THE RETURN OF THE OPPRESSED: A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH TO ORGANIZATION STUDIES

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This article reviews the history, foundations, development, and position of systems psychodynamic scholarship in organization studies. Systems psychodynamic scholarship focuses on the interaction between collective structures, norms, and practices in social systems and the cognitions, motivations, and emotions of members of those systems. It is most useful to investigate the unconscious forces that underpin the persistence of dysfunctional organizational features and the appeal of irrational leaders. It is also well equipped to challenge arrangements that stifle individual and organizational development. The article documents the tension, in this body of work, between an "outside-in" perspective, focused on institutions' influence on individuals, and an "inside-out" perspective, focused on leaders' influence on institutions. It also interrogates the marginalization of systems psychodynamic scholarship, positing that its marginality is both a social defense for organization studies as a whole and a generative feature of the systems psychodynamics approach. Granting it a position of functional, rather than oppressed, marginality, the article concludes, will enrich research about the experience, management, and organization of contemporary work.

No one needs psychoanalysis but some people might want it. Psychoanalysis, as a theory and practice, should not pretend to be important instead of keeping itself interesting (importance is a cure for nothing). (Phillips, 1997: xvi)

The term "talent shortage" would not be coined for decades, but in 1942, the British military faced one of existential consequence. World War II had been raging for 3 years, and the King's armed forces were under strain. A once unthinkable scenario—a Wehrmacht invasion of the British Isles—had become a realistic contingency. Countless officers had

been slain or injured, and the supply of young men from the upper classes, long seen as having the natural authority and proper education to lead, fell short of the demand for new officers. No longer able to rely on tradition, the army turned to the social sciences to help select competent leaders. The rest is history.

Leadership stopped being a legacy and became a talent on the day that Wilfred Bion, a decorated WWI veteran and psychiatrist serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, was ordered to assemble a team of social scientists to revamp the officer selection process (Murray, 1990). The task fit the unorthodox clinician. Following in Klein's (1959) footsteps, Bion had revisited the Freudian (1905) premise that humans are moved by innate drives that others frustrate or fulfill. Freud had theorized that a power struggle between instincts and institutions gave shape to subjectivity, showing that "individual psychology... is at the same time social psychology" (Freud, 1921: 69). He had also invented a relationship—psychoanalysis—in which two people joined forces against the totalitarian claims of unconscious wishes and cultural demands that kept individuals at war with themselves and uneasy in groups (Freud, 1929). During WWII, Bion expanded and applied Freud's insights to groups and

organizations, the hosts and products of relations that he regarded not as mere constraints but as a core part of human constitution.

Bion (1961) saw people's sociability, or "group-ishness" as he would later call it, as the root of our troubles and delights. Between the two world wars, he had been part of a group of clinicians who embraced the antiauthoritarian stance of Freud's work not only in consulting rooms but also in administrative offices. The Tavistock Clinic, where Bion worked, had implemented a democratic selection of its management that had improved staff morale and productivity. Lore has it that the "revolution" had empowered "a younger generation of clinicians with a level of ability and a maverick quality that would otherwise have been lost" (Trist & Murray, 1990: 2). Among them was Eric Trist, a young psychologist who would join Bion in the army.

Bion and his colleagues brought their irreverence and democratic ethos to the war against totalitarianism. If officer selection were to succeed, they resolved, it could not rely on the markers of upbringing or the judgment of professionals alone. It had to involve commanding and training officers, and it had to surface officers' potential to accomplish combat missions in the field (Murray, 1990). Bion's group developed a method to assess how "a man's capacity for personal relationships stands up under the strain of his own and other men's fear of failure and desires for personal success" (Bion, 1946: 88). They would place candidates in "leaderless groups," with no hierarchy and a task to accomplish—such as building a bridge to traverse a ravine—and observe how they tackled it. Their method built on Freud's (1921) idea that leadership is a product, and occasionally a casualty, of groups. If that was the case, Bion (1946, 1948) argued, then the fittest candidate for leadership were those who could keep the group in mind and not lose their own minds, even when the work puts everyone under strain.

The war pushed Bion's theorizing further when he was later called upon to reform the treatment of soldiers suffering from mental disorders. The number of men requiring psychological help made it impossible to offer individual therapy. Applying the same ethos that he had brought to officer selection, Bion pioneered community treatment (Harrison, 2000). One could use groups to pick officers who would withstand the strain of war, he showed, and also set up groups that eased that strain and restored their members' health (Bridger, 1990). This insight became the organizing principle for communities that helped soldiers transition back to civilian life

(Wilson, Trist, & Curle, 1990) and laid a path that would take psychoanalysis from consulting rooms to work organizations.

Bion's (1946, 1948) studies of leadership selection and group treatment would only be published after the war. They appeared at the same time as the seminal work of Kurt Lewin, a Jewish German social scientist who had emigrated to the United States to become a professor of Psychology at MIT. Lewin was a gestalt psychologist who viewed groups as dynamic wholes, not simply sums of interpersonal relationships. He captured his "field theory" with the formula $B = f(P,E)$. Human behavior (B), Lewin (1947) argued, is a function of the person (P) and his or her environment (E). Therefore, to understand individuals' actions, one must understand the pushes and pulls of their surroundings—a force field that Lewin (1951) referred to as people's "life space," and which could be, at any given moment, in a "frozen" state of equilibrium or in "unfrozen" flux.

Lewin, like Bion, was influenced by Le Bon's (1896) and Freud's (1921) observations that in groups, emotions spread easily and sway members' thinking. He as well saw groups as fundamental for individual functioning, arguing that "the group to which an individual belongs is the ground for his perceptions, his feelings, and his actions" (Allport, 1948: vi). Lewin, who had lost his mother in the holocaust, was also moved by the antiauthoritarian spirit that animated Bion's work. He saw democratic participation as central to the legitimacy of the psychologist's enterprise in treatment, consulting, and research (Freedman, 1999; Marrow, 1977). Lewin (1946) took a step that remained implicit in Bion's theorizing from a (battle) field in which he was tasked to facilitate change. He termed such studies "action research" and argued that they were better suited to understanding groups and organizations—and to facilitating adaptive change—than forms of inquiry predicated on the existence of an objective reality unaffected by the researcher's presence. The best way to understand a social system, he famously quipped, was to try to change it (Tolman, 1996: 31). While doing so, researchers would be able to draw data from experiencing the system in action. "Only by considering the groups in question in their actual setting, can we be sure that none of the essential conduct has been overlooked," Lewin (1946: 14) concluded.

Trist (1981), who knew them both, observed that Bion and Lewin brought complementary tools to the fight against totalitarianism. "Bion focused on the unconscious factors obstructing the attainment of

group purposes and group creativeness; Lewin on the commitment to action consequent on participation and on the performance superiority of the democratic mode" (p. 14). One learned to disarm defenses, the other to foster democracy. If Freud had shown that repressive authorities spark neuroses, their work "showed that there was a link between participation and the release of creative forces. The link suggests also that democratic and reparative processes are connected at a deep psychological level. They mutually reinforce each other" (Bridger, 1990: 86).

Bion and Lewin emerged victorious from the war, but their battle had only just begun. Their insights and novel methods fit neither the field of mental health nor that of industrial psychology, and yet they challenged both establishments (Burnes & Cooke, 2013; Dicks, 2014). Bion's "social psychiatry" had made psychoanalysis, if possible, more radical. It argued that if families could shape children's healthy or neurotic development, it would take interventions on work groups and communities to sustain adults' mental well-being and productivity (Bion, 1946, 1948). Lewin, on his side, had offered a similar twist on the human relations movement. Attending to individuals' needs without changing their environment would only set them up for suffering. Ken Benne, one of Lewin's fellow founders of the National Training Laboratories in the United States, noted that personal growth was a fine goal, but it had to "be seen as only a *part* of the larger process of democratic change" (cited in Freedman, 1996: 340 italics in original).

Bion's and Lewin's work opened a field of theorizing, research, and consulting that illustrated the benefit to individuals and organizations of "responsible self-regulation and freedom from oppression, democracy and self-determination of working arrangements, and fair treatment and dignity for all in the workplace" (Pasmore & Khalsa, 1993: 557). Their work also inspired new forms of experiential learning—group relations conferences and human interaction laboratories—that aimed to help people grasp the influence that groups had on them, and *vice versa*, so as to equip them for participating in and changing organizations (Kleiner, 1996; Rice, 1965). The approach to studying, intervening in, and learning about social systems that built on Bion's and Lewin's seminal work eventually became known as *systems psychodynamics*, a term coined by Eric Miller to unify its various strands (Fraher, 2004a; Neumann, 1999).

Systems psychodynamic scholarship is borne of the combination of open systems and psychodynamic

theories. It endeavors to study the interaction between collective structures, norms, and practices, on the one hand, and the cognitions, motivations, and emotions of members of those collectives, on the other (French & Vince, 1999; Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010, 2015). From open systems theory, it borrows the assumption that individuals and organizations are living systems "maintaining themselves in exchange of materials with environment, and in continuous building up and breaking down of their components" (Von Bertalanffy, 1950: 23). From psychodynamic theory, it borrows the assumption that "conflict is unavoidable and constitutive of the subject" (Gabriel, 2016: 214). People have conflicting wishes, and unconscious efforts to manage those conflicts and fulfill those wishes affect their behavior, relationships, and organizations. In particular, systems psychodynamic scholars focus on how social systems are shaped by, and help us manage, tensions between wishes for stability and change (Diamond, 1993), and between wishes for separation and belonging (Miller, 1993; Wells, 1985).

Seen from this perspective, organizing is a means for emotional management and political expression, as well as task accomplishment. Organizations are families as well as machineries of sorts. "Individuals unconsciously and symbolically treat organizations as recapitulation of the family structure," Levinson (1987) contends, "and organizations in turn treat their members as if the individual were in some way bound to the group by familial ties" (p. 52). Once one regards social systems this way, arrangements that appear dysfunctional—in that they are opposed to what the system needs to get its work done efficiently or adapt to changes its environment—can be understood as alternatively functional, in that they help evoke the familiar (Kahn, 2012). They ensure that members continue to experience certain thoughts and feelings and continue to keep others at bay.

We started this review of systems psychodynamic scholarship with an origin story of the field that Bion, Lewin, and their associates plowed first in keeping with that same field's ethos. The features and frictions of a system, systems psychodynamic scholars posit, "are all observable at entry" (Alderfer, 1980: 461), and personal experiences must be interrogated as sources of insight. Seen that way, a field's founding history becomes an illustration of its foundational principles. Bion's and Lewin's stories encompass four principles that bind and define systems psychodynamic scholarship: a consideration of how unconscious forces affect human functioning, a focus on the

interaction between individual and collective levels of analysis, a participative stance toward the production of theory and change in the field, and a subversive intent, both of the authority of detached scientists and that of repressive leaders and bureaucratic organizations.

Given the influence of Bion, Lewin, Trist, and their associates on both sides of the Atlantic, one can find echoes of their work in mainstream scholarly work and practice trends to this day. Research in social psychology continues to examine how nonconscious social influences affect individual behavior (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010). Sociological work has documented institutional recalcitrance to change, and come to regard individuals as embedded agents in fields shaped by implicit shared assumptions (Dunn & Jones, 2010; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Organizations continue to dismantle hierarchies and distribute leadership across their ranks (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). One might then be tempted to view systems psychodynamic work as a prehistory of organization studies or as a meta-theory that informs numerous streams of scholarship. Although we relate to those views, we do not embrace them. We chose to review systems psychodynamic work as a distinct stream of scholarship because the accomplishments of much mainstream work on cross-level interactions have come at the expenses of the other three features of systems psychodynamics—the unconscious, the subjective participation, and/or the subversion. In doing so, we contend, something fundamental is lost, or more precisely oppressed, that we intend this review to reclaim and return to organization studies as a whole. What is lost, or silenced, is a fuller account of the human longings for other people and for freedom that lay at the core of organizing and its study—and that render both vital.

The aforementioned principles and the intent of this article emerged in the process of reviewing the systems psychodynamics literature. We began with a search for the terms "unconscious" and "psychodynamic" in leading journals in the United States and Europe: *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Sciences*, *Organization Studies*, and *Human Relations*. We then reviewed these articles and retained the ones in which a systems psychodynamic lens was central to the study. We reviewed these articles' references to complement our initial selection with peer-reviewed work published in other journals and books, or book chapters, pertaining to the perspective. Our final list

included 234 articles, 25 book chapters, and 28 books. We complemented this literature with work on the foundational psychoanalytic theories that those articles built upon and on streams of organization studies that those articles contributed to.

Once we compiled our literature, we went through a thematic analysis to discern what those articles and books had in common, and what were the principal differences among them. Their commonalities informed this article's introduction. The differences inform its main body. Those differences concern two tensions that are illustrated in Lewin's and Bion's work as well. The first tension concerns the *focus* of inquiry. Systems psychodynamic scholars aspire to investigate traffic at the boundaries of people's inner and social worlds, "working simultaneously from 'the inside out' and 'the outside in' with neither perspective being privileged" (Gould, 2001: 4). Nevertheless, most extant work puts the accent on one or the other perspective, either focusing on how systems of organization affect individuals ("outside-in") or on how individuals affect systems of organization ("inside-out"). Although both strands are significant, their leading authors have often been in disagreement, and on occasion in conflict, with each other. The second tension concerns the scholar's *intent*. Scholars in this vein accept that "intervention and observation [are] parallel and simultaneous processes. They are not sequential" (Schein, in Quick & Gavin, 2000: 32). Theoretical insights culled from the field can lead to interventions that help people and organizations, at least ideally, develop and *vice versa* (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999). Nevertheless, most extant work puts the accent on one or the other aim, either seeking to study organizations psychoanalytically or to psychoanalyze organizations, as Gabriel (2016) puts it.

