterprise as competitively viable. They authorised ways of composing asset structures consistent with its top-down definition of primary task.

Innovation involves enabling this thirdness to give way to different forms of thirdness rooted in different processes and values (Lane and Maxfield 2005). This means that the asset structures have to be decomposable and capable of re-composition within different forms of thirdness (Foss and Klein 2012). Disruptive innovation, therefore, involves disruption to existing forms of thirdness, disrupting the existing taken-for-granted kinds of entity and interactions between them (Lane and Maxfield 2005). It is this disruption that is associated with 'crisis' in the efficacy of an existing normal science (Kuhn 1962). Within the socioanalytic field, such innovations may be described as abductions arising within an unconscious field of associations (Long and Harney 2013), abductions being hypotheses that attempt to make sense of experiences (Murphey 1993).

What, then, is the nature of the libidinal investment that is being disrupted? Resistance to such disruptions may well arise as a consequence of perverse organisation (Long 2008). The forms of resistance to change that defend existing paradigms seem to go much further, however, than narcissistic attachment (Lakatos 1970). What appears to be at stake is an unconscious libidinal investment in subjection to the *organisation* of a mental model, mobilised in support of organisations of identity (Stavrakakis 2007). The libidinal investment is in a form of *vagueness*.

An individual's mental model may impose a determinacy of meaning through unconsciously restricting the relation between an object-signifier and the object-signified i.e. through symbolic equation (Segal 1986[1957]). Even if the meaning of an object-signifier is indeterminate i.e. able to

be used in a variety of ways, however, its *vagueness* depends on the indeterminacy of its relation to other object-signifiers i.e. indeterminacy in the organisation of object-signifiers (Ochs 1998). For example, Bert and Agatha or Lisa and Donald may come from different backgrounds, so that when Bert asks himself to tea at Agatha's home, implied for Agatha in this may be a whole set of other related concepts to do with time-of-day, dress and behaviour that are usually left vague because of an assumed shared mental model. When the meeting in question is about planning Agatha's future care, a failure by Bert to understand the form of vagueness surrounding Agatha's understanding of 'tea' will have serious consequences. In Donald's case, a request by Lisa to make a list of damage to his property may wholly fail to appreciate the extent of the damage suffered by him as a result of flooding and the extent of the help needed even to get to the property.

The benefit of the doubt is given to Agatha over how she interprets Bert's vagueness when Bert assumes what 'tea' means to Agatha. On the other hand, Bert may go to great lengths to ensure that Agatha has no such doubts. Even if he does this diligently, however, there will remain an *irremediable vagueness* about the organisation of Agatha's assumptions. In Donald's case, news footage of the extent of the local flooding may remove some of the vagueness in what he needs, but still leaving some *irremediable vagueness* over the full extent of the damage with which he is going to need help. In the case of the therapist's interactions with the patient, the equivalent would be to develop with the patient a shared understanding of family context. In this understanding, the emphasis would be not so much on the objective nature of that context as on the way the patient understood it. This understanding would be likely to be vague for the patient, but from the therapist's perspective have an irreducible core of irremediable vagueness.

Disruptive innovation can, therefore, be understood as the disruption of these ways of managing vagueness through invoking familiar assumptions and/or giving the benefit of the doubt. This management of vagueness operates in a way that is like symbolic equation, except applied to the relations between object-signifiers. Disruptive innovation challenges these familiar ways while working to uncover the limits of what is remediable vagueness, the limits to understanding Agatha's needs, Donald's situation or the patient's context.

Social defences against anxiety, therefore, involve the conservation of forms of unquestioned vagueness, leaving room for the person to do things 'their way', shielded from performance anxiety by this unquestioned vagueness. This kind of shielding is a particular characteristic of hierarchical organisation as well as of some forms of professional membership organisation (Kirsner 2009). If we want to speak of defences against existential angst, therefore, this defence has to be reversed to *reduce* vagueness in order to uncover an irremediable vagueness at the heart of the angst, an irremediable vagueness that demands innovation if it is to be bearable. In the words of an extreme alpinist, "to climb through fear, to point fear up instead of down" (Twight and Martin 1999), existential angst acting as a guide "against its will" (Kierkegaard 1980).

