Freud's Project and topologising organisation

Introduction

How are we to understand what an organisation is? Whatever our notion is will inform the way in which we approach the question of intervention. One way of approaching the distinctiveness of a Lacanian reading of Freud is through his reading of the Project[1]. This is in itself a major project. My intention in what follows is to sketch out an approach to the Project, and show the main lines of argument, which might lead to a topologising of organisation.

Picking up on the Kleinian vs Freudian theorisation of organisation.

One of the points of difference between a Kleinian and Lacanian reading of Freud is over the nature and primacy of phantasy. By formulating phantasy under the maternal metaphor, the whole problematic of the subject's relation to the Freudian object and to primary anxiety (and therefore primary phantasy) is bypassed, with the emphasis shifting to the symbolic formations which arise to contain/defend against the secondary anxieties (and phantasies) associated with defending the (prior) response to primary anxiety. The Lacanians seek to re-open this problematic of primary anxiety through a consideration of the axiomatic structuring through which the subject constitutes his or her being-in-relation-to-desire (*manque à être*).[2]

This whole problematic can also be formulated in terms of the relation between Freud's Structure and Function, in which Structure refers to that minimal set of relations (Maturana's identity determining cognitive closure), the conservation of which Freud describes as the Pleasure Principle; and Function, referring to that which goes beyond this Principle - the activities of individuals that are constituted in relation to desire.

In these terms, if we approach Structure through Function, as happens with the Kleinian interpretations of symbolic functioning, then the Functioning takes place within the frame of the maternal metaphor. In the Kleinian argument therefore, this maternal metaphor is taken as being constitutive of Structure[3]. The Lacanian line of approach would therefore be to assume that Function must be approached through Structure, and that this structuring was what was constitutive of the subject's being. Thus Structure is constitutive of organisation *qua* Organization; and the particular relations to desire 'on offer' to individuals through the forms of support Organisation gives are like an ecosystem of psychical 'niches' on which primary anxiety may rest[4]. Thus I am equating Structure and fundamental phantasy, implying that there is a way of reading Organisation

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[1] Project for a Scientific Psychology (1950 [1895]) pp 283-397 Vol 1 Standard Edition.

[2] See the critique of "The Unconscious at work" where this problematic was raised.

[3] This is paralleled in the way primary task is invoked in Open Systems thinking in such a way as to suggest that Structure and Organisation follow logically from a determination of primary task. In practice, there is always a logically prior framework of structuring assumptions, which remains privileged.

[4] It is this sense that gives rise to the 'coral reef' metaphor of organizations, which, in their incarnate form, can be understood as the accumulated detritus of individuals' efforts.

as a support for individuals' structuring of their relation to desire. In these terms "resistance" can be theorised as conservation of identity; and questions of the 'good' of the organisation can only be answered through questioning the dynamic properties of Functioning in relation to Structure.[5]

So the Project offers a way into Freud's *oeuvre* which offers promise as a way of approaching this Structure/Functioning. But is this just metaphoric thinking?

Scientific Psychology

The popular understanding of Freud's project is as it appears at the beginning of the text - as a kind of biologistically deterministic psychology:

> "The intention is to furnish a psychology that shall be a *natural science*: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction". p295 (my emphasis)

But what is this Natural Science about? Is it a fair criticism of this Paper that the attractiveness of the Project is because it lends itself to deterministic formulations of organisation? I think not, and this reading of "natural science" is itself a mis-take. Things are not always as they seem.

The Project was only one amongst many in a series of working drafts that Freud composed over a period of two years.[6] Furthermore, the 1895 Project is the one draft that he disowned as an "aberration". The draft that is believed to have inspired Chapter Seven of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, on the other hand, was based on Freud's January 1986 revision of the Project. In this 1896 version, the systems ϕ and ψ were assigned radically different functions:

> "The nerve-paths which start from terminal organs do not conduct quantity but their particular qualitative characteristic peculiar to them; they add nothing to the amount [of quantity] in the ψ-neurones, but merely put these neurones into a state of excitation.... In my new scheme I insert [these] ω [perceptual] neurones between the ϕ-neurones and the ψ-neurones, so that ϕ transfers its quality to ω, and ω now transfers neither quality nor quantity to ψ, but merely excites ψ - that is, indicates the direction to be taken by the free ψ energy." [7]