We used this conceptual map to organize our account of the literature that follows. After a brief overview of the foundational psychodynamic concepts that systems psychodynamic scholars have built on, we move from outside-in to inside-out work. In each territory, we visit works that emphasize theorizing before works that emphasize intervention. This movement follows a trajectory—from a focus on systems to a focus on leaders, from an aim to theorize to an aim to help—that we discerned while reviewing the literature. In the final part of the article, we interrogate this trajectory and its relationship with the marginalization of systems psychodynamic scholarship.

One might conclude that systems psychodynamic work needs to return to organizations, and to theorizing, to shed its marginality. Recent work seems to

support that conclusion. Nevertheless, we will argue that the marginality of this approach is constitutional, that is, defensive and functional at once. Marginality is a feature not a flaw of a perspective that as Phillips put it in the quote we chose as epigraph, considers the interesting to be most useful, and regards the (self-)important with suspicion (psychodynamic punch lines are often parenthetical). Using a systems psychodynamic lens might marginalize scholars in a field dominated by positivist perspectives. But that very marginal position, if one is not silenced, presents unique opportunities to study the organization, management, and experience of contemporary work. At the end of World War II, the scholars who focused on groups to pursue the aims of fostering individual development and institutional democracy felt that they had "refined an instrument, perhaps the first adequate one, for a practicable approach to a key problem of our time: the strained relationship between the individual and the community" (Foulkes, 1946: 85). We can still use it.

THE "GROUND": FOUNDATIONAL PSYCHODYNAMIC CONCEPTS

The development of psychoanalysis in the first half of the 20th century provided the ground in which systems psychodynamic scholarship germinated. A comprehensive treatment of the psychodynamic literature, as the strands of scholarship that evolved from Freud's psychoanalysis came to be called, is beyond the scope of this review. However, we begin with a brief overview of foundational concepts that systems psychodynamic scholars have deployed—often as mechanisms or processes—to study groups, organizations, and broader systems. Besides reviewing these concepts in the following text, we summarize them in Table 1, referencing their original formulation.

We begin with the institution that first concerned psychodynamic scholars—the family. Freud based his theoretical edifice on the clinical observation that families of origin affect individuals for a lifetime. Children, he argued, learn more or less adaptive patterns of wish fulfillment—or suppression—early on and are compelled to repeat those patterns as adults. Freud (1900) labeled *identification* the mechanism through which such early learning shapes our lives and placed it at the center of human development and cultural reproduction. The internalization of an external entity in the social realm—an authority figure such as a parent—as an internal agency in the psychological realm, he argued, forged ideals and censors

that dictated the repression and oriented the expression of innate, mostly antisocial, wishes (Freud, 1916–17). If those internal agencies were particularly oppressive, the individual would become neurotic, and his or her unconscious wishes would be allowed expression only disguised as symptoms. If those agencies allowed a broader range of expression, conversely, wishes might turn into productive work, valuable art, or both (Freud, 1929). (A neurotic symptom, for Freud, is a bad work of art.)

The suffix "dynamic" in psychodynamics refers to the lifelong tension between instincts and institutions, between the push of wishes and the demands of norms, that forges the subject determining what can be conscious and what has to be relegated in the unconscious. Freud (1919; see also Bibring, 1943) theorized a *compulsion to repeat* ways of dealing with one's psychological and social worlds—or more precisely, ways of disguising the psychological world so as to retain good standing in the social world—learned early on. This concept explains the persistence of individual adaptations and neuroses as well as the lasting power of cultures. In particular, Freud labeled *transference* the mechanism through which individuals relived early identifications when forming new relationships, unwittingly forcing the novel into the familiar (Freud, 1912, 1915). When transference is particularly admiring, and a person attributes exaggerated and uncontested positive qualities to its target, it results in *idealization* (Freud, 1914). The same process, with the opposite valence, results in denigration of a target seen as entirely evil (Klein, 1952). Idealization and denigration are often markers of *regression*, a concept that refers to a return to a mode of functioning characteristic of an earlier stage of development (Freud, 1900).

Developing object relations theory, Klein (1959) recasts relationships—past and current—as central to the human constitution. Her work marked a shift in psychodynamic theorizing away from a hydraulic psyche, in which the pressures of drives met paths of more or less resistance, and toward a relational one (Fitzsimons, 2012). Significant others in our social world turn into "objects" in our inner world, Klein contended, and the ways we relate to those others and objects, not just the extent to which they please us, shape the self (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). Because others, much like the self, are desirable and repellent at times, pleasing, boring, and annoying, relating is... complicated. People, Klein argued, often manage the ambivalence that comes with it by *splitting* positive from negative elements, frequently holding on to the

TABLE 1
Psychodynamic Constructs

Mechanism	Definition	Foundational References
Identification	The internalization of an aspect, property, or attribute of an external entity in the social realm, usually an authority figure such as a parent, as an internal agency in the psychological realm.	Freud (1900)
Compulsion to repeat	The continual repetition of a behavior or dynamic learned early in life.	Bibring (1943), Freud (1919)
Regression	A defensive return to a familiar, earlier, usually less developed state.	Freud (1900)
Transference	The activation and use of relational patterns based on past identifications in new relationships. Results in perceiving and treating people in the present, and expecting to be treated by them, as if they were people in our past.	Freud (1912, 1915)
Idealization	Turning a target into the embodiment of a positive ideal, usually by attributing exaggerated and uncontested positive qualities to them.	Freud (1914)
Splitting	Partitioning a set of conflicting thoughts or feelings into two distinct subsets and then claiming one subset—often, but not always, the one with a positive valence—while denying or disowning the other subset.	Freud (1938), Klein (1959)
Denial	The rejection of thoughts, emotions, or actions. It can be tacit, when the denied content simply does not enter awareness, or explicit, when it enters awareness but is not associated to the self.	Freud (1929), Klein (1959)
Projection	The attribution of psychic elements of one's own, such as thoughts, emotions, or a whole identity, to another person or group.	Freud (1915), Klein (1959)
Projective identification	The attribution of psychic elements of one's own, such as thoughts, emotions, or a whole identity, to another person or group, followed by attempts to evoke those elements in the other person or group so that it seems that they, not us, own them. The person doing the projecting subsequently identifies with the person or group enacting them, denigrating them, if the projected content is negative, or idealizing them, if it is positive.	Klein (1952, 1959), Halton (1994)
Holding environment	A social context that reduces disturbing affect and facilitates sensemaking. Originally conceptualized as the activity of a caretaker who responds to a child's physical and psychological needs, withstands his or her aggression, and protects him or her from excessive external or internal distress.	Winnicott (1960, 1975)

former and trying to get rid of the latter. The purging of discordant affect, thoughts, or attributes, is accomplished through a combination of *denial* that negates unwanted elements and *projection* that locates them into another person. "It is he," one could then reassuringly observe, "who is spiteful and insecure. Not I!" These mechanisms relieve and impoverish one's inner world, making it safer yet monotone.

On occasion, "the recipients of a projection [will] react to it in such a way that their own feelings are affected: they unconsciously introject the projected feelings" (Halton, 1994: 16). When the recipient introjects and enacts the projection, or simply acts in ways that are consistent with it, they set up the possibility for the subject to unconsciously identify with them (Wells, 1985). An unconscious element of one's inner world, then, has then been given into custody to another person, and having that person in sight keeps the unwanted element out of one's mind. Klein (1959) termed this mode of relating *projective*

identification and saw it is a primitive form of communication—a nonverbal way to let another know, and carry, what children cannot yet bear feeling, let alone talk about. When adults use it, however, projective identification is problematic (Ogden, 1979). It is usually an attempt to control another person as much as the self. (Power, seen from this perspective, is the ability to shape and define the experience of others.) Klein's work on projective identification provided a theory of how intrapsychic conflicts become interpersonal ones (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012), elucidating why transference is both disturbing and revealing (Searles, 1955). Donald Winnicott, soon after, explained how to hold it in ways that foster growth.

Like Klein, Winnicott saw familiar relationships as constitutive of the subject, and he focused even more closely on how relationships help organize selves. Winnicott (1960) noted that caregiving relationships provide a *holding environment* for human development. The first one the luckiest among us experience is, in Winnicott's words, the "good-enough Mother" who provides a soothing presence, responds to the child's physical and psychological needs, withstands their aggression, and protects them from excessive external or internal distress. Winnicott (1960) argued that holding helps children develop their capacity to tolerate and make sense of emotional turbulence. Besides soothing distress, the holding caregiver leaves space for the child to act freely and shows interest in their actions, inspiring the child to become curious about those actions' origin. From this curiosity, according to Winnicott (1951), a sense of self emerges.

A person held well, Winnicott argued, develops firm attachments and autonomy. Fragmentation gives way to integration and projective identification to intimate relating, the aims of development in many psychodynamic theories (Westen, 1992). Rather than enlisting others in a forced division of psychic labor through projective identification, then, a person is "able to hold, accept, and own (rather than to avoid, deny, or project onto other individuals and out-groups) those aspects of the self that are disturbing and troublesome" (Alderfer & Sims, 2003: 19). Winnicott (1950) argued that for adults, the collective equivalent of a "good-enough mother" is a democratic society, where conflicting voices can be held within and heard around one's self. This contention implied that taking the side of the unconscious and of democracy were, in fact, one and the same.

Although the concepts outlined earlier emerged from clinical observations in psychotherapy, or from the systematic observation of children's interactions with their parents, systems psychodynamic scholars have taken them beyond the dyad and the nursery, and into communities and workplaces. Scholars taking an "outside-in" perspective have used these concepts to theorize how groups and organizations shape their members' psychological functioning, serving defensive and developmental functions. Those taking an "inside-out" perspective have used them to theorize how the character and neuroses of powerful individuals influence the structures and norms of groups and organizations, as well as the lives of other people who live and work in them.

OUTSIDE-IN: HOW GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS GET UNDER OUR SKIN

Since its origins, systems psychodynamic scholarship has focused on "the emotional, relational, and political dimensions of organizational experience, which often remain unconscious" (French & Vince, 1999: 4). In this section, we review the literature that takes an "outside-in" perspective and inquires about how "institutions of all kinds leave their marks on the internal as well as external reality of individuals" (Bar-Lev Elieli, 2001: 67). Most of the early systems psychodynamic work, published over the three decades that followed Bion's and Lewin's wartime contributions, took this perspective to study organizational life. Systems psychodynamic scholars shifted the focus from the family of origin to the groups and organizations in which people worked, showing that they could be equally impactful on individuals' inner worlds and actions. Those groups and organizations can constrain their members and can also, at times, free them up.

Research in this stream sees individuals' experience in general, and leaders' in particular, as "a symptom rather than the cause" (Kernberg, 1978: 8) of the state of their institutions. Therefore, it examines how people struggle with the demands of organizational life and how they benefit from its protections. Although the vector of influence goes from the system to the individual, the latter is never passively molded by impersonal collective pressures. On the contrary, this body of work shows that those pressures are personal all along because individuals often collude in creating them and keeping them in place. Institutions become dysfunctional and their leaders lose their minds, then, not only at the expense of members but also on members' behalf. In the sections that follow, we trace how this insight emerged, reviewing major areas of "outside-in" inquiry. We summarize these areas in Table 2. We then briefly review

TABLE 2
"Outside-In" Domains of Inquiry

Stream	Description	Key References
Dual layers of group life	Groups have two modes of functioning that operate in parallel: the work group in which members focus on the goal the group was formed to accomplish, and the basic assumption group in which members pursue actions and structures that protect them from anxiety. Groups are paradoxical and often pulled to act in two opposing directions which can cause them to polarize and conflict to emerge. Conflicts in one group can be exported to another group in the same social system leading to a parallel process.	Alderfer (1987), Ashforth & Reingen (2014), Bion (1961), French & Simpson (2010), Hirschhorn & Krantz (1982), Krantz (2001), Lawrence et al. (1996), Petriglieri et al. (2018), Berg & Smith (1985, 1987), Wells (1985)
Sociotechnical systems	Organizations contain two interdependent systems: the technical system which comprises the tools and equipment needed to conduct work, and the social system which comprises the humans who work in the group, their emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. Changes in one system impact the other; therefore, to understand a whole system, one must study both systems in parallel.	Emery (1959), Rice (1951, 1953a, 1953b, 1955, 1958), Rice & Trist (1952), Rice et al. (1950), Trist (1981), Trist & Bamforth (1951), Trist et al. (1977)
Boundaries in task and sentient systems	Boundaries are lines or regions that demarcate a system. They define systems and ensure their existence. Organizations have multiple internal boundaries between subsystems, as well as an external one. Task systems execute the task a system must perform to survive. Sentient systems satisfy members' emotional needs for belonging. The boundaries of task and sentient systems rarely overlap, creating frictions that affect organizational functioning.	Alderfer (1980, 2011), Hirschhorn (1999), Hirschhorn & Gilmore (1980), Kahn (1998), Miller (1959), Miller & Rice (1967), Smith (1989)
Social defenses	Social defenses are collective arrangements—such as an organizational structure, a work method, or a prevalent discourse—created or used by an organization's members as a protection against disturbing affect derived from external threats, internal conflicts, or the nature of their work. They are features of a collective that people invest in to bolster their individual defense mechanisms. Although social defenses help members to defend against anxieties, they often create secondary or substitute anxieties, which can become the focus of organizational change efforts.	Bain (1998), Brown & Starkey (2000), Fotaki & Hyde (2015), Hirschhorn (1988), Jaques (1955), Krantz & Gilmore (1990), Menzies (1960), Padavic et al. (2019), Petriglieri & Petriglieri (2015)
Organizations as holding environments	Organizations can provide institutional holding through their policies and structure and make it possible for their members to provide interpersonal holding to each other. An organizational holding environment provides containment—the ability to absorb threatening emotions, and present them back in a less threatening way so that they can be understood and worked with—and interpretation—the provision of meanings and to individuals so that they can better understand their experiences. In addition to holding members' anxieties related to the organization's work, organizations can become holding environments for members' identity work, the so-called identity workspaces.	Bion (1970), Kahn (1995, 2001, 2004), Petriglieri & Petriglieri (2010), Petriglieri, Ashforth & Wrezniewski (2019), Petriglieri & Obodaru (2019), Petriglieri et al. (2018), Shapiro & Carr (1991)

scholarship on organizational consulting, which also elucidates the outside-in systems psychodynamic stance.