## Innovation in pursuit of irremediable vagueness

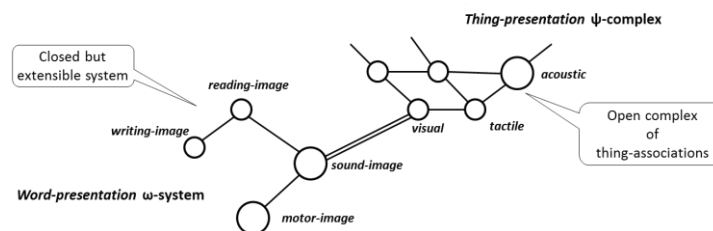
The prototypical mental model is the containing maternal matrix through which the child develops the capacity to give meaning to their experience, becoming an introject that forms the basis of the child's ego (Segal 1986). What vagueness adds, therefore, is consideration of the *organisation* of this mental model. To understand the unconscious effects of disruption, therefore, we need to consider the nature of the libidinal investment that provides the basis for the conservation of the

organisation of the relationships between object-signifiers, appearing as a form of vagueness. Put another way, what is at stake in the individual's relation to the unconscious with disruptive innovation?

Bion makes a distinction between beta-elements and alpha-elements in which the former remain outside consciousness while the latter do not (Bion 1962), but which form the foundations of his grid (Bion 1977[1963]). Bion's reading of Freud places the 'contact-barrier' as "the point of contact and separation between conscious and unconscious elements", originating the distinction between them (Bion 1962) p17. The difficulty with this reading is that it involves reducing any more complex organisation of relations between object-signifiers to these elements, providing no way of capturing the notion of libidinal investment in the organisation of the relationships between object-signifiers *per se*. It provides no insight into the structure of the unconscious.

To understand the unconscious basis for the conservation of any such organisation, therefore, we must return to the distinctions made in Freud's original Project for a Scientific Psychology (Freud 1950[1895]). Doing this involves three steps, first, to take up Freud's more complex understanding of the object-signifier, second to see how a different relation to the 'contact-barrier' implies an unconscious that structures difference, and third to see what support this gives to irremediable vagueness

Freud provides an insight into his understanding of the relation between the unconscious and the ego in Appendix C of The Unconscious (Freud 1957[1915]a), which appears in Figure 2, after correcting for the change in terms used between Appendix C and the text to which it is an Appendix:



**Figure 2: An object-presentation, denoting a combined complex of both thing-presentation and word-presentation**

Important to note here is first that the combined complex is referred to as an object-presentation and second that it is a complex made up of two systems from Freud's Project, word-presentations being a closed system, and thing-presentations being an open complex of associations.

This combined object-presentation was a component in the mental representation of an unconscious experience or phantasy, forming the basis of object-relations theory (Segal 1979). Symbolic equation was a fixing of the relation between this combined object-presentation (referred to in this chapter as an object-signifier) and this unconscious combined complex (Segal 1986[1957]). We can understand the unconscious basis for the conservation of the organisation of relations between object-signifiers in a way that parallels symbolic equation by paying attention to the relation between the 'open' and 'closed' nature of thing-presentations and word-presentations respectively.

## The unconscious as structuring difference

Understanding the relation between perception and object-signifiers involves returning to the distinction made by Freud in his first model between the perceptual  $\phi$ -system and the  $\omega$ -system of word-presentations. This first model (summarised in Figure 3) was Freud's Project for a Scientific



Psychology (Freud 1950[1895]), in which he distinguished word-presentation from thing-presentation as the distinction between a closed  $\omega$ -system organising differences in *quality*, and an open  $\psi$ -complex organising *quantity* (quotas of 'affect') distributed across different neuronal pathways as networks of complication (Freud 1950[1895])p315.

