

# Harnessing the Power of Loss: On the Discriminatory Dynamic of Non-Emancipatory Organization Identity

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**Abstract**—In this paper, Lacanian theory will be used to illustrate the way discourses interact with the material by way of reifying antagonisms to shape our sense of identities in and around organizations. The ability to ‘sustain the loss’ is, in this view, the common structure here discerned in the very texture of a discourse, which reifies ‘lack’ as an ontological condition into something contingently absent (loss) that the subject hopes to overcome (desire). These fundamental human tendencies of identification are illustrated in the paper by examples drawn from history, cinema, and literature. Turning to a select sample of empirical accounts from a management consultancy firm, it is argued that this ‘sustaining the loss’ operates in discourse to enact identification in an organizational context.

**Keywords**—Lacan, identification, discourse, desire and loss.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE present paper is an investigation into the field of organization identity with the aim of exploring the failure of intention in discourse as it relates to the fundamental question of: what makes employees identify with their organization? By invoking a psychoanalytic perspective, putting forth a range of analogies drawn from modern history and cinema, the paper primarily offers a theoretical contribution by introducing and making useful the teachings of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. However, there is also an empirical component consisting of brief excerpts from a larger study of which four interviews will be quoted here; drawn from a management consultancy firm. These sources are all invoked to illustrate different aspects in the omnipresent discursive structure denoted in the title ‘*sustaining the loss*’. In putting forward this argument, the ambition is to add nuance to some of the seminal voices of critical management studies that have tended to focus on the dimensions of intentionality, and in particular that of managerial intention, stressing the conscious and rational dimensions in the control and regulation of identities [1]-[4].

However, this form of control has interchangeably been called bureaucratic-engineering [4], concertive control [2], negotiated control [3]; or simply control exerted by managerial discourse [1]. What all these forms of control share is a striking resonance with Foucauldian theory [5] and in particular his thesis on *governmentality*. Of particular importance is the ways in which power is internalized by the subjects themselves. Moreover, they also share an assumption with regard to managerial intentionality. In contrast, what will be accentuated in this paper in line with a Lacanian view on subjectivity is the unconscious nuances of such discursive power. Lacan,

following Freud’s famous topology of the subject, describes such unconscious pressure as inextricably embedded with anxiety, punishing every failure of the subject to follow its command, without being attributable to one clear and concrete source or particular agent.

Consequently, psychoanalysis allows for an understanding of how a discourse reproduces desire by neutralising unconscious pressure. In other words, imaginary-symbolic constructs engender desire, but they are at the same time marked by an element of the impossible – the ‘*real*’. Here, anxiety functions as an indication of the ‘*real*’, and explains how discourses that sustain employees’ desire may break down. Therefore, the ability to sustain a discourse is dependent on, articulating within this very same discourse an external source or agent, which can be held responsible for the inevitable failure of realizing the full identity it implies for the subject. In opening up this realm of the unconscious the argument collapses simplified dualisms of subject-object binaries, including the dialectic notion of regulators and the regulated prevalent in critical management studies more generally [1]-[4].

Indeed, the paper fits into an emerging tradition of Lacanian theory in organization studies that do not resort to notions of absolute intentionality in discourse (e.g. [6]-[8]). Each of these accounts points towards the failure of discourse to realize and suture the imaginary-symbolic identities they set forth; for instance, [6] illustrates with the ambiguity surrounding the figure of the entrepreneur. But in contrast to these accounts, the present paper targets the particular ways in which discourses are able to sustain themselves through reifying the ontological *lack* into something specific in the discourse itself (loss). The signifier functions here as a way to make this inability sustainable, which will be referred to as ‘sustaining the loss’. What exactly this means will be fleshed out at some length in the following as it is the wager of this paper that understanding *lack* as an ontological condition and yet having a close functional affinity on a discursive level with a trope of a ‘loss’, will be key in the understanding of how identification is unconsciously enacted.

## II. FROM LACK TO LOSS

In order to answer the basic question of why people recognize themselves in discourse posed by Jones and Spicer [6] that foregrounds a Lacanian view on organizational identity, let us start off by casting an eye to one of the most horrific historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The example serves to

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render visible the power of discourse and how it may operate, but also how such power resonates with the three Lacanian registers of identification - the 'symbolic', the 'imaginary' and the 'real'.