Thus, not only do energies from the external world have absolutely no quantitative effect on the nervous system, so that all quantitative excitations are endogenous. Freud was developing his fundamental psychoanalytical model using a model, which was almost directly antithetical to the passive hydraulic reflex model so often attributed to him. Freud did not conceive of mental life as being in any way reducible to neurophysiological principles when he was constructing his first psychological theories. Rather, Freud took

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[5] The 'step-by-step schema is a way of theorising four formations of this Structure/Functioning.

[6] I am quoting here from a book by Mark Solms and Michael Saling: "A Moment of Transition. Two Neuroscientific Articles by Sigmund Freud" translated and edited by Solms and Saling. Karnac 1990.

[7] p388 SEI.

the view that powerful unconscious mental processes, which were constituted by a closed causal system that enabled him to conceptualise mental life independently of its physical substrate, determine conscious events. So "natural science" referred to something rather more radical - a being in relation to the unknowable - in this case the unconscious. He was to clarify this some 43 years later:

> "Now it would look as though this dispute between psychoanalysis and philosophy is concerned only with a trifling matter of definition - the question whether the name 'psychical' should be applied to one or another sequence of phenomena. In fact, however, this step has become of the highest significance. Whereas the psychology of consciousness never went beyond the broken sequences which were obviously dependent on something else, the other view, which held that the psychical is unconscious in itself, enabled psychology to take its place as a natural science like any other. The processes with which it is concerned are in themselves just as unknowable as those dealt with by other sciences....."[8]

So here we have a causally closed system with its own endogenous dynamics being affected qualitatively by processes which are not wholly conscious. What happens if we use this as a way of defining organisation? Clearly there is a 'body' problem[9], but if the psychical topology of the Project is defined independently of its physical substrate, why not? It would mean that we had to construct a theory of organisation which was based on a theory of the unconscious, of *objet petit a*, of transference and of the drive.

The basic schema of the Project

Fundamental to the Project is the notion of Q_η - energy within the system. Between Q_η and Q in the external world are Q-screens, which are impermeable to Q. Two kinds of contact-barrier are then hypothesised: those which are permeable (ϕ), offering no resistance to the passage of Q_η; and those which are impermeable (ψ), and therefore capable of holding back the passage of Q_η. Facilitation is then defined as altering of the thresholds of permeability of these contact barriers. We can represent this as follows:
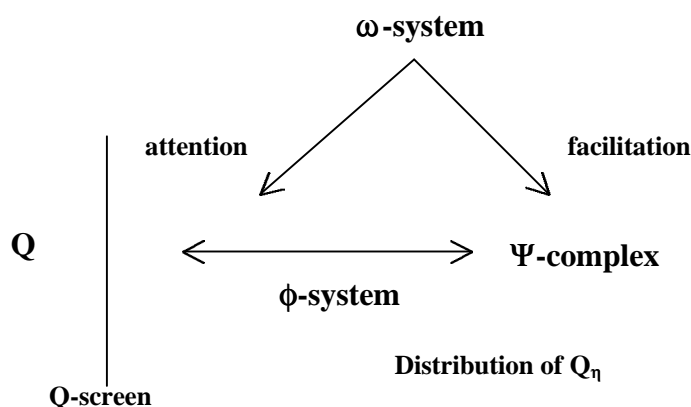
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[8] SEXXIII p158 Physical Qualities. (1940[1938])

[9] The immediate 'solution' to this 'body' problem is through the use of the coral reef metaphor. In other words, what we take to be the incarnate form of the organization is the side-effect of the pacts with desire supported by the organization-as-ecosystem. This ecosystem is governed by its own laws, and has an organization which will argue reflects an economy of discourses. But this 'body' is not without its effects, introducing considerations of Structure and Function into those of Organisation. (This is where the problem of the 'platform' introducing "feature interactions" appears cf. Cohen's work on this.)