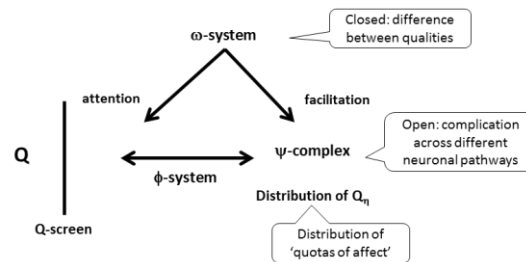


Figure 3: Freud's first model

This  $\psi$ -complex could be thought of as an open-ended variety of possible pathways between linked neurones i.e. contact-barriers, each pathway distributing affect in a different way. The  $\omega$ -system was then a source of 'downwards' regulation of these distributions of affect (and of attention) through the way it facilitated the transmission of quantity through contact-barriers in such a way as to regulate levels of pleasure/unpleasure.

Neuronal pathways as networks of complication can be understood through the metaphor of a dictionary. The words in a dictionary are made up of letters and combinations of letters, not all of which convey meaning, while those that do being defined by their relation to other meaningful combinations in the  $\omega$ -system. The potential number of letters and combinations of letters in the  $\psi$ -complex is open while the number of words that convey meaning is closed. The relation of the  $\omega$ -system to the  $\psi$ -complex is, therefore, like the relation between words and letters, in which letters and combinations of letters correspond to neuronal pathways to which affect is attached, whether or not they have meaning attached to them as words. The unconscious is, therefore, structured in the sense that it is constituted through the articulation of different patterns of distribution of affect, rooted in the individual's embodied (and as such affective) experiencing and subject to the forms of difference that are articulated by that experiencing.

The letter in the unconscious, understood in this way as a structuring of difference, may equally be an ideogram or any fragment of experiencing. Whatever form it takes, however, it acts as the lexicon on which word-presentation and ultimately object-signification is founded, bathing them in the affective medium that is the unconscious. To be subject to the unconscious is, therefore, to be subject to this structuring of difference that ultimately applies as much to individual object-signifiers as it does to organisations of relationships between object-signifiers.

Built on the foundations of this affective medium are, therefore, relations of condensation and displacement by means of which the ego becomes an organisation of a relation to the unconscious through metaphoric and metonymic relations between word-presentations (Freud 1953[1900])p339. The result is a relation to the perceptual other subjected to social structures of meaning, but also a relation subjected to an unconscious that remains radically Other. This double subjection is represented in the following figure by the two axes of a-a' and S-A respectively:

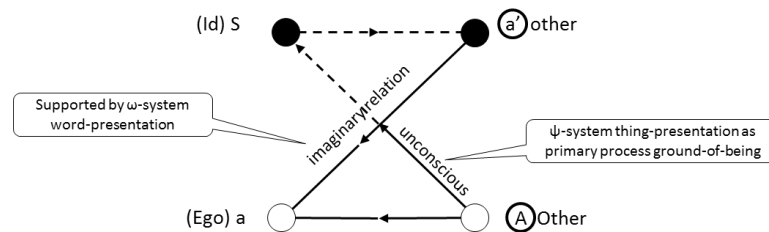


Figure 4: Lacan's L Schema (Lacan 2006[1966]e)p40

Psychic defence now becomes the conservation of an organisation of the relation between these two forms of subjection. The psychoanalytic basis for using a social defence is, therefore, that an enterprise makes available forms of social structure organised under its forms of thirdness. These forms of thirdness are, or become, congruent with an individual's relation to their double subjection, enabling the organisation of the enterprise to act as support for the individual's psychic defences against anxiety. Viewed in this way, disruptive innovation impacts on this unconscious structuring of difference quite differently, leading to the need to reverse these defences in order to bear angst.