In 1942, General Reinhardt Heydrich had assembled a select group of government bureaucrats and military officers. They met to address what was perceived as the most pressing problem facing Nazi-Germany in the midst of the second World War. They were not concerned about the devastating blows to the eastern front delivered by the ruthless cold of Russian winter. Neither were they worried about the threat from the Red Army, nor the British expeditionary army battering the German campaign in North Africa. Instead, what they were truly concerned about – what they perceived as the true enemy of the Nazi project – was the Jew.

The meeting concluded that since no other country was offering to receive the millions of Jews living in German occupied Europe, there was no other way than to abolish the plans of repatriation and as General Heydrich put it 'evacuate them' [9]. What exactly this meant may still have been a bit vague since it had just been established that there was no place to which they could be evacuated. The Wannsee conference and in particular that specific change in terminology by General Heydrich was the first step in implementing a policy that has come to be called 'the final solution' entailing gas chambers [9], concentration camps and denoting the most systematic, organized and diligently executed genocide known to man.

This event of the Wannsee meeting is captured in Frank Pierson's 2001 film [10], *Conspiracy*, and a striking analogy to what was going on in the meeting, and in Germany more generally, comes out in an allegorical story delivered by Dr Kritzinger. Dr Kritzinger was minister director of the Reich Chancery for Nazi Germany and one of the decision-makers presiding at the Wannsee conference. Though he was himself an anti-Semite he found the methods put forth by General Heydrich, which later has come to dominate our view of the holocaust, to be miss-guided, excessive and contrary to the rule of law. However, with the fear of ending up on the SS blacklist, he embeds his critique into a seemingly harmless story that he tells the General. The story is about one of his childhood friends:

"This man hated his father...loved his mother fiercely...and the mother was devoted to him. But the father used to beat him...demeaned him...dis-inherited him and tormented him immensely. Anyway this man grew to manhood and he was still in his 30's when the mother died. This mother who had nurtured and protected him – she died. The man stood as they lowered her casket, and tried to cry, but no tears came. The man's father lived to a very extended old age, withered away and died when the man was in his 50's, and at his father's funeral...much to his own surprise, he could not control his tears, he was from that point on apparently inconsolable." [10]

The description of this event along with the supplemental story is invoked here to illustrate what refers to 'sustaining the loss'. This brings to light a certain discursive structure that functions in the way that it identifies a certain element, a *loss*,

which is held responsible for reality never rising to the imaginary splendour of a full identity, which renders possible the imaginary notion of the end of *lack*. In other words, this structure functions precisely because *lack* is at the same time an inescapable ontological condition of, as well as limit to, discourse (the 'real'), which needs to be concealed by a symbol (the 'symbolic'), so the subject can go on believing that identification is not failing but ultimately rendering possible fantasy (the 'imaginary'). Basically, this is how, according to Lacan, *anxiety* as in the breakdown of identity is evaded and the co-ordinates of desire are set by discourses that are structured in the way that they 'sustain the loss'.

The way this plays a part at the Wannsee conference, as well as in the little story by Dr. Kritzinger, is indeed rather straightforward. Basically, what Kritzinger wants to convey is that, the man had been driven all of his life by hatred towards his father. When the mother died it was obviously a loss but one that was already subjugated to a more existential loss. In other words, it was just one of the many losses that in fact on an unconscious level gave his life meaning, precisely because of the promise it preserved in fantasy for a life that could have been. Thus when the father died, when the hate had lost its object – the man's life was completely devoid of meaning.

Moreover, this critique strikes at the very core of Nazi-ideology; one shouldn't let hatred so fill one's life that if one would lose this object of hate (the Jew, the father), there would be nothing left to live for. In other words, an ideology of hate can subsist only as long as an unwanted element *qua* antagonism remains a viable threat [11], upon which ample sources of misfortune, insecurity and dissatisfaction may be inscribed. The common misrecognition of people under the sway of such ideologies is that once the loss has been relieved, overcome or 'evacuated' the presupposed chapter of harmony, emancipation and more noble desires that one may envision will ensue, may prove to be the end of desire itself.

The contingency of the actual content that fills out this underlying discursive structure is of course something that does not make itself known on a conscious level where it is more likely to appear as an objective necessity. However, it is precisely this contingency that needs to be repressed and still operate as a continuous unconscious disavowal in order for such ideology to sustain itself.