$\downarrow$ **facilitation**

Q | $\longleftrightarrow$ **Ψ-complex**

φ-system

Distribution of Q_η

Q-screen
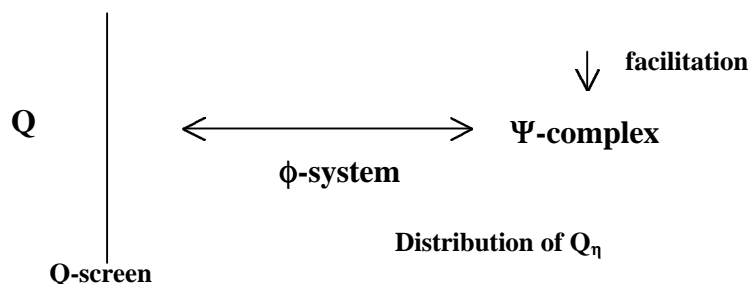
The φ-system is that which is reached by exogenous stimulation and through which the discharge of Q_η takes place; and the ψ-complex is that which is reached by endogenous excitation. "ψ-complex" because this is a system of *complexification* of distribution of Q_η across contact-barriers with varying thresholds of facilitation. The Pleasure Principle argues that the distribution of Q_η across this ψ-complex follows a principle of constancy, through the facilitation of distribution and discharge via φ.

To this model, Freud then adds an ω-system which conducts the periodicity of stimulation arising at the Q-screen back to the ψ-complex as a path of facilitation:

ω-system

attention **facilitation**

Q | $\longleftrightarrow$ **Ψ-complex**
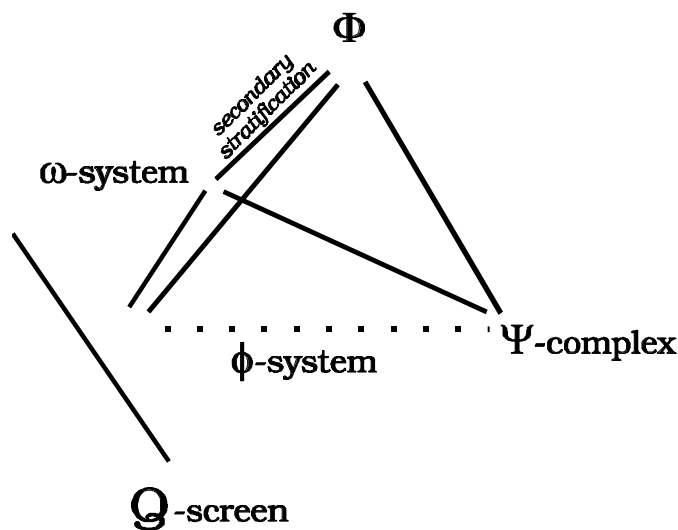
φ-system

Distribution of Q_η

Q-screen

Thus, on the one hand there are memory traces - specific configurations of ψ-complexification; and on the other there are (let us say) complex waveforms which are the periodic correlates of these memory traces. This distinction between ψ and ω can be read onto the distinction between thing-presentation and word-presentation, insofar as the latter is taken as being an indication of quality.

In his letter to Fleiss of the 6th December 1896, Freud postulated a process of stratification in which W [Wahrnehmungen (perceptions)] are neurones in which perceptions originate (φ), to which consciousness attaches, but which in themselves retain no trace of what has happened; Wz [Wahrnehmungszeichen (indication of perception)] is the first registration of perceptions, arranged according to associations by simultaneity (ω); Ub [Unbewusstsein (unconsciousness)] is the second registration arranged according to the process of complexification (ψ); and Vb [Vorbewusstsein (preconsciousness)] the third transcription, attached to word-presentation.

What are we to 'do' with this third transcription? Freud comments that "the cathexes proceeding from this Vb become conscious according to certain rules; and this secondary thought consciousness is subsequent in time and is probably linked to the hallucinatory activation of word presentations, so that the neurones of consciousness would once again be perceptual neurones and in themselves without memory". Just as perception leads through indication of perception to produce facilitating effects on the ψ-complex, so the "subsequent in time" would indicate that the preconsciousness leads back through the ω–system to produce effects of attention - a kind of echo. The important point here, however, is that whereas thing-presentations remain anchored in the ψ-complex, the ω-system acts as a support for word-presentations, and ultimately for consciousness.