The Dual Layers of Group Life

Freud's recognition of the centrality of unconscious elements to individual and social lives, together with Klein's theorizing of projective identification as a mechanism through which people shape both those lives, provided the building blocks for Bion's seminal theorizing about groups. Bion (1961) posited two modes of functioning that operate in parallel, and often in conflict, in groups: the work group and the basic assumption group. When functioning as a "work group," members organize and operate in accordance with the task that the group is set up to accomplish, say, storming an enemy position, manufacturing a product, or throwing a party. Group structures and member's behavior are said to be "rational" when they are oriented toward dealing with opportunities and challenges in the environment, and using available resources, in the pursuit of its task. For example, in the "work group" mode, the number of executive vice presidents in a management group will be limited by the functions requiring EVPs, regardless of political consideration. The number of meetings will be determined by the decisions to be made, and so on.

Bion contended that pure work groups are functional, efficient, and rare. People are seldom dispassionate about their work. Especially when that work is challenging, members experience disturbing feelings—principal among them, anxiety—about the work itself or about each other (Krantz, 2001). Tending to disturbing affect if only by keeping it out of awareness, then, becomes the group's business too, and can lead its members to collude in sustaining beliefs and courses of action that hinder the group's work (Anzieu, 2014). When it shifts to the business of protecting members from distress, Bion (1961) argued, a group becomes a "basic assumption" group. Members act *as if* irrational "basic assumptions" are true, and the group often appears to be stuck.

For example, members of a project team whose task is to conduct an industry analysis may become anxious on realizing that the organization is more vulnerable to disruption than its management knows. This realization might threaten members' sense of job security or raise concerns about breaking the news to superiors. To stave off the anxiety associated with such thoughts, Bion (1961) argued, groups mobilize one of three basic assumptions: dependency, fight/flight, or pairing. In the dependency mode, group members act as if they are inept and rely on a leader whom they regard as a "savior." In the fight/flight mode, the members act as if the source of all the group's trouble is a discrete threat, internal or most often external to the group, which they must destroy or avoid at all costs. In the pairing mode, the group acts as if the pairing of two members will produce a solution to its challenges. Each assumption serves as a cognitive filter, simplifying a complex reality, and as an emotional buffer, reassuring the group. Bion argued that groups unconsciously mobilize basic assumptions—and are then immobilized by them—when the work threatens to overwhelm them. Returning to the example of the project team, members anxious about their security and status may become convinced that a spokesperson with strong "communication skills" will sweeten the message, and thus become dependent on this member. That conviction might be functional to reassuring the group and at the same time dysfunctional by derailing the work of analyzing the industry and informing top management (see Hirschhorn & Krantz, 1982).

Building on Bion's seminal work, scholars have further refined the theory of the work group (French & Simpson, 2010), examined the relations between the basic assumptions he observed (Karterud, 1989), and described two more: "one-ness" and "me-ness." In one-ness mode, members uphold a shared conviction that the group is harmonious and aligned with a higher principle as a way to avoid divisive topics (Turquet, 1974). In me-ness mode, members insist on their individual uniqueness as a way to deny the limits posed by their need for each other and for the group (Lawrence, Bain, & Gould, 1996). The most generative aspect of Bion's theorizing, however, was the general principle that groups often do two things at once—they cooperate to pursue their work and collude to protect themselves from anxiety. The latter, and least visible, effort can occasionally energize a group but it most often shapes "irrational" group structures, decisions, and norms.

Describing basic assumptions, Bion extended psychoanalytic theorizing about regression. The concept of regression denotes a reaction to environmental circumstances perceived as overwhelming or threatening, resulting in denial of reality and withdrawal into a seemingly secure inner space (Diamond & Allcorn, 1987; Parker, 1997). Bion observed regression at the level of a "group as a whole," an entity that emerges from a web of individual

members' projective identifications (Wells, 1985). Basic assumptions are a shared regression, through which members unconsciously avoid what they fear knowing and enact what the group needs them to be. In extreme cases, groups will lodge what everyone wishes to avoid—anxiety, incompetence, and malevolence—into a single member, creating a scapegoat. Or they will lodge what everyone wishes to have—courage, ability, and righteousness—into a member, creating a leader. In both cases, those members might feel compelled to act accordingly, without realizing that they are "inspired, and in part, governed by collective forces" (Wells, 1985: 124; see also; Gemmil & Oakley, 1992), and are complying to the group's unconscious demand for a convenient distraction from its real troubles. Basic assumptions, in short, keep members safe but not sane, in numbers, providing beliefs that erode thinking to shore up self-esteem (Brown, 1997). Because that safety is illusory and endangers the group in the long run, Bion (1962) saw curiosity, rather than defensiveness, in the face of anxiety as the ultimate mark of mental health and work group functioning.

Smith and Berg (1985, 1987) took a step forward from Bion's observations, linking them to the psychodynamic axiom that tension is ubiquitous with individuals and in social systems. The regression that Bion described, they argued, was due to group members' inability to manage the paradoxical nature of group life, leading to polarization. A stream of work has since argued that the experience of paradoxes activates defenses (Jarrett & Vince, 2016; Lewis, 2000; Vince & Broussine, 1996) and that the process of trying to keep tension unconscious does not end in groups (Smith, 1989). Ashforth and Reingen (2017) documented it in a study of a natural food cooperative, where groups of members espousing one of its two ideologies of "profit" and "purpose," fought bitterly with each other about the direction of the firm, to which both sides claimed unconflicted allegiance. Projective identification underpinned the intergroup conflict, they observed, and allowed the firm to sustain both values. Conflict at the intergroup level yielded harmony at the organizational level. Observing a similar configuration in an educational institution, Petriglieri, Petriglieri, and Wood (2018) described it as a functional polarization: functional, that is, to reducing ambivalence within individuals and sustaining multiplicity in the organization.

Just as intrapsychic conflicts get exported in interpersonal and group relations, conflicts in one part of a social system can be exported to another part,

leading to a parallel process between those subsystems (Alderfer, 1987). Consider, for example, a steering committee for a corporate change initiative comprising representatives of different departments. Although tasked to consider the future of the company, members will often relate to each other in ways that mirror past relations between the departments they represent. Having absorbed their department's worldviews, they will be moved to enact them on behalf of colleagues, through projective identification, so that the steering committee becomes mired in the company history, whereas the rest of the organization, to whom that history belongs, can blame the committee for not collaborating. Such observations lead to "a radical shift" in the question scholars ask, Smith and Berg (1987: xxvi) note, from "What is wrong with this worker?" or "What is wrong with this group?" to "What systemic forces have made it so hard for this person's or this group's competence to be expressed?" It was this line of questioning that led Eric Trist and his colleagues to develop the theory of sociotechnical systems.

Sociotechnical Systems

The idea of multiple layers of functioning applied to organizations was a springboard for the conceptualization of sociotechnical systems (for an overview, see Trist, 1981). This concept brought together organization theories, which placed structure, process, and technology in the foreground, and psychological theories, which gave pride of place to personalities and relationships (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999). Its proponents argued that "any work site contains two interdependent systems, a technical system and a social system. The technical system consists of machines, tools, conveyances, and so forth, all of which are arrayed over a geographical area and joined together by the timing and movement of raw materials and information. ... The social system consists of humans, but the aspects of humans that are of relevance to this system are not hands, feet, and muscles, so much as attitudes, beliefs, and feelings" (Trist, Susman, & Brown, 1977: 208).

Trist and Bamforth (1951) put this theory of organization forward in a seminal study of the long-wall method of coal extraction in an English mine. The coal mining industry, one of the most powerful in the United Kingdom at the time, was transitioning from a nonmechanized mode of extraction to the one based on "factory principles" as a result of the introduction of new technology. Managers had assumed that the best form of organization would be

one that optimized the output of the automated system, but unexpectedly, workers' efficiency had decreased. Trist and Bamforth (1951) concluded that the introduction of new technology had broken down social arrangements that granted miners "responsible autonomy." In the legacy system, which their research site retained, people worked in small groups that allowed them to affiliate with those whom they trusted and to adjust to the production challenges of the day. That arrangement gave them a sense of "craft pride and artisan independence" (p. 6). Elsewhere, the new technology had broken down the miners' social system, as managers forced people to work in assigned groups relating through the machine. The change caused disaffection and defiance, which increased turnover and decreased productivity. Three decades later, Trist (1981) would highlight the subversive nature of that first study, claiming to have proven that "it was not true that the only way of designing work organizations must conform to Tayloristic or bureaucratic principles. . . . The technological imperative could be disobeyed with positive economic as well as human results." (Trist, 1981: 9)

The (re-)discovery of self-managing teams, which had its roots in the wartime experiences that Trist had been part of, led to the distinction between social and technical systems (Trist, 1981) and to the insight that optimizing output required both systems to be suboptimal (Emery, 1959). The theory was a hit because it argued that productivity could be enhanced without subjugating or seducing workers (Pasmore & Khalsa, 1993). It implied a need to balance management and workers' power that harked back to Lewin, and met with the approval of labor organizations that had been suspicious of Mayo's prescriptions for enlisting workers' cooperation (Zaleznik, 1984). Rice revealed the emotional and political struggles underlying failed technological change in a series of studies of the Glacier Metal Machine Shop conducted with Trist and other colleagues (Rice, 1951; Rice, Hill, & Trist, 1950; Rice & Trist, 1952). He found that workers not only resisted managers' efforts to expand operations and make them more efficient but also, surprisingly, rebuffed managers' attempts to consult them about the changes. Rather than embracing a collaborative way of working that would potentially give them more influence, the workers held on to a belief that the managers wanted to co-opt them in pushing production quantity over quality, which threatened their identities as skilled workers. Managers' insistence on adopting new technology and a new way of working clashed with the workers' sense of autonomy and place.

True to Lewin's (1951) admonition about the practical value of a good theory, the same authors applied insights from their early work to facilitate change and innovation in organizations. Rice's (1953a, 1953b, 1955, 1958) studies of Indian textile mills, for example, documented an organizational redesign implemented alongside the introduction of automated weaving. The redesign featured work groups intended to promote responsible autonomy and democratic participation in the workplace. The intervention helped workers to embrace the new technology and resulted in sustained improvements in production, efficiency, and quality. Applying his theories to an American coalmine, Trist documented how the introduction of autonomous work groups improved miners' safety, performance, and satisfaction (Trist et al., 1977).

The stream of work that established the theory of sociotechnical systems highlighted the interplay between an organization's structure and technology and its members' experience and relations. It also established how important, and elusive, workers' autonomy was. Autonomy affected well-being and engagement, as well as organizations' productivity and ability to change. Understanding the conditions that denied, sustained, or enhanced autonomy, therefore, became a central preoccupation for systems psychodynamic scholars (Miller, 1993). If innovation could be counterproductive when it disrupted arrangements that gave workers pride and agency, what would it take to make innovation work for everyone? How could one use organizations' attempts to modernize and motivate workers to advance the values of democratic participation? These questions led to the conceptualization of task and sentient systems and to the recognition that boundaries were both a defining feature of systems and a primary locus of intervention.

Boundaries in Task and Sentient Systems

Developing sociotechnical systems theory, Emery and Trist (1973) concluded that traditional planning, with goals set at the top and cascaded through hierarchies, was unsuitable to turbulent environments. It represented "closed systems thinking, the machine theory of organizing, and the maximization of power—everything which the encounter with higher level of complexity and uncertainty has shown to be unworkable" (p. 203). To maintain responsive systems, managers—and scholars—needed to shift their attention from what the center wanted to what happened at the periphery, in the boundary region between the system and its environment (Rice, 1951).

Boundaries define systems and ensure their existence. Permeability is their crucial property (Alderfer, 1980; Diamond, Allcorn, & Stein, 2004). A system is open when its boundaries have optimal permeability (Alderfer, 2011), that is, when they allow exchange with the environment while preserving the system's integrity. Complex systems, such as large organizations, do not have only one boundary. They have multiple ones demarcating subsystems that compose the whole. Think of the boundaries between management and workers, marketing and production, business units, and so on. Not all subsystems are deliberately drawn; some are embedded into others (Alderfer, 1980, 1981). In their seminal volume, Systems of Organization, Miller and Rice (1967) theorized a distinction between two categories of subsystems: task and sentient systems. Emerging in parallel to, and elaborating, the theory of sociotechnical systems, this conceptualization continued to translate the idea of two levels of functioning in a dynamic relation with each other—collaborating and conflicting at times—to the organizational level.

The structure and function of task systems is usually determined by the organization's primary task, that is, "the task that [a system] must perform to survive" (Miller & Rice, 1967: 25). The organization as a whole, and each task subsystem within it, has a primary task. For example, the primary task of a hospital might be to provide quality health care to patients, and the primary task of its blood laboratory might be to provide accurate data to clinicians. Those authorized to manage a (sub-)system, when doing their job well, ensure that the input and output of the system, as well as its organization, are geared toward the accomplishment of the task. Drawing on Freud's portrait of the ego as a guardian of the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious, Miller and Rice (1967) argued that managers served a similar function in an organization, drawing, monitoring, and changing functional boundaries between its various parts and its environment.

Miller (1959) suggested that technology, territory, and time, alone or in combination, are three bases for differentiating task systems. Technology refers to the skills, tools, and materials needed to perform the task that the system is responsible for. Territory refers to the geography in which the task is performed. Time refers to the working period of the system. The more complex a system becomes, the more likely it is that it will differentiate into subsystems. Thus, a hospital's blood laboratory might be part of a larger diagnostic laboratory, but the skills and knowledge required to analyze blood, and the need for the laboratory to be located close to wards, and to operate 24/7, might make it a task subsystem that is distinct from the bacterial diagnostic laboratory, which requires a different set of skills, might be located in the basement, and be open only during the day.