The same logic is indeed apparent in the many variants of current populist movements sweeping Europe and the United States, which find their sole support for cohesion and identity in the negation or exclusion of the other *qua* the immigrant in the case of such ideologies [11]. The exception to the people is what defines the people (cf. [5]), be it by virtue of creed, ethnicity etc., what has been created is a simple repository signifier of the other that is held accountable for the limitless unrealizability of fantasy. So essentially what is structurally needed in the make up of a discourse is a specific signifier function, what Lacan referred to as *point de capiton*, and the way to understand this function it is suggested here is through the trope of a 'loss' as it effectively occupies the liminal space between desire and anxiety. As long as this 'loss' can be retained, it sets the coordinates of our desire, but when the

sustenance of such a discourse becomes untenable as in e.g. the object of hate or struggle disappears, or its contingency is revealed, simultaneously exposing *lack* (the '*real*') at the heart of discourse, the subject is struck by anxiety.

### III. LOSS OF THE LOSS

The interruption of the '*real*' then is precisely what strikes the subject in the form of anxiety [12], as it becomes obvious that paradise does not seem to descend on earth as a consequence to overcoming or losing the loss itself. Consequently, what is threatened at this moment is not only a certain belief system but the very identity of the subject, which highlights the significance of the unconscious in the sense that what is consciously rejected is in fact precisely what on an unconscious level defines the subject. This is what Georg W. F. Hegel [13] would refer to as a *negation of the negation*, a loss of a loss, which Jacques Lacan [14] explains as an intrusion of the '*real*' where both the symbolic and the imaginary breaks down. It should be somewhat clear at this point how symbolic and imaginary constructs are merged together to make up discourses that produce and sustain identification in crude discriminatory ideologies of racism, nationalism, populism etc. and how the '*real*' in such cases may intervene and reveal the unconsciously disavowed contingency embodied in this discursive structure.

However, it is perhaps less apparent how the very same structure may operate in the more mundane world of present-day organizations that endeavor to generate and nurture commitment by a range of different financial incentive programs and cultural practices. To break it down this is essentially achieved by the many variants in which the unconscious endows sensuous reality with an affective charge. "[F]antasy begins with sense data and transforms them into a heightened reality, filled with wishes, hopes, and desires. [...] Its sphere of activity begins with everything absent – the 'happy islands of the past', 'the promised land of the future' ..." [15, p.31]. In short, the present is inextricably embedded with a 'loss', but then again one that appears to veil the path towards a full identity and consequently trigger the lure of fantasy and concomitantly desire.

In order to flesh out in greater detail what relevance this has for the contemporary organization, the empirical accounts will be brought forth. The aim will be to illustrate how these signifiers may act as instantiations of this allegedly pervasive discursive structure. Furthermore, this will render possible a more tangible understanding of how organizations may provide employees with the coordinates of their desire, performatively embodying what in different ways sustains the loss for their employees.

By invoking a Lacanian perspective, this paper does not resort to absolute dualisms, and neither to their complete rejection. Instead, what is suggested is that whether dealing with entrenched perspectives on either side of the agency and structure debate (cf. [16], [17]), as too, with this radical poststructuralist turn drawing on the deconstructive *doxa* (cf. [18], [19]), quite significant nuances of the subject's situatedness in discourse may be blurred. This is also true but

for different reasons concerning the bias towards assuming managerial intentionality in the rather one-directional shaping of employee identities [1], [4]. In contrast, a Lacanian view enables a fertile theoretical middle ground, an understanding of *the subject* that does not get caught up in subjective/objective antinomies, either surrendering to essentialist pretensions of rationality (cf. [16]), determinism (cf. [17]), an overemphasis on managerial intentionality (cf. [1], [4]) or de-subjectivized vanishing and substanceless *becoming* (cf. [19]).

What is lacking in these perspectives is quite paradoxically lack itself, and more specifically the lack of intention in discourse, and which might be conceived of as agency beyond intention. This perspective, to a certain extent, de-essentializes the notion of something being exclusively agency or structure, rational or irrational, management or employee driven in discourse. Instead, what is highlighted is the sequential nature of identification where the intentional and rational surrenders ground to the 'non-rational' as agency becomes unconscious, foreclosed by the 'symbolic' and thus immersed in the structure referred to as 'sustaining the loss'.