### Innovation and the relation to the lost object in existential angst

An individual's subjection to their unconscious has its roots in the primary patterns of distribution of affect within the  $\psi$ -complex. If we consider an infant's early experience of their mother, there will be that about their mother that becomes inscribed in these distributions of affect, but there will also be that which is not. Freud makes this distinction in referring to two kinds of thing-presentation supported by the  $\psi$ -complex: *sachvorstellung* and *dingvorstellung*. *Sachvorstellung* is the thing-presentation that may act as support to word-presentation, potentially repressed by the ego through negation (Freud 1961[1925]). But *dingvorstellung* is that about the thing that is lost:

"The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality-testing is not to find an object in real perception, which corresponds to the one presented, but to re-find such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there... The reproduction of a perception as a presentation is not always a faithful one; it may be modified by omissions, or changed by the merging of various elements. In that case, reality-testing has to ascertain how far such distortions go. But it is evident that a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction" (Freud 1961[1925])p235-236.

In the Project, Freud speaks of this reality-testing as judging in relation to the fellow human-being (*Nebenmensch*). Understanding this fellow human-being as the neighbour (Reinhard 2005), Freud emphasises the coexistence of the neighbour-as-known with that-about-the-neighbour-that-is-lost:

"The complex of the fellow human-being falls apart into two components, of which one makes an impression by its constant structure and stays together as a thing while the other can be understood by the activity of memory – that is traced back to information from the subject's own body" (Freud 1950[1895])p331.

There is always that about an experience that can be re-found, but also that-which-is-lost. In terms of an organisation of object-signifiers, this relation to that-which-is-lost is the relation to a beyond-of-the-signified:

"Das Ding is that which I will call the beyond-of-the-signified. It is a function of this beyond-of-the-signified, and of an emotional relationship to it, that the subject keeps its distance and is constituted in a kind of relationship characterised by primary affect, prior to any repression... It is then in relation to Das Ding that the first orientation, the first choice, the first seat of subjective orientation takes place" (Lacan 1992 [1959-1960])p54.

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud argues, “anxiety is a reaction to a situation of danger, obviated by the ego’s doing something to avoid that situation or withdraw from it” (Freud 1959[1926])p128. This is signal anxiety, pointing towards the possibility of annihilation. He goes on to say, however, that as well as an affective signal of danger, anxiety is also a reaction to a loss, a separation, the first of which is a separation from the mother (Freud 1959[1926])p130. The response to disruption will depend, therefore, on the way it is experienced unconsciously, either as an annihilating threat demanding a defensive response, or as an existential gap engendering existential angst indicating an irremediable vagueness testing the limits of innovation.

What is lost is the lost object, a structural gap in the  $\psi$ -complex, its word-presentation being the *objet petit a* (Lacan 2006[1966]b)p690. *Objet petit a* is thus a way of ‘plugging’ this gap by putting something in the place of this loss, providing a way of libidinally investing in an existing organisation of vagueness. It is also the cause of desire, however, in the sense that by pointing towards what is lost, it is also pointing towards what is yet-to-be-known and yet-to-be-experienced, towards the irremediably vague. Disruptive innovation will impact on unconscious libidinal investment in one of two ways, therefore, depending on the way the individual takes up their subjection to their relation to loss. Either it will be experienced as an opportunity for further libidinal elaboration through innovation, or as a threat to an existing libidinal organisation and, therefore, to the raising of psychic defences.

The unconscious object supporting a relationship to the ‘otherness’ of the customer is, therefore, the *objet petit a* that is either a ‘good enough’ fit maintaining the status quo, or that about the other which is lost to the current organisation of meaning *aka* thirdness, demanding an innovative response. The challenge presented by existential anxiety or angst, if not refused as disrupting the existing organisation of affect, may, therefore, be taken up as an opportunity to innovate. The unconscious basis for the individual’s relation to cross-boundary dynamics is, therefore, the individual’s relation to the lost object.