Within task systems, people will occupy roles that give them specific authority. That authority "offers a legitimate base to have power and from which to influence others and bring about the completion of work tasks. It is legitimate power vested in particular people or positions for system purposes" (Kahn & Kram, 1994:18). The primary task, then, is a heuristic tool (Miller & Rice, 1967). It is not an objective property of the system, but a statement that allows managers (or consultants) to discuss how the whole system should be organized, whose authority can be considered legitimate where and when, and whether the system can be called functional or not.

If all organizations had to care about was accomplishing their primary task—assuming this task was clear and agreed on—managing them could be relatively straightforward. But managers often have to define the task in the face of risk (Hirschhorn, 1999) or contested views of the organization's purpose. Furthermore, defining and accomplishing that task require mobilizing people, and people have beliefs, wishes, and concerns tied to their *sentient systems* in organizations. The function of sentient systems is to satisfy members' emotional needs by fulfilling their wishes, assuaging their concerns, and providing a sense of belonging. These systems often take the form of identity groups, be they occupational or professional groups, or gender, ethnic, or other social groups. People identify with, and are loyal to, sentient systems often outside of awareness and independently of the needs of the task system (Alderfer, 1983).

The functioning of an organization, Miller and Rice (1967) posited, including how it structures itself and conducts its activities, depends on the relations between those two systems. If the boundaries of task and sentient systems coincide, that is, if accomplishing the task mobilizes and benefits one's identity group, members of a sentient system will invest heavily into pursuing the primary task. Perfect overlap, however, is rare. Conflicts often arise between task and sentient systems, especially in times of change. What would help achieve the task, such as the adoption of an Artificial Intelligence diagnostic system, might disrupt the autonomy and authority of, say, radiographers, who

would mobilize as a sentient system to resist change in the task system. Understanding the functioning of an organization, and intervening to improve it, therefore, requires paying attention to where boundaries are drawn and what happens across them (Smith, 1989).

The movement across systems boundaries depends on their level of permeability. Overbounded systems have impermeable boundaries, closed off to the environment, and risk not responding adaptively to change. Underbounded systems, on the other hand, are too open to environmental influences and risk losing their coherence and identity. "Overbounded systems," Alderfer (1980: 274) observed, "tend to have their primary intergroup conflicts among task groups, and underbounded systems to have their primary conflicts among identity groups." Consider, for example, an overbounded surgery unit whose primary task requires the close collaboration of surgeons, technicians, nurses, and anesthesiologists forming task groups for each operation. Individuals from each profession might do their best to collaborate during a procedure, acting according to strict role requirements. But they might also have a habit of taking lunches with people in the same profession—surgeons with surgeons, nurses with nurses, and so on—where conversations veer into annoyances with the other groups. Although such lunches might reinforce camaraderie among fellow professionals and help blow off steam, they will also entrench the sentient systems' boundaries at the expense of the task system. Overboundedness will get in the way of building the familiarity among professions that the task requires, and in moments of distress or change, like an incident or a layoff, will erupt into overt conflict. Kahn (1998) helped understand such tensions by reviewing the functions that relational systems serve for organizations' members and argued that one way that crises affect organizations is through the disturbance of these systems (Kahn, Barton, & Fellows, 2013). But even when change is planned and appears to be beneficial, people resist it. The theory of social defenses explains why it is often so.

Social Defenses

The most researched and built on among "outside-in" systems psychodynamic constructs is *social defenses*. Social defenses are "collective arrangements—such as an organizational structure, a work method, or a prevalent discourse—created or used by an organization's members as a protection against disturbing affect derived from external threats, internal conflicts, or the nature of their work" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010: 47). Social defenses are features of a collective that people invest in to bolster their individual defense mechanisms. Classic psychoanalytic work showed that individuals use a range of tactics to suppress disturbing thoughts and affect and keep them out of consciousness, regaining a sense of safety at the cost of their contact with reality (Cramer, 1998; Freud, 1936). Social defenses protect people from disturbing ideas and feelings that are likely to be shared (Halton, 1994). Although most scholarship has focused on defenses against anxiety, Stein (2000a) has argued that other emotions, such as envy, are also defended against through social means (see also Patient, Lawrence, & Maitlis, 2003; Vidaillet, 2008).

Jaques (1951, 1955a) postulates that one reason people join organizations is that their structures and norms bolster individual defenses against depressive and paranoid anxieties that Klein (1959) saw as central to our existence. Jaques (1995) later qualified his proposition, arguing that social defenses are only present when the organizational structure does not adequately support people's work. In doing so, he aligned with most scholars who regard social defenses as necessary because of anxiety evoked by the work itself or its organization (Krantz, 2001; Schwartz, 1991).

In a landmark study of a training hospital, Menzies (1960) elaborated the theory illustrating the operation and consequences of social defenses. She observed that the organization of nurses' shifts served as a social defense. The rotation system was meant to ensure uniformity in patient treatment and socialize the nurses into professional detachment. Menzies, however, postulated that the depersonalized work allocation also ensured that the nurses did not get too attached to very ill patients, which suppressed their anxiety about those patients dying. The nurses' potential sense of helplessness was thus avoided, but not entirely. It was split off from the work and projected into its organization. Although successful as a defense against nurses' primary anxiety, then, the structure elicited secondary (i.e., substitute) anxieties in the form of frustration, alienation, and stress about the rosters. Depersonalizing rotations became a necessary evil—providing an escape from and outlet for the anxiety nurses faced and eroding the quality of their work and lives. This analysis explained why the shift system was both widely denigrated and considered necessary.

Menzies theorized that nurses' anxieties "had been projected and *given objective existence* in the social structure and culture of the nursing service" (p. 452, italics ours). Her statement clarifies that regarding organizational features as social defenses does not require anthropomorphizing organizations. Institutions do not operate defenses. "Defenses are, and can be, operated only by individuals. Their behavior is the link between the psychic defense and the institution" (Menzies, 1960: 458). Put another way, individuals invest in institutional features that sustain convenient illusions, and then behave *as if* those features are necessary even if they are dysfunctional. We animate and protect institutional features that help protect us, ensuring that the actual organization does not diverge too much from our "organization in the mind" (Armstrong, 1997), much like we invest in, protect, and attempt to replicate familiar relations (Klein, 1959).

Menzies' insight opened up a view of the unconsciousness as "an inexhaustible psychosocial force driving organizations and organizing; and setting the institutionalization process into motion" (Komporozos-Athanasiou & Fotaki, 2015: 321). This view regards conscious emotions in organizations as a consequence of the unconscious organization of emotions, and regards institutionalization as the structuring of a "division of emotional labour" (Neumann, 1999: 63). Since those early studies, a rich stream of work has investigated collective structures, processes, and discourses that appear irrational but persist because they help members "deal with," without "thinking about" or "working through," unpleasant experiences (Hirschhorn, 1988).

In a study of a social service agency, for example, Kahn (1993) documented the contrast between the equanimity of management and the isolation, distress, and turnover of social workers, the agency members in direct contact with its troubled service users. This division of emotional labor, he theorized, revealed the operation of splitting between the two groups. As he explained, "the social workers' splitting off from the rest of the organization seemed an involuntary sacrifice that kept agency administrators—as the ongoing core of the agency, given social worker turnover—unconsciously protected from debilitating anxiety (which they acknowledged not feeling). The image here is of the social workers, as primary caregivers, wading out into a river of painful emotions to help rescue homeless youth, and the other parts of the agency, instead of pulling taut on the lifeline connecting and anchoring the social workers to the organization, unconsciously dropping the rope and abandoning the social workers to the force of the waves so as not be pulled in themselves." (p. 560) Kahn's findings highlight that while rendering organizations dysfunctional, social defenses also sustain their power structure (Voronov & Vince, 2012). "The direction of unwanted emotional elements seems to be usually downward in terms of hierarchy and status," Krantz (2001: 153) notes. If power is the ability to not have to learn, as Deutsch (1967) put it, social defenses help the powerful avoid learning, forcing less powerful others to carry what those in power cannot bear to know or feel (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012).

Systems psychodynamic work, as noted earlier, has long focused on the emotional underpinnings of power relations (Neumann, 1999; Vince, 2014, 2019). A rich vein of recent work has continued to pursue this line of inquiry, enriching critical management and organization studies (Arnaud, 2012; Frosh, 2003). Examples include studies of how promises of empowerment disguise efforts to tighten the grip on employees' subjectivity (Casey, 1999), of the fantasy of limitless potential that leads managers and workers to collude with cultures of overwork (Ekman, 2013), of the symbolic disappearing underlying the marginalization of women in British academia (Fotaki, 2013) and the New Zealand film industry (Handy & Rowlands, 2017), of professional burnout among educators for children with special needs (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2004), and of the discourse of trust as a resource for identity work (Driver, 2015).

Several of the aforementioned studies draw on the work of Jaques Lacan to analyze the compulsion to repeat dysfunctional patterns in organizations (Arnaud, 2002; Driver, 2009; Magala, Arnaud, & Vanheule, 2007). Central to this stream of work is a conceptualization of the unconscious in organizations as an unmanaged (and unmanageable) territory where fantasy reigns, usually in the form of stories that symbolize unconscious fears and desires (Gabriel, 1995). Such confabulations allow people to claim their experience of and in the organization, without submitting to its control or being consumed by resisting to it. Seen that way, fantasy might seem irrational because work is supposed to be about facing truth and dealing with reality, and yet it is a potential avenue for subjectivity as it gives work meaning (Gabriel, 1999).

A related stream of work has expanded the insight that social defenses provide protection from anxiety, at least for the powerful, as well as access to

gratifying experiences such as passion and pride (Carr, 1999). Drawing on Judith Butler's work, this stream has begun to elucidate the role of desire in the systems psychodynamics of organizations. Studying a charity whose members passionately embraced "ethical living," for example, Kenny (2010) showed how those members did not hesitate to police minor transgressions with equal passion, embracing the exclusionary processes that they consciously stood against. Kenny, Fotaki, and Vandekerckhove (2018) elaborated the workings of "passionate attachment" in a study of whistle-blowers, revealing the bond between these employees and the collectives they kept belonging to even as they defied them.

Social defenses can also operate across organizations that share a common task and norms, such as universities, hospitals, or police departments. These "system domain defenses" (Bain, 1998) allow outsiders to interact with different organizations of the same type and members to move from one organization to another without needing to adjust the way they handle work-related anxiety. For example, scholars have researched the operation of social defenses in management theory (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990) and education (Hirschhorn, 1988). As ways to support organizations and help managers in their roles, some ideas and courses can be seen as failures. However, they succeed in keeping managers' anxiety at bay, and reinforce managers' and academics' identities, status, and relationships. Therefore, they remain popular despite criticism (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015). Fotaki and Hyde (2015) have documented a similar kind of social defense across organizations in the British National Health Service. They observed executives developing "blind spots" as a defense against the anxiety of being in charge of crafting policies to avert the unavoidable—disease, suffering, and death. Anxiety about the impossibility of the task at hand led executives to idealize policy and denigrate implementation, a split through which their work remained hopeful but their policies became unquestionable and doomed to fail (see also Fotaki, 2006, 2010).

In a study of a professional service firm, Padavic, Ely, and Reid (2019) showed how systems level defenses, such as a cultural discourse, can interact with organizational defenses, in a cycle that seals those organizational arrangements and reinforces dominant discourses. They found that male and female members of the firm used the well-worn "work–family conflict" discourse to explain women's stalled advancement to senior leadership. Women had conflicting work and family obligations, the story

went. That story served as a defense against the anxiety stirred up by the firm's demand for 24/7 availability. Although men and women were equally unsettled by that culture, the firm cast women as the ones who suffered from it and offered work–family accommodations to alleviate their suffering. Those accommodations derailed women's careers, as they institutionalized a split that cast men as fully committed breadwinners and women as torn by family obligations. The system, as a result, burdened women and favored men, while preserving its 24/7 work culture and promoting an illusion of the firm as fair and generous to women.

Studies of social defenses suggest that all organizations have at least some defensive features (Allcorn, 1995) that are "inherently conservative" (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990: 202) and provide a sense of "imagined stability" (Vince, 2002). Social defenses help organizations hold together, but they induce conformity (Feldman, 1985) and limit the organization's ability to innovate and adapt to changes in its environment (Halton, 1994; Hirschhorn, 1988; Long, 2006; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Illustrations abound in the literature, encompassing studies of the movement for American airline pilots to be armed (Fraher, 2004b), the effect of the occupational dream of flying on pilots' career transitions following layoffs (Fraher & Gabriel, 2014), the rise of the Anglo-American pension funds (Sievers, 2003), the appeal of political correctness (Schwartz, 1987), the rise of consumerism (Long, 1999) and evangelical forms of leadership (Khaleele, 2004). These studies suggest that in the face of new circumstances, change agents as much as recipients collude to sustain the status quo even while advocating for change (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Social defense theory argues that when the work, relations, or change raise anxiety, boundary permeability decreases, limiting a system's ability to do its best work as well as to learn (Brown & Starkey, 2000). This theory explains Argyris' (1990) observation that "organizational defensive routines are antilearning, overprotective and self-sealing" (p. 25, see also Baum, 2002; Starkey, 1998, Vince, 2001). Seen from a systems psychodynamic perspective, then, "an organization that fails to change is succeeding at protecting the status quo. What moves its members to protect it, what they get out of it, and what price they pay is the question system psychodynamic scholars ask" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015: 630). The answer is often a frustrated need for "a person or an institution—who can safely contain all our internal contradictions and give us a sense

of wholeness" (Miller, 1999: 101). Someone who is akin to Winnicott's good-enough mother.