The Lacanian subject is divided, split and equal to a lack in a signifying chain, which means that it is a being that extensively comes to know itself in language [20]. What this state of affairs for subjective experience can devolve into in moments of crisis when discursive sustenance breaks down is what Julia Kristeva captures in one of her book titles [21] *Strangers to Ourselves*. Sustaining the loss is reducible neither to intentionality nor pathology but in more precise terms a discursive preemption of this traumatic breakdown where it is constantly rehearsed and enacted through the discursive narrative as opposed confronted head on when the discourse is unable to sustain itself.

Psychoanalysis, as Tim Dean [22] has suggested, is characterized by a fundamental distinction between the irrational and the non-rational, which exempts the latter from the "taint of pathology". In other words, the Lacanian subject is neither autonomous nor completely enfolded into the inertia of the organization but subjectivized through the radical 'lack', or '*real*', which is what makes the sustenance of any discourse latently laced with the eruption of anxiety [23]. Thus, in order for any subjectification to sustain itself there has to be a continual dependency on the subject to unconsciously assume this 'lack' by indefinitely deferring the form of its realization upon the future. In short, an organization has to invoke in its workers some form of partial enjoyment, often derived from the lure of full enjoyment deferred upon the future, in order for employees to adapt and persist in this identification that ultimately fails [24], [8]. In other words, there is a dialectic in Lacanian theory, albeit both discursive and negative, not as it were between two positive and autonomous elements, implied in most studies mentioned above, but between discursive constructs and their inherent finitude *qua* lack [24].

However, it is clear that Lacan conceived of 'lack' as an ontological condition, an indication of the '*real*', as well as an imaginary-symbolic construct [12]. Thus, in order to better identify the structural role of 'loss' in discourse, the term 'lack' is here used to denote the ontological condition hampering an identity to suture itself and 'loss' as the imaginary-symbolic

disavowal of this very impossibility, which as a result neutralizes anxiety and generates desire. Subsequently it is easy to discern how Kritzinger's critique aims at the very symptomatic unconscious misrecognition of the ontological lack at the heart of identity itself, for the narrativized contingency of a foreign element, or intruder, that discursively embodies a *loss* and thus the promise to overcome it.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The research design of the present paper is as its very object of study – split. The main component being that of a theoretical account, which by its very nature gradually unfolds the methodological assumptions for how its object of study will be interpreted. The different components of a discourse and how to make sense of it are quite logically interlinked with the way it is conceived of as a construct of language. Even the unconscious is according to Lacan structured like a language so the epistemological and ontological positions of Lacanian theory that are relevant to understand the methods used, have actually been perceived in the theoretical argument itself. In essence, subjects always gain recognition in and through discourse – that is, epistemologically confined to grasp that, and only that, which can be expressed through language. Consequently, this is precisely why the methodology that will be used to interpret the other component of the paper, as in the empirical accounts, will be that of a discourse analysis. The aim of such methodological approach is to interpret the many layers of meaning engendered in language, which will be further developed in the following section.

At present, some basic background information will be fleshed out concerning how the extraction of these accounts were carried out and then in the next chapter, the aim is to tease out how Lacanian theory more specifically may be used in interpreting the empirical accounts.

The empirical accounts have been obtained over the course of two years ranging from September 2007 to September 2009. They consist of 12 in-depth interviews of which only selected parts from 3 different interviews will be presented here. All interviewees have been approached informally and have agreed to take part in the 45 to 60 minutes long semi-structured and recorded interviews. All interviewees were male and more or less at the same level of seniority in their respective organization, having worked there between three and six years.

When Lacan speaks about *discourse* he is first and foremost, referring to symbolic and imaginary constructs. Discourse theory goes beyond the positivistic and naturalistic notions of knowledge and method, challenging scientific laws on social reality grounded on empirical generalizations [24]. Furthermore, discourse theory does not surrender to naïve conceptions of truth and in contrast bases validity on the adequacy in socially constructed identities conferred on social agents [25]. To quote Lacan 'truth is structured like fiction' [20]. Therefore, in such area of subjectivity with the inherent absence of an independent Archimedean point from which to assess or evaluate certain phenomenon, insight demands to the extent possible a viable equivalent of relative fixity [25].