## Conclusion

The metaphor of the coral reef allowed the enterprise to be viewed as an ecosystem within which was constituted a habitat of niches colonised by many different forms of organism. The use of such an ecosystem in support of psychic defence was associated with a locking-in of forms of organisation of the ecosystem habitat that became particularly problematic in turbulent environments. The need for dynamic adaptation changed the viability of previously stable boundary definitions (Boxer 2014). In these turbulent environments, the cross-boundary interactions between the ecosystem and adjacent environments became dynamic and two-way, presenting the ecosystem with potential incommensurabilities between the current ‘logic’ of its organisation as a habitat, and the enterprises within its larger environments. The paper argues that the current conception of social defence becomes inadequate in this context, given its inability to provide a psychoanalytic basis for going beyond the defence of current organisations of libidinal investment.

To overcome this limitation, the paper introduces the double challenge facing an enterprise as a way of understanding the relationship between a vertically-defined relation to the prior founding assumptions of an enterprise and the horizontally-defined assumptions needed to respond to the new kinds of demand emerging from turbulent environments. This double challenge changes the focus of the enterprise from being defined solely by its boundary conditions to being defined by

its multiple relationships one-by-one within the larger ecosystem with which it is interacting. At the same time, the individual's double subjection to both social structures of meaning and to the unconscious mean that the emphasis on psychic defences addresses only one side of the double challenge, in which the existing organisation of the enterprise is conserved. On the other side of the challenge is the need for innovation, through which what appears to be lost is engaged with, and by which the enterprise moves towards the limits of what is irremediably lost.

The concept of vagueness is used to refer to the organisation of relationships between concepts in the shared mental models of an enterprise. Vagueness is taken-for-granted when a mental model is assumed to be shared. Disruptive innovation demands vagueness to be re-examined and its limits established as irremediable vagueness. In order to explore the individual's valency for innovation through examining vagueness, the paper proposes that this depends on the individual's unconscious relation to a lost object. This unconscious relation demands a re-examination of Freud's first model in order to understand the relation to the unconscious as a structuring of differences in which two kinds of 'thing' are distinguished, one of which is the relation to a lost object. The *objet petit a* is a formulation signifying this relation to what is a gap in the unconscious structuring of difference. This *objet petit a* is proposed as the psychoanalytic basis for understanding the means by which existing forms of vagueness are maintained in the form of psychic defences, but also the means for innovation through pursuing what it points towards as lacking in existing forms of vagueness.

Choosing the side of innovation involves going beyond distinguishing the doubly-subjected 'true-self' from a socially constructed false-self (Levine 2013). It involves disentangling unconscious libidinal investment from the institutionalised forms of social structure commonly referred to as forms of 'Big Other'. These forms of 'Big Other' are actually social structures supporting a relation to the particular forms of libidinal investment of an unconscious Other. Innovation involves allowing the experiencing of an unconscious gap, therefore, to determine the context within which meaning is to be elaborated. This involves a relation to what-is-going-on that is not restricted to work on a couch and includes the nature of an authentic political act. Such acts challenge existing (hegemonic) forms of thirdness such as that of neoliberalism, for example, by challenging existing conventional wisdoms on the organisation of healthcare or banking (Glynos 2003). It also includes institutionalising the relation to lack (Stavrakakis 2007), for example, by taking up a form of organisation to be found in a not-for-profit such as Bert's or Lisa's, driven by the value *deficits* of those they are supporting (Boxer 2014).

The essential characteristics of practice implied are first to create the conditions in which the horizontal relations of an enterprise may dominate vertical ones (Boxer 2014). Second, they are to engage in forensic examination of existing forms of thirdness in order to identify the dilemmas that they keep concealed, an examination of which may lead to new learning (Boxer 2013). Thirdly, it involves engaging in developing new forms of thirdness in the course of responding to what are experienced as value deficits in any given situation (Boxer 2012). Finally, such practice demands courage from leadership.

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