Holding Environments in and around Organizations

Most research focuses on how social defenses "impair or even cripple an organization's capacity to function or innovate effectively" (Krantz, 2001: 135). Scholars, however, have recently begun to articulate a more functional aspect of social defenses. Revisiting Menzies' work, for example, Foster (2001) found that a moderate degree of depersonalization was functional to healthcare professionals in difficult circumstances. Conceptualizing the functional, even developmental, facet of such arrangements, this work fully embraces the psychodynamic axiom that the self encompasses "two contradictory behavioral tendencies: the tendency toward learning and change and the tendency to protect one's self against the risk of change as a result of learning. The first tendency is change oriented and crucial to the development of self-identity, maturity, and autonomy, and the second tendency is resistant to change and crucial to the construction of defensive techniques for avoiding anxiety and maintaining security" (Diamond, 1986: 544).

Building on Jaques' (1955) hypothesis that social defenses bind individuals to organizations and on Halton's (1994) insight that these defenses can help individuals develop, Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) have theorized how these arrangements can be somewhat adaptive. They proposed that social defenses allow individuals to organize their experience in a way that is tolerable and legitimized. Social defenses help people (consciously) avoid the question "how do I feel?" while helping them address the question "who am I?" In doing so, some social defenses help organizations serve as identity workspaces—holding environments for individual's identity work geared toward identity affirmation or change. Using the case of educational institutions, they translated the concept of holding environment (Winnicott, 1960) to the institutional level.

Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) define a holding environment as "a social context that reduces disturbing affect and facilitates sensemaking" (p. 44). This definition highlights the provision of containment and interpretation. Containment, a term coined by Bion (1970), occurs when the context "absorb(s), filter(s), or manage(s) difficult or threatening emotions or ideas—the contained—so

that they can be worked with" (French & Vince, 1999: 9). Interpretation refers to "ideas that provide connections, meanings, or a way of comprehending previously unrelated [experiences]" (Shapiro & Carr, 1991: 5). Because reassurance and meaning making can take place in relation to a person or to a group, holding can be conceptualized at different levels of analysis. It can also be informal, such as the holding provided by a colleague in a moment of distress, or formal, such as a group where people can examine their dreams (Lawrence, 2003).

Kahn (2001) has argued that people need holding more often at work because of the insecurity and uncertainty of the contemporary workplace. Such need may be fulfilled by "temporary moments" of holding, in which "organizational members who experience anxiety authorize someone else, or a group, to be a holding environment" (Kahn, 2001: 265). Kahn's studies of caregiving organizations showed that these moments occur most frequently when coworkers are physically and emotionally available to soothe the anxiety of others (Kahn, 2004). In these circumstances, change agents such as leaders or consultants can (and must) serve as attachment figures providing stability in the midst of change, lest the change fail (Kahn, 1995). In a study of the aftermath of BP's 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis, for example, Petriglieri (2015) showed that the organization most effectively held executives' anxiety and helped them to work through it, when it involved them directly in responding to the crisis. This holding through direct action led to a positive resolution of executives' damaged identification with BP.

Although the need for holding is most obvious in moments of crisis, change, and transition, Kegan (1982) has argued that people need holding on a regular basis to function and grow. Healthy institutions provide such holding—through their policies and structure—and make it possible for members to hold each other. In a study of a women's education project, for example, Van Buskirk and McGrath (1999) showed that organizational cultures "hold" when they support their members through symbols and practices that stimulate growth. Being held well, they found, increased the women's identification with the organization. People who do not expect their work organizations to provide reliable holding, conversely, such as those engaged in mobile careers, often seek it elsewhere, for example, in educational institutions that promise to facilitate career transitions. A longitudinal study of managers in an MBA program, for example,

showed how the combination of institutional and interpersonal holding turned regressive features of the program into developmental opportunities (Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011), and supported the development of "portable selves" suited to mobile careers unfolding across organizations. The institution therefore became a "temporary identity workspace" that anchored people's identity while only offering membership for a limited time (Petriglieri et al., 2018).

Peoples' need for a holding is so strong that absent an organizational one they work hard to cultivate an alternative one. Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrezsniewski (2019) showed how the absence of institutional holding was associated with the experience of intense anxiety among independent workers. Those who fared best, in such conditions, cultivated a personal holding environment through connections with routines, people, places, and the purpose of their work. Although the study concluded that personal holding environments cannot surrogate institutional ones, it also showed that they allow independent workers to endure, and at times enjoy, their independence in the open market. Petriglieri and Obodaru (2019) showed that workers can create an interpersonal holding environment with their spouse. That holding sustains their professional development over time in the absence of the institutional holding of stable careers. In many organizations, however, the provision of holding is not entirely neglected. Especially in times of change, it is often entrusted to consultants hired to support managers through the change process, a circumstance that, as noted in the introduction, has led to many systems psychodynamic insights.

The Systems Psychodynamic Stance in Organizational Consulting (and Scholarship)

Following Lewin's (1946) articulation of the value of action research, many "outside-in" studies informed, and emerged from, scholars' consulting to organizations. A stream of articles in this literature has rigorously documented such consulting interventions. We review them here because, as Arnaud (2012) argues, "the internalization of a new reflective capacity within organizations can, as such, be considered a major contribution" (p. 1,128) of systems psychodynamic work. We also review them because they articulate what it takes to take a systems psychodynamic perspective in the field. Consulting and researching from this perspective ultimately aspire to help organizations' members

understand themselves and their systems while finding better ways to organize. Consultants and scholars must not limit their interventions to "psychoanalysing organizations" (Gabriel, 2016), that is, generating insights into people's motives and attitudes in the workplace. They must also help change the structures and norms that sustain those motives and attitudes (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999). Doing only one of the two, Mosse (1994) argues, is what makes consultants fail. When they surface anxiety without facilitating change to the structures that provoke it, consultants make people hopeless. When they only recommend new structures, those structures might not work because they do not contain anxiety.

Understanding and working with transference is essential to generate actionable insights (Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). Gilmore and Krantz (1985), for example, showed how transference can lead a consulting team to mirror their clients' afflictions. This parallel process can not only derail productive engagements but also provide an opportunity for consultants to understand, under their skin, important tensions in the client system and find ways to voice them and intervene (Alderfer, 1981, 1987; Smith & Zane, 1999). From a systems psychodynamic perspective, then, one might "define consultants as individuals who, in using and interpreting their feelings in their roles, stand both inside and outside themselves, and both inside and outside their organizations . . . Such consultants become immersed in the dynamics of the organization and consciously try to discover within themselves and through their own experiences a sense of the issues that are important to the organization." (Shapiro & Carr, 1991: 81; see also; Kahn, 2004).

Consultants need to be mindful that they are often hired to be defeated (Gilmore & Krantz, 1985), that is, to prove that defensive arrangements are necessary (Bain, 1998). Through projective identification, they become vessels for the client organization's troubles. "From the point of view of the client group, the purpose of projective identification is to "move" the consultant in two ways: to fill the consultant with the group's feelings and to mobilize the consultant to act on behalf of the group's defenses. From the consultant's perspective, the purpose of projective identification is to allow the projections to find a place within them and to then "metabolize" the projections until they can be returned in a less virulent form" (Petriglieri & Wood, 2003: 335; see also Horowitz, 1985).

Kahn (1995) argued that the role of the consultant is to hold members of a system as they work through

anxiety (see also Kahn, 2012). Alderfer (2011) provided extensive guidance for doing so with competence and care, without harming the client system through inappropriate analyzing of clients, nonsystemic interventions, and collusion (Driver, 2003). Alderfer (1981, 2011) has also long argued that helping and studying organizations in this way requires more than an intellectual understanding of systems psychodynamic concepts. It requires experiential training and supervision. This view harks back to Bion's (1970) idea that absorbing, metabolizing, and returning projected content in a nonthreatening way is bodily as much as intellectual work. The process begins when consultants, engulfed in their clients' worldviews, shake off the "numbing feeling of reality that is concomitant [with projective identification]" (Bion, 1961: 149) and voice their views "in ways that will help the members of the group to understand their own feelings as they are experiencing them" (Rice, 1965: 27). The picture of a consultant that emerges from this literature, in summary, is that of the container for emotions and facilitator of political debate, which allows them to build reflective capacity and facilitate democratic participation (Neumann, 1999).

INSIDE OUT: HOW ORGANIZATIONS BECOME PSYCHES WRIT LARGE

At the turn of the 1980s, systems psychodynamic scholarship shifted its focus toward individuals, following in the footsteps of Erikson (1950, 1975), Levinson (1964), and Zaleznik (1966; Hodgson, Levinson, & Zaleznik, 1965) whose work had begun to cast organizational issues as the "neurotic problems of persons writ large" (Sofer, 1972: 703). This shift, not always celebrated in historical accounts (e.g., Schein, 2015), coincided with a dwindling number of publications reflected in the shorter length of this section, and with the rise of interventions focused on personal growth (Freedman, 1996). Some might even question whether work that investigates "the internal workings of the mind of the leader" (Stein, 2005: 1405) falls within the confines of systems psychodynamics. We contend that it does, because it retains a concern for systems of organization, even if only as triggers and outcomes.

The "inside-out" perspective focuses on the imprint that powerful individuals have on systems—what Kets de Vries (1994), echoing Zaleznik (1989), calls the "leadership mystique" that engulfs and enlivens organizations. "Inside-out" scholars treat leaders as people who shape structures, processes, and cultures in ways that reflect and amplify their inner world—their history and aspirations, neuroses, and preferences—or who, on occasion, can make the organization less about them and more focused on its work. If "outside-in" scholars cast leaders as caricatures, at worst, and containers, at best, of the unconscious concerns of a systems' members, "inside-out" scholars cast them as arsonists, at worst, and architects, at best, of followers' concerns. The tension between regressing to relational templates that render people "prisoners of the past" (Kets de Vries & Engellau, 2010: 191) and tackling work challenges in the present, in "inside-out" work, informs studies of leaders' emergence and impact, and practitioners' efforts to help them through coaching. We summarize these areas of inquiry in Table 3 and review them in the sections that follow.

Selves in Roles

Since its foundation, systems psychodynamic scholars have paid attention to individuals' experience and behavior in formal and informal roles. Roles locate individuals in social systems, and each of us, Bion (1961) argued using a metaphor from chemistry, has a "valence," due to our history, to get lost in familiar places (Shapiro & Carr, 1991). That is, to take roles and attract projections that affirm our self-conceptions and replicate familiar patterns of relating. The inside-out literature has elaborated this clinical observation and examined how such internalized models shape the way people earn, experience, and conduct themselves in work and organizational roles.

Developing Freud's insights on transference, Bowlby (1988) noted that individuals develop relational templates with caretakers early on and then use those templates to form relationships throughout their life. "These internal models are theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1982) of which people are not particularly aware and cannot articulate even as they enact them" (Kahn, 1992: 336). Such internal models, Hirschhorn (1988) contends, function paradoxically: they both facilitate the taking of roles, in that they serve as blueprints to occupy positions in social structures, and facilitate the violation of roles, in that they tempt us to turn away from meeting the needs of our current task and relationships. Echoing Buber's (1937) distinction between I-it and I-thou relations, Bion (1961) labeled "relatedness" a bond with a person that is either not present but continues to influence us, like a mentor, or is present but treated as a stand-in for past others. Bion distinguished

TABLE 3
"Inside-Out" Domains of Inquiry

Stream	Description	Key References
Roles as hosts for selves	Roles locate individuals in social system, and each person has a valence to take on certain roles and attract certain projections. People develop relational templates, or theories-in-use, with significant adults early in life and when they relate to people through these rather than through their roles, they violate their organizational roles.	Argyris and Schon (1982), Bion (1961), Bowlby (1988), Hirschhorn (1988), Miller (1993), Oglensky (1995)
Regression in and transference on leaders	Leaders often emerge because they reflect and amplify their followers' fears and ideals. The latter, through transference, endow them with superhuman qualities that can make leaders lose touch with reality. Seen that way, leadership becomes an expression of a shared "disease" rather than a way to face and address challenges in the environment.	Gabriel (1997), Kets de Vries (1979, 1988, 1990), Krantz (1989), Levinson (1987), Petriglieri & Stein (2012), Zaleznik (1965), Zaleznik & Kets de Vries (1975)
Neurotic organizations	Neurotic organizations develop when people in leadership roles use their power to externalize their neurotic traits, so their organization comes to reflect and amplify those traits. Through the cultivation of affirmation and elimination of dissent, neurotic leaders hook their subordinates into a shared "madness" that escalates into a neurotic culture.	Kets de Vries (1979, 1991), Kets de Vries & Miller (1984a, 1984b, 1986), Sofer (1972), Stein (2000b, 2005, 2007, 2011), Zaleznik & Kets de Vries (1975)
Narcissistic leaders	The narcissistic personality is characterized by self-love, self-centeredness, and a strong need for authority and power. People with narcissistic characteristics are more likely to emerge as leaders than those who are less narcissistic. Although a small dose of narcissism can be useful, leaders with a destructive level build narcissistic cultures that are characterized by hubris, exaggerated risk taking, and high manager turnover.	Galvin et al. (2015), Kernberg (1979, 1980), Kets de Vries & Miller (1985), Levinson (1964), Maccoby (2000), Stein (2003), Vince & Mazen (2014)
Leading with presence and negative capability	Leaders who are psychologically present are able to counter the pull of neuroses and foster hospitable and adaptive organizations. Their behavior is oriented toward actual others and the task at hand, rather than toward the pulls of their internalized others, and of the past. Negative capability allows leaders to stand still under internal and external pressures, making it possible to regard emotions as a source of data, instead of repressing or acting them out.	Armstrong (2004), Handy (1989), Heifetz (1994), Kahn (1990, 1992), Obholzer (1996), Simpson et al. (2002)

relatedness from relationships, in which the other is an actual person we encounter anew, and in the present.