In Lacanian theory [14, p.268] there is precisely such relative

fixity in the abovementioned signifier 'point de capiton', that is key to sustain the loss, which produces fixity in the otherwise indeterminate sliding of signifiers. This hegemonic signifier, also known as the *master-signifier*, whether embodied in a leader, in an organization, in a certain objective, idea, enemy also engenders as claimed here a *loss*. In sum, the signifier of the loss is dependent on being equipped with this emotive charge [12], and it is these quilting points that one needs to locate in order to analyse the effects they have in the discursive constructs encountered in the interviewee accounts.

#### V. SUSTAINING THE ORGANIZATION

In order to situate the argument of 'sustaining the loss', we consider Sam Mendes's film *Revolutionary Road* depicting a middle-class family that is struggling to stave off what is perceived as the 'hopeless emptiness' of suburban life. April, played by Kate Winslet, used to harbour acting ambitions but after a series of humiliating encounters with the unglamorous underside that engulfs most that set off for this alluring profession, she finds herself in the role of being a housewife with the sole ambition of getting out. She manages to convince her husband Frank that Paris is where they should be, which lifts them both out of the scourge of anxiety giving way to desire until an unexpected pregnancy as well as promotional prospects makes the flight more difficult to undertake. Consequently, Frank has a way to reinscribe the loss of Paris into the lure associated with his promotional prospects, whereas the prospects of a third child doesn't do the same for April. In a desperate measure to fight for her loss, her fantasy and her desire, she turns her frustration against her own womb in a visceral act that resonates with the Lacanian dictum 'the signifier becomes flesh'.

But what is clear in the case of April even before the desperate last act is that she has already entered the void of shattering anxiety, where even pain provides pleasure - *jouissance*, a comforting reminder that one exists beyond the symbolic death associated with the loss of the loss. Another cinematic illustration of the loss of the loss is often invoked by Slavoj Žižek [26] by putting forth the first film *Blue* of Kieslowski's famous trilogy. The film depicts a woman that survives a traumatic accident in which she loses both husband and child. Though this horrendous experience may instigate immense grief and mourning it nonetheless falls short of the Lacanian notion of anxiety.

In short, she has at least one last thing at her disposal and that is of course the loss itself. This loss as cause of suffering is a quite prevalent feature on which the protagonist may direct her affective reactions. In other words, the symbolic support for the loss is extremely salient, which no doubt causes immense mourning and suffering but is nonetheless never an encounter with the 'real'. This 'real' and in particular the way that it may give rise to anxiety, is according to Lacan, quite a different matter [26]. It is in fact only later when she finds out about her late husband's double-life that she experiences a *loss of the loss*, a feeling of no longer being able to inscribe her suffering in this loss, being as it were, always already built up around lies and deceit.

At the other side of the spectrum vis-à-vis loss, there is an interesting phenomenon that has been referred to as the *summit syndrome* [27], which entails the achievement of an existential life goal that essentially relieves the loss. This is to say, if the loss cannot sustain itself by being reinscribed onto the future, and reality seems to technically enact that which has previously been operating on the plane of fantasy, where another problem is encountered.

The summit syndrome is basically what often happens when someone, perhaps a manager, realizes a life goal that is quite distinct and thus somehow unable to be smoothly morphed onto new and exciting prospects, when the overcoming of the loss does not hold out the presupposed enjoyment and there is no more loss that can step in as a usual suspect ready to take the blame for the absence of enjoyment. Thus, the summit syndrome, in a Lacanian view, emerges precisely when a fundamental loss is overcome, having previously sustained the discourse through the figure of this same 'loss'. Consequently, when the loss is overcome and none of the fantasies that it was perceived to hamper, has come true, the subject may be overwhelmed by anxiety until another loss can assume the role of re-structuring the subject's position vis-à-vis enjoyment. Parsons and Pascale [27] describe the problem of one of the executives in crisis: "He became obsessed with completing each day's *New York Times* crossword puzzle. Much to his surprise, when friends called with a proposal to row the Atlantic, he found himself genuinely interested".