This whole φωψ system therefore acts as a kind of complex recursive structure which itself acts as a substrate to consciousness.... I want to propose a secondary stratification (the one described by Freud being taken as primary) by invoking the Lacanian reading of the project and introducing the effects of Φ as the particular orienting of the subject's relation to the Unconscious through the effects of the signifier. Introducing Φ raises the whole issue of transference, the drive functioning and *objet petit a*, to which I will return in order to address the discourses. This secondary stratification can be understood as systems of word-presentations themselves becoming the support for (embedded in) 'higher' systems of word-presentations.[10]

This produces the following further step in the topologising of the Project:
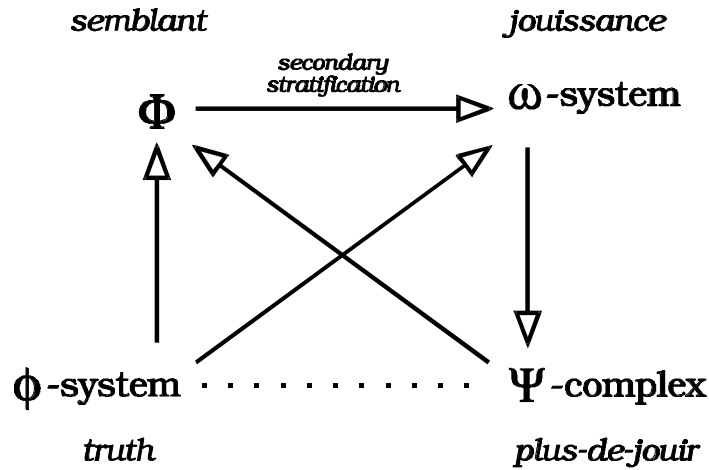

The dotted line is there, because the φ-system does not affect the ψ-complex in ways which are not mediated by the ω-system. There is no direct relationship possible, therefore, between φ and ψ. The secondary stratification takes place on the other axis of ω to Φ.

Why this topology? Because it is the structure of the 'quadripod' which Lacan describes in Savoir (p57-58) and which determines the "fundamental topology from

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[10] This is the arrangement of stratification which is characteristic of the formation of business architectures, where every simple object can be taken as being a complex object, and further 'disassembled'.... and of the what, how, who/m, why of stratification as in "The stratification of cause"..

which any function of speech derives". Putting both topologies together, and showing the
directedness of the edges of the topology as described by Lacan and the terms he used,
we get the following four 'places' in the topology of a discourse:

semblant   *jouissance*

$$\Phi \xrightarrow{\;\;\text{secondary stratification}\;\;} \omega\text{-system}$$

$$\phi\text{-system} \cdots\cdots\cdots \Psi\text{-complex}$$

truth   *plus-de-jouir*

Lacan formulated the four discourses using this topology by 'doubling' it so that the four
orientations of the edges could each be arranged in terms of the four 'places'. Here are
the four orientations:
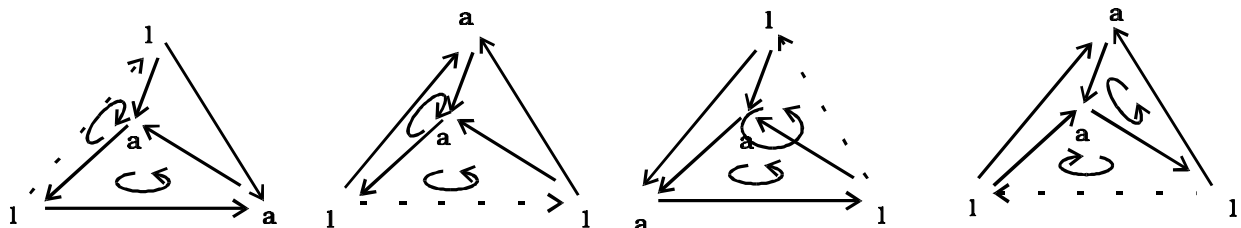
       These are pretty wild leaps of reasoning, which I sketch out here as a preliminary
to further elaboration and critical examination. But my thesis is that the structure of
discourse is founded on a topologising of Freud's Project; and through the elaboration of
this topology with the support of the Project, it becomes possible to suggest a different
way of 'reading' what an organisation is.