When we relate to others primarily through the former, perhaps with their collusion, we lose, vacate, or violate our roles, in the sense that we use others as props to reenact inner scripts. "As we violate our roles," Hirschhorn (1988) observed, "we can no longer understand what the world outside our group demands of us. Our ignorance in turn supports the ways in which we violate our roles. We enter into a vicious circle in which role violation and ignorance reinforce each other" (p. 55). Conversely, when people in general, and executives in particular, fully occupy and respect their roles, they are able to "define the task and to equip groups and individuals with the requisite resources so that they can manage themselves to perform it. If in that way the task itself becomes the leader, hallowed concepts such as subordination, obedience, and

personal loyalty become outmoded and are replaced by negotiation between adults responsible for managing the boundaries of their respective systems and subsystems" (Miller, 1993: 313).

A family business executive, for example, would vacate their role if they acted in ways driven by relatedness to family members, insisting on a strategy and structure that they believe the rest of the family approve, but do not fit the demands of the organization's environment. They would take their role fully, conversely, if they honored relationships with family members and argued with them about the needs of the business. As the example suggests, relatedness is not always conflictual and relationships equanimous, and people can replicate secure attachment patterns as well as insecure ones (Oglensky, 1995). Work roles, in summary, provide opportunities not only to revisit and relive familiar patterns but also to learn and transcend those patterns. Like good-enough caretakers (Winnicott, 1960), managers who endure and recognize their anxiety and distress, and that of others, can help attenuate those pressures. Then, they can provide adaptive leadership that orients people toward the demands of the situation and hosts healthy debate about possible course of action (Heifetz, 1994). The inside-out literature has examined how people relive and amplify, or work through and transcend, familiar patterns of relating in leadership roles.

Regression in and Transference on Leaders

Leadership roles pose significant challenges to those occupying them because of their practical, symbolic, and emotional demands. "At the conscious level, the leader is appointed or elected," notes Rice (1965); however, "at the unconscious level, he takes or is put into a role, of which he may or may not be aware, that requires him to go into collusion with the unconscious striving of those inside the boundary [of the organization]" (pp. 176–177). If it is true that "individuals unconsciously and symbolically treat organizations as recapitulations of the family structure," (Levinson, 1987: 52) then leaders are seduced into assuming the role of parental figures, and as such come under pressure and yield normative power (Zaleznik, 1966).

Transference is the mechanism through which organizational members cast leaders as parents—and leaders, in turn enlist organizational members to enact their inner dramas. Freud (1912), as noted earlier, coined the term "transference" to describe the human proclivity to relate to others using familiar templates developed in relation to authority figures in one's past. Transference blurs the boundary between past and present, allowing us to maintain a continuity of experience and affirm deeply held beliefs, and desires, about ourselves and others. "When we go to work, we take these fundamental desires," write Kets de Vries and Engellau (2010), "into the context of our workplace. We project our desires on others and, based on those desires, rightly or wrongly anticipate how others will react to us; then, we react not to their actual reactions but to their perceived reactions. … a leader's subordinates are often drawn into collusive practices and play along, turning the leader's expectations into self-fulfilling prophecies" (p. 191; see also Kernberg, 1980; Zaleznik, 1965). Such collusion can impede the functioning of superior–subordinate relationships, the "managerial couples" which are essential to the performance of organizations and to the development of culture within them (Krantz, 1989). It can lead to "a sort of corporate madness in which every member colludes and which stifles any independent thought or cooperative work" (De Board, 1978: 39; see also; Gabriel, 1997). And yet, the idealization that often accompanies positive transference can be so rewarding that it motivates leaders to hang onto power well past the point when their effectiveness has begun to decline (Kets de Vries, 1991).

Besides describing transference as a defining feature of the encounter between psychoanalyst and client, Freud (1921) theorized its involvement in the emergence of leadership. Leaders, he argued, are such not because of the position they occupy, but for the principles they represent. The bond that ties followers to them, he contended, is identification. Leaders represent followers' cherished principles and affirm their wishes, and followers, in turn, are prepared to humor leaders' illusions as long as they do so. Kets de Vries and Miller (1984a) observed that transference toward leaders can take three forms: followers can idealize leaders as superior beings; see them as a mirror, as "one of us"; or treat them as persecutory and fear them. Indulging in such fantasies about the leader is a form of regression that lets people escape anxiety about their circumstances. It works best when the leader shares the regressive fantasy, so that it appears that the leader is autonomous and authentic—and can thus be blamed if things do not work out. Leaders, however, need not share the fantasy of their special power to be compelled to humor it, as the existence of admired leaders who believe themselves to be imposters attests (Kets de Vries, 1990).

Transference and regression are not just individual defenses. As we discussed earlier, members of a group can regress together or transfer similar ideals onto a leader through projective identification. Freud's theory of leadership (1921) was grounded in the idea that "when people come together in numbers, they are more likely to be swept up in a shared fear or to be enthused by a common faith than they are to engage in reasoned problem solving. Groups are eager to follow not those who present the most accurate picture of reality but those who most clearly reflect group members' cherished ideals. And the more distressing the group's reality is, the more those ideals become divorced from it" (Petriglieri, 2016). Weber (1947) echoed Freud's view of leader emergence in his articulation of charisma as the basis for informal authority. Charismatic leaders are more likely to emerge at crisis points, when organizations are in distress (Parsons, 1951). We can therefore think of their rise as a social response to the "need for order. . . . Propelled by the ambiguity and complexity of the events around us we choose leaders to make order out of chaos. Leaders become the ideal outlets for assuming responsibility for otherwise inexplicable phenomena. Hence, it seems that even if there was no one with leadership abilities available, we would have to create such a person" (Kets de Vries, 1988: 266).

Leaders, especially charismatic ones, are neither born nor made from a systems psychodynamic perspective. They are fabricated. And they become arsonists of collective wishes. "What most leaders seem to have in common is the ability to reawaken primitive emotions in their followers" (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985: 585). Seen this way, the source of leadership is neither skill nor virtue but the ability to channel, often unconsciously, a widespread disease because that disease reflects one's own. Building on Erikson (1958, 1969), Kets de Vries (1988) has argued that charismatic leaders "lift individual patienthood to the level of a universal one, trying to solve for all what they originally could not solve for themselves" (p. 266). In doing so, leaders accrue power (Zaleznik & Kets de Vries, 1975). When individual leaders then use such power to affirm and amplify flaws in their character whole organizations can be described as "neurotic."

Neurotic Organizations

Scholars have long investigated how discrete leadership traits affect specific management and organizational variables (for reviews, see Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Zaccaro, 2007). The "inside-out" systems psychodynamics perspective broadened the focus to the impact of leaders' whole character (Zaleznik, 1966). Kets de Vries and Miller (1984a), in particular, focused on how people in leadership roles use their power to externalize their neurotic styles, so their organization comes to reflect those styles. Power is key to the amplification of individual neuroses into organizational norms for two reasons. First, executives' power leaves their subordinates with two choices: either to participate in their neuroses by affirming them—for example, by also becoming obsessive or paranoid—or to resist them. The more powerful the leader, the more likely it is that the number of people taking the former route exceeds the number of resistors. This puts resistors at risk of becoming a target for hostility, resulting in either chronic conflicts or getting fired. Through the cultivation of affirmation and elimination of dissent, Kets de Vries (1979) argues, neurotic leaders hook their subordinates into a shared madness that escalates into a neurotic culture. Second, subordinates do not just humor executives' neurotic styles. They often idealize them as leaders because of those styles. When such idealization occurs, the subordinates will ignore or deny the leader's dysfunction. "Not a single negative word or critical comment is allowed to spoil an image of sheer perfection and bliss.... Leaders as well as objects of infatuation become endowed with 'all' the perfections, forming part of [the subordinate's] ego-ideal, the set of idealized images against which he/she measures him/herself" (Gabriel, 1997: 321). Emboldened by the idealization, leaders will feel justified in sidelining those who do not agree (Kets de Vries, 1991). As a result, the neurotic style becomes the leader's driver and the organization's cultural signature.

In a series of articles and a book, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984a, 1984b, 1986) identified five neurotic styles that could permeate organizations: the paranoid, compulsive, histrionic, depressive, and schizoid styles. Over and above shaping organizational culture, this work suggests that a neurotic leader is a projection in power. Such leaders often deal with character flaws or discordant elements of their selves by forcing others to carry them on their behalf. Leaders might, for example, project aspects of their self that they consider unsuited to leadership onto others whom they then continue to blame for their inadequacy (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). Or they might project their aggression into their peers and subordinates and then attack those same people for being too aggressive, a process that Vince and

Mazen (2014) described as "violent innocence." They might also project virtues into others, and then become envious, denying and devaluing those others' contributions as a result (Kets de Vries, 1992). Although appearing to strike a pessimistic chord, work on neurotic organizations retains the subversive stance of systems psychodynamics in suggesting that centralized power is pathogenic. Centralization allows "one or two top executives to strongly set the tone for the firm" (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984b: 37). This outcome is less likely where power is broadly distributed, and structural checks and balances limit leaders' influence.

Work on leaders' character flaws and their impact on organizations saw a revival with systems psychodynamic studies of corporate failures in the early 21st century. Stein (2000b), for example, analyzed the fall of Bearings Bank as a result of dependence on a CEO who created a culture of extreme risk taking that mirrored his own attitude to risk. The opposite of Bearing's past prudent culture, the CEO was given a free hand in the wake of U.K. financial markets' deregulation. The idealization of the CEO and the silencing of his opponents were so strong, Stein (2000b) observed, that the board ignored evidence that his decisions were exposing the bank to large losses. Stein (2011) found similar dynamics at play in the Asian banking sector. In a related vein, he offered a systems psychodynamic analysis of the Enron collapse (Stein, 2007), arguing that its leaders' early experiences with parental authority shaped the organization's attitude to regulators. As he put it, "a culture in which external authority was seen to be weak and not worthy of respect emerged in Enron because it was unconsciously influenced by an experience of failed parental authority figures within Enron's leaders, coupled with failed government and regulatory regimes associated with the gas industry" (p. 1,397).

This work illustrates that the inside-out perspective is never context free. It still takes into account how external circumstances shape and activate leaders' responses. If the central problem, for systems psychodynamic scholars, "is to differentiate the symptomatic activation of emotional regression in the leader, reflecting problems in the institution, from the deterioration of organizational functioning reflecting psychopathology in the leader" (Kernberg, 1978: 6), outside-in work only puts the accent on the former and inside-out work, on the latter. Although the system mirrored the loose constraints that Enron's leaders experienced earlier in life, Stein (2007) argued, their adaptations to those experiences

ended up shaping the company's exploitation of weak regulation. The same character flaws that make leaders appealing, this work concludes, make them and their organizations vulnerable. This is especially true in the case of narcissism.

The Narcissistic Leader

Narcissistic leadership is arguably the most researched and applied of the "inside-out" systems psychodynamic constructs. It has also gathered much interest outside this perspective. In Greek mythology, Narcissus was a beautiful and proud hunter who disdained those who loved him. In retribution for his derision, Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, lured him to a pool where he fell in love with his own reflection and died when he realized that his own love could not be reciprocated. Embodying the cautionary tale, the narcissistic personality is characterized by self-love, self-centeredness, concealed feelings of inferiority and envy, and a need for admiration, authority, and power that can be self-defeating (Kernberg, 1979; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985).

"Because narcissistic personalities are often driven by intense needs for power and prestige to assume positions of authority and leadership," Kernberg (1979) observes, "individuals with such characteristics are found rather frequently in top leadership positions" (p. 33; see also Maccoby, 2000). Freud (1921) pointed out that narcissism is common in individuals that rise to leadership, writing that "the leader himself need love no one else, he may be of a masterful nature, absolutely narcissistic, self-confident, and independent" (pp. 123–124), and recent studies have confirmed that people with narcissistic characteristics are more likely to emerge as leaders (Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011). A common feature of the narcissistic personality is a belief that others' love or loyalty is unreliable. Although narcissists appear to be self-sufficient, they actually long for recognition and love from others. Their willingness to do whatever it takes to obtain power, prestige, and status can then be regarded as a compensation for their belief that such love is unattainable (Kernberg, 1979).

Like all personality traits, people range in narcissistic tendencies, and scholars have suggested that some degree of narcissism is helpful in leadership positions. The so-called productive narcissists are "gifted and creative strategists who see the big picture and find meaning in the risky proposition of changing the world and leaving behind a legacy" (Maccoby,

2000: 94). Although a small dose of narcissism can be of use, most scholars have investigated the damage that leaders with a high level of narcissism can cause. Examining the case of Long Term Capital Management (LTCM)—a hedge fund run by two Nobel prize–winning economists whose collapse in 1998 nearly brought down the global financial markets—Stein (2003), for example, built theory on how narcissistic leaders develop a narcissistic organizational culture. This culture cast the organization as special, invincible, bearer of unique qualities and led to widespread hubris and exaggerated risk taking. In a much-cited study whose findings echo systems psychodynamic theories, Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007) showed that firms with more narcissistic CEOs took bolder, riskier actions that resulted in bigger wins or losses than firms with less narcissistic ones. Narcissistic leadership, in short, is attractive for the hope it generates and dangerous for its volatility.

Although narcissistic CEOs produce bold visions, their visions are more personal ambitions than expressions of the greater needs of a collective (Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010). Narcissistic leaders are also more likely to exploit their organizations for personal benefit as a result of narcissistic identification, which occurs when leaders see their identity as central to the organization's identity (Galvin, Lange, & Ashforth, 2015). This form of identification contrasts to classic organizational identification, in which people see their organization's identity as central to their own. Given the ubiquity of neurotic traits in general and narcissism in particular, and the likelihood that power amplifies those traits, this body of work raises the question of what it takes for leaders—and people in general—to resist giving in to their character flaws when in power.

Leading with Presence and Negative Capability

Most "inside-out" systems psychodynamic work focuses on the pathology of leadership, so to speak, revealing how leaders' psychological rigidities and vulnerabilities affect those around them and their organizations as a whole. A smaller stream of work, however, has explored how to counter the pull of neuroses and foster hospitable, adaptive, and effective organizations.