Now let us consider what Frank's situation, in Sam Mendes film as well as the summit syndrome, says about how organizations keep anxiety at bay by focusing on the future rather than the present, which the argument put forth here, suggests as the most basic and ubiquitous principle in which desire is sustained within organizations. Some of the increasingly predominant practices of organizational life entail a rich diversity of alluring narratives on promotional prospects, measures on self-empowerment and endless discursive practices about the future for the organization as a whole, which arguably sustains the loss of the employee in variety of ways. However, in the first organization investigated here, the 'loss' according to these two management consultants is rather more barren and instrumental than is often the case, the first one remarks about the identity of this organization:

"I see it as a loosely tied together congregation of people who don't really like what they do but are united in terms of their purposes. They need to stay there for a certain amount of time because the incentive structure is built in such a way that you will earn an optimal amount of money through staying in the firm. Most employees have an exit strategy, but consent to staying for maybe 7 or 8 years, and that incentive system is the sole reason why I stay there or why other people stay there. But we don't really have feelings towards our organization, only towards our work which we of course hate."

The first response of the other consultant was very sparse but no less clear: 'm-o-n-e-y! ...show me the money!' alluding to a famous quote from the film *Jerry McGuire*. It was obvious that he thought of any other notion of purpose, culture, identity etc.

to be redundant perhaps even naïve in this regard:

"This is what I as a consultant sometimes must sell to the customer, basically...that there are soft values beyond harsh finance, because it turns out sometimes we don't have that much to sell, and then you have to invent stuff, at which times issues on culture and identity springs to mind. But as a consultant, whenever you see that, you see that someone is reaching, and if I were sitting at the other side of the table, that is being a client, I'd reach for my gun."

The master signifier here appears, perhaps not so unexpectedly, to be 'money', which Lacan [20, p.27] refers to as 'the signifier that most thoroughly annihilates every signification'. What Lacan means here is basically that 'money' has the potential, precisely because it is so close to lack itself, of levelling all other significations as mere incarnations of this one fetishized object, resonating with the Oscar Wilde [28] quote about the cynic 'who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing'. What Lacan is referring to here seems very much to be at work in the accounts from the consultants, not only does it seem to cancel out any other signification whether it be something that the latter interviewee is selling, when not directly concerning money. This discourse can only function as long as 'money' is both loss and the promise to overcome it, and it functions precisely because it undermines any other source of identification.

The *loss* is very clear and inextricably embedded with the idea of the work itself, and money the only thing that makes it worthwhile in that it holds out the promise of fantasy. The second consultant confirmed this view of the work life not being more than an instrument, and a hateful instrument at that, but one that nonetheless makes money. In response to the question 'do you like your work' he snapped back: 'don't be ridiculous' other than that his account resonates by and large with the former. An additional little anecdotal story from the former interviewee shows that there is almost like a tacit prohibition towards identifying with the work, that could be seen as a form of unconscious obscene cynical over-identification with the effect of money cancelling all other significations, not very subtly implied in the following remark:

"I mean there is this Danish guy who really appears to appreciate what he does, and I would totally make fun of him, like – how can you really believe that you are doing something even remotely meaningful, for the economy and society. Its really ludicrous...' I guess he felt a bit nervous since the sheer act of agreeing to that fact, disturbs his whole worldview. His identity as a consultant was a little shattered, he felt uncomfortable about having chosen a lifestyle that is meaningless... and utterly cynical. But he privately couldn't really accept this fact, so he would outwardly agree and joke about it but you could feel he privately continued believing what he did; you know that we add value as consultants and such crap. But this kind of guy is a minority in the organization, there are very few who really believe in what they do. Also, they are constantly being ridiculed, to the point of harassment, so in the end they typically leave out of free will and start

working for one of our competitors. They are also the kind of people who won't get anywhere in our organization, most of them have been around for ages without even the slightest hint of a promotion. Because the directors in the company don't really feel that they are of the right calibre, you need a certain dose of cynicism and distance to what you do in order to succeed in the firm."

Rather than identifying with the organization, the consultants not only disidentify with it, mounting a cynical distance towards it; but what is more, any colleague who would identify with it, as for instance the 'Danish guy' will be ridiculed for it, and perhaps even miss out on promotional prospects.

The Consultancy firm is not so harmoniously intertwined in its relationship with money, which makes the tension between the conscious and unconscious more apparent in an almost masochistic identification. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the latter is any less productive, only it seems that the cynical dimension runs deeper when one's identification cannot so smoothly be integrated with this hegemonic signifier [11]. The second consultant said that he would characterize what he was doing and the line of business he was in as 'a wart on the arse of the economy, but then again it was a pretty good arse to be on' (this comment came some time before the crisis).