The organisational correlate

       Again using the Maturana language, we are not trying to formulate the
organisation in terms of its viability - this would be to confuse the physical substrate of
the organisation with the processes of organisation themselves. It is the *Identity* of the
organisation we are interested in, so that we are examining a kind of co-ontological drift
by a multiplicity of organisations of $\phi\omega\psi$'s which are somehow organised in relation to
each other through the effects of Φ, and insofar as the ϕ-systems and ω-systems are
coordinated in the ways in which they organise the pleasure-reality dialectic under the
effects of Φ, can be thought of as a system as a whole.

The form this takes is as an *Economy of Discourses[11]*, in which the identity of the organisation is formulated in terms of the way the economy 'locks' together around an underlying topology which, at a higher order of complexity, can be described in terms of the same 'quadripod'[12]:
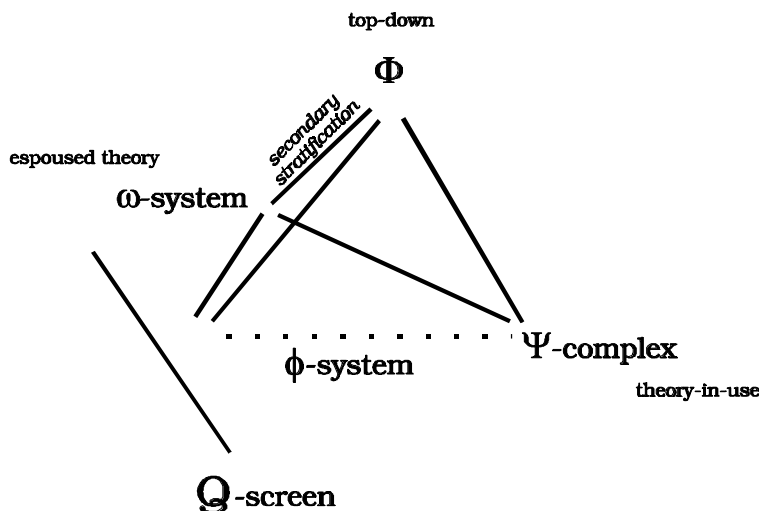
This has been formulated in terms of the dilemmas taken as being constitutive of organisation[13]:

- Top-down vs bottom-up
- Espoused theory vs theory-in-use
- Affiliation vs alliance

This 'take' on the quadripod leaves us with the third dilemma (affiliation vs alliance) as the problematic behind the formation of Maturana's "co-ontogenic drift" in the first place, and the effects of being-in-relation-to Φ. Affiliation becomes constituted by this being-in-relation-to Φ; and alliance becomes constituted through the relation to the S($\mathcal{A}$) of the Ψ−system. Thus 'alliance' becomes the problematic of the subject's relation to the desire of the Other[14], mediated by the effects of the subject's relation to the organisation.

In conclusion, then, the quadripod topology gets developed by Lacan in terms of the RSI and Sinthome – the problematics of the subject in relation to the 4th ring of the Borromean knot. This trajectory begins to address the problematics of the subject's relation to embodiment. Taking this earlier formulation in the direction of the discourses, however, indicates a different trajectory of development which suggests a way of topologising organisation.

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[11] An early attempt to formulate this concept is in "The economy of discourses: a third order cybernetics" with J.V. Kenny. Human Systems Management Volume 9 Number 4 1990 pp 205-224.

[12] It is this 'higher order' formulation which the PAN/Decon work with Cohen is seeking to formulate.

[13] These are the dilemmas elaborated in the paper on Foucault's archaeology.

[14] My first attempt at trying to approach this question is in "What is the good of psychoanalysis: Zizek and the vanishing mediatrix." CFAR Seminar 1993.