One way for leaders, and everyone else, to foster such outcomes is by being psychologically present at work. Psychological presence is "the simultaneous experience of feeling fully *there* and fully vulnerable during role performances" (Kahn, 1992: 324). When we are present, our behavior is oriented toward actual others and the task at hand, rather than toward the pulls of internalized others, and of the past. Leaders are likely to be psychologically present when they can manage their anxiety in a nondefensive way and integrate the emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of their selves. Such presence, in turn, lets others personally engage at work and enhances organizational effectiveness (Kahn, 1990). It also makes it possible for different voices to be heard and contribute to an adaptive debate about the organization's identity and future (Heifetz, 1994).

Work on presence highlights the value of the capacity to show up—in the "here and now" of the work and the organization, rather than in the "there and then" of familiar patterns. Work on *negative capability* complements it, focusing on the ability to stand still—in the face of turmoil within oneself or in the environment. First, described by Keats in a letter to his brother in 1817, negative capability is the state in which one "is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Simpson, French, & Harvey, 2002: 1209). Although Keats believed it to be a necessary state of mind for a poet, scholars have argued that the same capacity to hold oneself in, one might say, a space of possibility is valuable for exercising leadership. Making the transposition, Simpson et al. (2002) argued that leaders' ability to sustain "reflective inaction" alongside "decisive action" is key to their performance. Using the case of a joint venture among Russia, China, South Korea, and a conglomerate called Megacom, they showed how negative capability "can create an intermediate space than enables one to continue to think in difficult situations" (p. 1,213; see also Handy, 1989). Although meeting the expectation that leaders act decisively might relieve others' anxiety, resisting the pull to act has its benefits too, they argued. Negative capability stops leaders from letting anxiety dictate their agenda, especially in crises (Stein, 2004), and it affords them the space to interrogate emotions as potential sources of insight, rather than treat them as disturbances (Armstrong, 2004).

Presence and negative capability can help leaders contain the anxiety of others, setting up a virtuous circle opposite to the vicious one that supports neurotic cultures (Kahn, 1992). They can also ensure that leaders tolerate others' aggression (Kernberg, 1978) and avoid acting out their envy of others who might appear freer, more creative, or have more time ahead of them (Kets de Vries, 1991; Stein, 2005). In line with the assumption of "inside-out" work, Obholzer (1996) suggests that leaders'

capacity to contain themselves and others is contingent on having experienced solid containment as a child. The experience of containment does not make leaders immune to the pulls of transference or to the risk that others' concerns and wishes cloud their perception and intent. But it might allow leaders to resist being "carried away" by transference into defensive and harmful enactments. Although leaders' gift of containment might be rooted in the generosity of those who held them early on, scholars agree that such capacity can be developed and that it needs bolstering. Activities such as psychotherapy, coaching, journaling, and meditation can all contain leaders and increase their containing capacity (Simpson et al., 2002). The conviction that leaders, with support, can transcend dysfunctional patterns and foster functional ones has led to the rise of coaching.

A Systems Psychodynamic Perspective on Coaching

Many "inside-out" studies emerged from scholars' engagements with executives and informed efforts to help those executives "get a grip" on, and inhabit, their roles. That is, to better understand how their preferences and defenses affected others and the organization, and how what happened in the organization, often unconsciously, triggered their thoughts, feelings, and responses. Coaching informed by systems psychodynamics seeks to counterbalance the popularity of development activities "aimed at the domains nearer to the surface" (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006: 464). This brand of coaching aims to foster "reflective engagement" with one's inner and social worlds, instead of seeking to assist with the acquisition of requisite skills (Petriglieri et al., 2011).

Psychodynamic coaching involves bringing to light "unconscious materials in the form of past experience, emotional responses, defensive reactions, underlying and unresolved conflicts, and dysfunctional patterns of thinking and behaving" (Kilburg, 2004: 249) that decrease executive's presence, capacity, and effectiveness. Although such coaching might seem to cover similar terrain as psychotherapy, it is distinct because it focuses on a client's work role often with the aim of helping both the individual and their organization (Arnaud, 2003; Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2016). The surfacing of unconscious material, however, can be distressing and at times even counterproductive (Kilburg, 2004). Therefore, executive coaches are often reticent about interpreting unconscious patterns and defenses, and

more likely to offer the attentive presence and encouragement required, according to ego psychologists, for development (Zaleznik, 1995).

Key to psychodynamic coaching is the examination of transference in the coaching relationship and in the executive's role relationships (Brunning, 2006). The intent of transference work is to help the client uncover, and be released from, patterns developed in past relationships that repeat themselves at work. As executives receive such support, they might, for example, idealize or denigrate their coach in the way that followers idealize or denigrate them (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2016). Handled sensitively, frictions in the coaching relationship can give way to the client's understanding of his or her work relationships and make room for the client to experiment with different ways of being, acting, and learning in their work roles and in other social systems.

THE FUNCTIONAL MARGINALITY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

In a recent review of research on nonconscious processes, Pratt and Crosina (2016) note that a systems psychodynamic lens is well suited for developing theories that bridge levels of analysis and account for emotions, as well as cognition, a desirable pursuit in organization studies. And yet, they concur that this perspective "has remained at the periphery of organizational theorizing" (Fotaki, Long, & Schwartz, 2012: 1,106). Pratt and Crosina (2016) conclude that "one of the most critical challenges is overcoming an often superficial—and sometimes inaccurate—understanding of what psychodynamics is today (Westen, 1998) and a relative lack of awareness of the decades of research applying various psychodynamic concepts to organizational contexts" (p. 334). If the neglect of systems psychodynamics was simply due to lack of awareness, one might hope that a review such as this could be enough to end its marginality. But if we agree with Westen's (1998) suggestion that psychodynamic ideas have remained, "*like classic psychodynamic symptoms*, outside the conscious awareness of the scientific community" (p. 362, italics ours), naming the forgotten will hardly help. We need to examine why it has been neglected instead.

Taking Westen's simile and the literature we reviewed here seriously, we argue, requires entertaining the possibility that the marginality of systems psychodynamics reveals a deeper resistance. That systems psychodynamics may have been the

object of a kind of institutional oppression that mirrors individual repression of undesirable thoughts. (If repression produces a sense that "this *does* not exist," oppression results from the resolve that "this *should* not exist."). Seen that way, the marginalization of systems psychodynamics might be a social defense against the anxiety raised by giving "the unconscious" a place in scientific and educational enterprises. In this section, we articulate this point of view, elaborating both the defensive and functional aspects of the marginality of systems psychodynamics, and its potential contribution to future research.

The (Dys-)Function of Marginalization

Scholars have documented a turn toward positivist research, quantitative methods, and clear prescriptions in response to the shaky academic legitimacy of business schools (Khurana, 2007; Starkey & Tempest, 2008, 2009). The timing of this turn, over the second half of the 20th century, coincides with the progressive marginalization of systems psychodynamic work (Fotaki et al., 2012; Gabriel, 1998). Its assumption that "researchers cannot escape entanglement with the phenomena they study" (Alderfer & Smith, 1982: 36) and its subversive intent (Miller, 1993) make this stream of work a double threat for those portions of the academy committed to the ideal of a detached and objective social scientist whose insights bolster organizations' efficiency. Marginalizing systems psychodynamic work, then, might be a way to affirm the mainstream's commitment to those ideals and keeping their opposites at close distance.

As a result, although in psychology the notion that much behavior is motivated by affect that remains out of awareness is widely accepted (Westen, 1998), organization studies have resisted it (Barsade, Ramarajan, & Westen, 2009). Riffing on Winnicott's (1962) quip that "[psycho]analysis is for those who want it, need it, and can take it" (p. 167), Petriglieri (2020a) argued that "as a challenge to collective fictions and a quest for personal truths, psychodynamic perspectives seem hardly compatible with the positivism that dominates organization studies. If you are seeking to challenge personal fictions and find collective truths, you will not want or need to use a psychodynamic lens, and likely will not be able to take it."

Ironically, Westen (1998) observed, Freud distinguished himself from philosophers by employing a rigorous empirical attitude to theorize about unconscious processes. His psychoanalytic setting was a Petri dish of sorts for revealing thoughts and feelings that would not otherwise be accessible to consciousness. Nevertheless, "psychologists who embraced a positivist-empiricist philosophy of science were never enamoured of the kind of data upon which Freud relied" (Westen, 1998: p. 336). Distrust of such data, the way they are gathered in intimate encounters, and the way they are interpreted, persists. Generalizability challenges are common to interpretive research (Pratt, Kaplan, & Whittington, 2019), and systems psychodynamic scholars are not alone in facing skepticism of field data collected and interpreted by involved researchers. Their work represents, however, an extreme, even radical, version of interpretive scholarship for three reasons.

The first is the persistent effort to "account for the behavior of full-blooded, emotionally driven, and conflicted people" (Epstein, 1994) rather than attempting to isolate discrete variables. This commitment to a holistic portrait of individuals and their messy relationships to each other and to institutions often clashes with the restrained parsimony many expect from scientific work. The thick elegance of the best psychodynamic work is different from the minimalist elegance of, say, an experimental study. The former then is somewhat like "curvy" models on a fashion catwalk—welcome perhaps, and even praised at times, but only as an oddity, and to the extent that they protect the system from accusations of being dehumanizing.

Second, theorizing about the unconscious involves making inferences from the absence of data. For example, to infer that a certain institutional practice serves as a social defense, one needs to observe that some members appear keen to sustain it, and that those members do not report anxiety. One theorizes a defense from the absence of anxiety among those who are exposed to the practice as well as by the presence of anxiety among those who are not (e.g., Kahn, 1993). The necessity to treat absence of data as important data, so to speak, means that a psychodynamic interpretation can be called theory—rather than confabulation—only to the extent that it is plausible, meaningful, and useful to those who encounter it and that it frees them up from having to defend themselves. Such interpretive validation subverts traditional standards of empirical proof.

The third reason that psychodynamic scholars can be seen as radical interpretivists is their defiant stance as spokespersons for the unspeakable. In mainstream science, the unspeakable is subjectivity, the possibility that researchers' personal involvement affects research no matter what. [The so-called 'replication

crisis' in social psychology (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011), challenging experimental effects allegedly produced in pursuit of status-enhancing publications, can be read as an illustration of this position]. In psychodynamic work, subjectivity is not a limitation but a source of data (Berg & Smith, 1985). The unconscious is not beyond the bounds of scientific inquiry but its protagonist (Westen, 1998). What others see as a flaw, this perspective casts as a vital feature of scholarly work (Petriglieri, 2020b). No wonder it evokes ambivalence.

Alderfer (1985) explained why organizational scholars might be ambivalent about systems psychodynamics, putting forward a challenging interpretation of the quest for objectivity in organization studies. That quest, he argued, "is founded on a complex of fears, which are extraordinarily difficult for individual social scientists to acknowledge to themselves—let alone to critical colleagues. The cornerstone of this complex is that allowing for greater consciousness of their own experience would unleash powerful emotions—in others to be sure, but also in themselves. The next step is the belief that these emotions would get out of control and disrupt any realistic possibility of rational understanding. As a result there is a decided—one could almost say compulsive—desire to control. The acceptable language is experimental control or statistical control, but the focal tension beneath the language of rationality is a fear of disorder and chaos. In order to cope with these fears, the regime in authority adopts repressive measures and resists mightily efforts to examine the fundamental bases of their assumptions" (p. 67).

Our review expands this oppositional view that repression of scholars' unconscious anxiety becomes oppression of the unconscious in the field of organization studies. One pattern we discerned, as noted earlier, is that systems psychodynamics scholars focused primarily on "outside-in" work for the three decades following the inception of this perspective and then, in the next three decades, shifted their focus to "inside-out" work. One explanation for this trajectory is that the literature followed the market, which rewards individualistic conceptions of leadership (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015). In doing so, systems psychodynamic scholars moved away from the focus that characterized its prolific decades. A recent wave of "outside-in" work in top journals (e.g., Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Petriglieri et al., 2018; Padavic et al., 2019) seems to suggest that when they focus on organizations—and on studies—systems psychodynamic scholars have a better chance of shedding their marginality. Although this is a defensible conclusion, it might be a defensive one

too because it translates a conflict between center and margins into one between marginal factions.

Looking at the literature of systems psychodynamics more closely, as we have done here, one notices that systems psychodynamic scholars working from both "outside-in" and "inside-out" perspectives have remained present, if not always as prolific, for over half a century. And their marginalization is hardly recent. It was there since the beginning, when Bion and Lewin claimed a precarious perch at the edge of the clinical and industrial psychology of their times. And earlier still, when Freud strove to establish psychoanalysis in the medical profession. In a recent biography, Phillips (2014) argued that Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious reflected, in part, his experience as an ambitious Jewish doctor in the prejudiced Vienna of his time. As a result, Phillips (2014) concluded, psychoanalysis is a "psychology of the immigrant" (p. 30), with all the troubles and opportunities that come when one experiences the world from its margins.

Consider these examples; Bion's first attempts at group treatment in World War II led to the military's termination of the project for fear that the participation he encouraged would foster insubordination (Bridger, 1990). Jaques, whose early work led to the publication of a popular book (Jaques, 1951) and the conceptualization of social defenses (Jaques, 1955), lamented that "the response from the field was silence" (Trist & Murray, 1990: 9). Trist (1981) cast the development of sociotechnical systems as "going against the grain of the fifties" (p. 14) and revealed that the mine that hosted his landmark study of self-managing teams wished for no publicity because the findings contradicted the industry's move toward centralization. In a history of corporate efforts to foster autonomy and participation, Kleiner (1996) described the pattern of enthusiasm and rejection that proponents of those interventions kept encountering. He compared them with heretics.