## VI. CONCLUSION

The present paper has ventured through a diverse range of different examples from the horrendous Wannsee conference and cinematic references, to paradigmatic voices from the landscapes of management literature, to a select sample of empirical accounts. The journey has been undertaken in order to illustrate the ubiquitous structure referred to as 'sustaining the loss' and how it may operate in discourses as disparate as the wide range of examples brought forward. However, the more precise question that set this theoretical and empirical expedition in motion was: *what makes employees identify with their organization?*

The common-sensical answer to this question is perhaps that the most successful, and potent organisation, is also the most desired employer. This may very well hold true, but what this reading misses is that an employee *qua* subject has to be able to identify and recognize oneself in the discourse that make up the organization. More specifically, one has to inscribe oneself where there is a fissure, or 'lack', that prompts the subject to unconsciously assume and take it upon itself to symbolically suture this 'lack', making it into a 'loss'.

Now, it is not the actual loss itself, as in its particular form that is of main interest here, which should be quite clear in regard of the wide range of invoked instantiations. It may be e.g. a traumatic rupture, or something that persists like e.g. precarious conditions of work, or perhaps something of a more existential nature. What is more interesting is how the structure 'sustaining the loss' is the unconscious condition of possibility for a discourse to persist in being the object of identification, generating desire, keeping fantasy intact and anxiety at bay. This may be done, as seen in many different forms where the *loss* is consciously rejected, yet unconsciously functioning as the source of enjoyment. This clearly illustrates the Lacanian

notion of the divided subject and the way in which it is extensively subjected to unconscious desires.

'Sustaining the loss' is what structures our fantasy, carving out a clear identity, which renders possible a sense of enjoyment even if it is far from being realized in actuality. The argument put forth in this paper is the rather counter-intuitive proposition that desire needs an element of the impossible, a loss, in order to sustain itself. Consequently, any organization dependent on a committed workforce needs in one way or another its subjects to experience a persistent this loss, but at the same time embody the very promise to overcome it.

It should be clear by now that the impossibility is in the form of an ontological negativity referred to as lack (the *real*) and precisely what is being unconsciously disavowed in the symbolic inscription of a loss. What is at stake here is the lure of a phantasmatic screen or image (the imaginary), that is kept intact by putting into symbolic form a loss (the symbolic) and counting as 'something' that which precisely is 'no-thing', (the *real*).

However, as has been argued in the present paper, the confrontation with the *real* is an interruption, manifested in the negative as a loss of the loss. Indeed, it is a disruptive force that gives rise to anxiety by tearing apart the imaginary-symbolic discourse that founds the subject's identity. As a concluding remark, in the case this paper has come off as a bit on the negative side, the *real* as a negative force, the loss of the loss and the only non-deceiving emotion being that of anxiety lurking behind all symbolic fictions.

It is also the condition of possibility for a cut in which the story changes course. By changing the structure of our identification in discourse, what may present itself through anxiety is an opportunity to confront the symptomatic repressions of the unconscious in what Lacan [20] refers to as *passage a l'acte*, which Žižek [26] sees as the potential for a real ethical act. Lacan is however a bit more ambiguous in speaking about what he sometimes refers to as the end of psychoanalysis or 'a traversing of the fantasy' [20]. This is captured quite well by a Lacanian scholar:

"To traverse the fantasy in the Lacanian sense is to be more profoundly claimed by the fantasy than ever, in the sense of being brought into an ever more intimate relation with that real core of the fantasy that transcends imaging" [29, p.275].

One could thus speak about something like a post-fantasy in order to distinguish the two. Basically, the post-fantasy is what persists after having traversed the fantasy, in which it is not so much the images associated with a full identity or lost object that steer desire as it is the loss itself that is the object of desire. In other words and to quote Stavarakis [24], 'enjoyment (jouissance) seems to be had without the mediation of fantasies of accumulation, fullness and excess' and thus post-fantasies may render possible a domain of reconciliation in which lack is avowed and even assumed as the necessary element, a partial enjoyment in the inevitable non-all character of identification. This would enable the subject a greater level of autonomy and ownership in regard of the desire either to enact or resist ideologies prevalent in organizations, or indeed to society at

large.

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