The margin, however, is not just a place that systems psychodynamics has been cast into. It is also a space that it has claimed as its domain. The study of the "unmanaged organization," Gabriel (1995) has noted, "is a marginal terrain" (p. 479) between individual and collective, fantasy and reality, and emotion and structure, where it is possible to study what Winnicott (1951) described as "the substance of illusions" (p. 230). That is, the ways subjectivities become institutions, and *vice versa*. To do so well, scholars themselves need to remain at some distance from established dogmas and structures, carving a place "at the margin of the group" (Mosse, 1994: 6) that "makes it easier for them to observe, and to think about what they observe, without getting caught up in institutional defences. It might also

make it easier for the institution to license them to see and be heard" (p. 8). This view suggests that although it might be dysfunctional from the perspective of bolstering status, the marginality of a systems psychodynamic stance is functional to its work.

When it has been heard, the marginality of systems psychodynamic has been significant to its contributions, which have always aimed to challenge rigid traditions. "The unconscious" is a generic name for a self that defies cherished identities (Petriglieri, 2020a). In its various conceptualizations, it remains a locus for desires that challenge social norms. Be they for sensual pleasure (Freud, 1929), transcendence (Jung, 1957), power (Adler, 1954), meaning (Frankl, 1946), or close relationships (Bowlby, 1988), those studying the unconscious have always provided a view of longings confined to the "dark side"—a place that the power of repression, oppression, or both, has filled with life and deprived of light. In a similar vein, our reading of the literature suggests that underneath a conflict between the marginal and the mainstream, there has long been a covert collaboration to provide a balanced, if not yet integrated, portrait of organizational life.

Reconciling the narrative of oppression of systems psychodynamic work with the contributions that its authors have made from the margin requires revisiting the controversial nature of conceptualizations of "the unconscious" embedded in the work we have reviewed. Ever since Freud, psychoanalysis has been suspended between science and fiction, a social science dedicated to understanding how desirable fictions become cultural ideals and undesirable ones turn into private preoccupations. Its conceptual centerpiece and main protagonist, "the unconscious," is usefully troublesome. The use of the article "the" and the prefix "un" captures what makes psychodynamic perspectives unique. "The" refers to the intentionality of unconscious forces, and "un" to their opposition to conscious elements. The unconscious is distinct from selves claimed and selves not taken. It is a self taken but not claimed—a self-claiming us, if only by surprise.

Conceptualizations of the unconscious have been enlivened by its definitional duality. Should we understand it as a motivational force inaccessible to self-examination? Or as an (anti-)social construction? Should we investigate it as a bundle of innate drives, or as a product of layers of socialization? It depends on what authors, and authorities, wish the unconscious to be. Those seeking to domesticate psychodynamics, pulling it toward the realm of positivist scholarship, have focused their efforts on providing experimental evidence for various psychodynamic constructs (e.g., Newman,

Duff, & Baumeister, 1997). Those seeking to embolden psychodynamics, arguing that its theories belong in the realm of critical scholarship, have focused on their ability to expose the emotional underpinnings of power relations (e.g., Fotaki et al., 2012). Others still take a middle ground, interpreting the unconscious as a creative force, an "institutional illogic" (Vince, 2019) that helps account for the contradictions of organizations and people's lives in them. Ambivalence should be the establishment's response to the unconscious, as the unconscious seldom belongs and often subverts. That response does not reduce its significance and value.

So what good could a perspective like systems psychodynamics—which will not renounce the unconscious with all its ambiguity and the ambivalence it provokes—do for organization studies? It might help us (re-)humanize them (Petriglieri, 2020b). First, by shedding light on organizations and societies in flux and people's experiences in them. Second, by inviting us to confront and own subjectivity in our scholarly work.

Suggestions for Future Research

Systems psychodynamic theories suggest that when organizations are stable and efficient, difficult emotions will remain unconscious. The power structure holds. In these conditions, positivist methods might seem more useful to make sense of relations between phenomena, focusing on a single level of analysis might yield satisfactory answers, and supporting effectiveness might seem a valid aim for scholars reaching for relevance. In these conditions, marginalizing systems psychodynamics can be disguised as scientific progress. When institutional boundaries loosen, however, and the defenses they provided fail (Krantz, 2010; Miller, 1999), uncertainty rises and emotions come to the surface. In these circumstances, a systems psychodynamic lens becomes useful to make sense of shifting relations. Supporting multiple voices is a more important practical aim; hence, the return of the oppressed perspective will enrich rather than threatening the mainstream.

In our review, we noted that "outside-in" scholarship thrived at a time when automation and the rise of large organizations constrained people's expression at work in new ways. The first wave of systems psychodynamics theorizing attempted to pull workers from "dependency to autonomy," as Miller (1993) put it. In those days, the anxieties workers experienced, and scholars investigated, were mostly social ones, concerning inclusion or status. The quest for leadership evident in the "inside-out" work, and the recent wave of interpretive and critical "outside-in" studies, conversely, fit an historical moment when radical changes in organizations

and markets have led people to long for responsible leaders and scholars to call for theorizing about the lived experience of work (Barley, 2016). Workers now experience existential anxieties about the consistency and continuity of the self (Petriglieri et al., 2018). At this juncture, we contend, a systems psychodynamic approach can help build a cross-level understanding of new organizational forms and workers' emotions within and in relation to them. It is well suited to explore the structuring, and people's experience in workplaces within, between, and outside organizations. And, it is helpful to challenge dominant views. Systems psychodynamics, in short, can help develop theory about the "new" world of work (Ashford, Caza, & Reid, 2018), and this new world of work provides opportunities for revisiting systems psychodynamic theorizing. Scholars interested in taking this lens to the field could contribute to four burgeoning streams of research.

Meso-level theorizing on "grand challenges." A systems psychodynamics perspective is particularly useful in building theories that span levels of analysis from individual to organizational to institutional, and that include both conscious and unconscious processes. The call in organization studies for scholars to address "grand challenges" (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016) highlights pressing global issues, from climate change to the rise of independent work to economic and gender inequality. This call echoes long-standing ones within systems psychodynamics to examine broader social phenomena occurring beyond single organizations (Khaleelee & Miller, 1985). This lens could bring into focus the emotional and political underpinning of institutional contradictions in tackling grand challenges. It is well placed, for example, to explore what aspects of institutional systems are kept in place to manage the anxieties of powerful stakeholders, rendering those institutions unable to live up to their aspirations to improve the state of the world.

One potential research setting is the rise of executive philanthropy, which has been widely criticized as a way to address social problems while keeping the power structures in place that caused the problems in the first place (Giridharadas, 2018). Another is the antidemocratic effect of social media whose promise was to make the world more connected. Yet another is the paradox of elite executive gatherings, where the promise of cross-sector collaboration often results in insularity. What leads good intentions to coexist with self-defeating outcomes is a question that systems psychodynamics, with its focus on tensions and contradictions, is well suited to answer.

Similarly, with more organizations claiming to pursue social impact as well as financial goals, systems psychodynamic scholarship can fruitfully contribute to the burgeoning stream of research on organizational paradox (Jarrett & Vince, 2017), focusing on when the anxiety that paradox provokes leads to splitting, and when it can be held. Finally, systems psychodynamics can help advance the study of the role of emotions in people's experience of, and actions in, institutions (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Having recently warmed to "the idea that people construe and realize an authorized social self through emotional practice" (Voronov & Weber, 2016: 457), scholars could use a systems psychodynamic lens to investigate empirically how the experience and management of emotions leads to the structuring and undoing of institutions (Voronov, 2014; Zietsma, Toubiana, Voronov, & Roberts, 2019). One pressing question, for example, is how social defenses might get institutionalized in the algorithms that structure the platforms that many people call workplaces.

The fate of nomadic professionals. The contemporary world of work calls for systems psychodynamics to shift its focus from understanding working lives in the tight grip of impersonal organizations to understanding working lives in unbounded circumstances. As more people work across and outside of established institutions, where do people find the guidance and comfort that such institutions once provided (Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007)? Systems psychodynamic theories might help address this question and help understand the tribalization of the world of work, with people seeking niches and interpersonal bonds, not only as a result of new technologies but also as attempts to replace defenses once provided by institutions. The rise of talent mobility (Kerr, 2018) could also be addressed by scholars using a systems psychodynamics lens. How, if at all, do workers attach to social systems, both in the workplace and in society, when they know their membership in them is temporary? What is the consequence of this process for their individual identity and the collective identity of social systems? And how can individuals whose careers are mobile claim the commitment to people, or institutions, that would make them trustworthy leaders?

The meaning of leadership. A review in this journal has highlighted a persistent imbalance between leadership studies focused on effectiveness and studies focused on meanings, with the former getting far more attention than the latter (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010). Scholars have long called for more

attention to leaders' function as symbols and shapers of organizational values and meanings (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2004). Systems psychodynamic theories are well suited to examine this underresearched facet of leadership. They might help, for example, to investigate whether the cult of leadership and identification with charismatic leaders are becoming surrogates for the disappearing of organizations as stable targets for identification and middle managers as containers for emotions. Scholars could also use a systems psychodynamic lens to investigate the "distancing of top management from the workforce" (Miller, 1999, p. 109). Evidence of such distancing is the decrease in trust toward business and political leaders (Edelman, 2018), which suggests that they too might fail to provide stable targets for identification. One way to read this review is as an exploration of the dark side of traditional anchors of identification—organizations and leaders. Their potential failure raises the question of "what next?" Will a technologically enhanced subjectivity perhaps serve as an anchor of identity?

Multiple identities. The idea that individuals and organizations hold more than one identity is widely accepted, and the study of multiple identities (Ramarajan, 2014) and hybrid organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Besharov & Smith, 2014) is thriving. Systems psychodynamic scholarship provides a way to examine when and how the conflicts that holding multiple identities entail cross levels of analysis. Conflicted institutions, this perspective suggests, might prove a source of comfort for conflicted individuals, who might then resist efforts to render the institution more aligned to one set of values (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Petriglieri et al., 2018).

This lens can advance the study of how organizations deal with conflicting wishes for alignment and efficiency as well as diversity and creativity within their ranks (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Ramarajan & Reid, 2019). One domain worth investigating is the interplay between individuals who invest in a portfolio of identities (Ramarajan, 2014) and those who home in on protecting a singular identity (Khaleelee, 2004). In popular accounts, the tension has been portrayed as "globalists" versus "nationalists" and described as the "new political divide" across the world (The Economist, 2016). This troubling trend raises the questions of how a diverse society can work with, or protect itself against, movements based on singular identities, and how leaders can hold the tension between the two so that it remains reasonably civil and possibly creative.

The Precision of Poetics

We began this review noting that the systems psychodynamics perspective is an interpretive approach based on lived experience and relational understanding of one's research setting. If it struggles with marginality, its power is in the relative freedom that comes with that position. The best systems psychodynamic scholarship combines clarity and compassion. It humanizes researcher and researched, taking phenomena regarded as irrational, dysfunctional, and problematic, and making inferences as to their rationale, what function they may serve, what value they have, to whom that value accrues, and who pays what price. Taking this perspective requires navigating a path between the detached objectivity of positivist scholars and the decentered subjectivity of critical ones. It requires us to acknowledge our personal involvement in ways that do not distort but enrich theorizing. If it raises anxiety in the process, among those who do it and those who host it, systems psychodynamic research carves an interpretive path toward a social constructionism with a heart. Embracing it requires revisiting the scholar as separate from the scholarship and viewing scholarship as a product of, not just a contribution to, society. It requires questioning our own identities in the field, and, at times, even voluntarily moving to its margins.

We have argued that the marginality of systems psychodynamic scholarship in the field of organization studies is both defensive and functional, and that reducing the former and celebrating the latter might benefit scholars and scholarship alike. The psychodynamic "understanding of the self as decentered, multiple, and contextualized is central to the way subjectivity and experience have been explored in many areas of contemporary philosophy, literature, and social criticism" (Mitchell & Black, 1995: 84). It is time to acknowledge, and even celebrate, conflicted selves and institutions in our scholarly narratives as well. Working to do so in peer-reviewed journals, over the past decade, we have occasionally bumped against the preconception that systems psychodynamic work is stronger in providing holistic portraits of the human conditions, than in parsing theoretical mechanisms (Westen, 1992). The insights that taking a psychodynamic lens makes available, reviewers told us, are "compelling but not convincing" or "more poetic than precise." On the one hand, those are fair characterizations of the main protagonist and construct of psychodynamics—the unconscious—whose work is always to compel and seldom to convince. On the other hand, systems psychodynamic scholarship can help reconcile these dualities. If we have done justice

to it, you will recognize at this point that the best work in this vein has the precision of poetics—rather than the precision one might associate with a scale—the kind of precision that does not sacrifice richness and leaves room for contradiction.

Just because it is an interpretive, and at times critical, perspective, it does not mean that everything goes in systems psychodynamic theorizing. Quite the contrary. Its interpretive methods call for ruthless self-examination, as well as, and as a form of, data analysis (Berg & Smith, 1985). They demand that we carefully document inferences from data (Hackman, 1985). Having conducted an extensive review of systems psychodynamic work, we have become aware of the need of a more specific articulation of its unique research method. We hope that systems psychodynamic scholars will take up our invitation to offer a more detailed treatment of methods than that provided in the consulting section earlier and in this section.

While striving for methodological rigor and transparency, taking a systems psychodynamic approach will always require acknowledging that we are telling one among many stories that could be told from our research site (or literature review). "This does not make analytic interpretations random, relative, or fictional," Mitchell and Black (1995) observe. "As with good history, good psychoanalytic interpretations must also make sense, pull together as much of the known data as possible, provide a coherent and persuasive account, and also facilitate personal growth" (p. 227). There is no reason, in other words, not to attempt to be both compelling and convincing, precise and poetic in our work. That might put us at the margins of the natural sciences and literary production. So be it. That is, a place where we might find a passage to the most meaningful of social science, the kind whose findings challenge defensive arrangements and strengthen democratic participation for the benefit of individuals and institutions alike. Those aims are worth some strife.

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