New Rules in the workplace: Applying object-relations theory to explain problem Internet and email behaviour in the workplace

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Abstract

While the Internet and email can be great assets to an organisation, especially in respect to creating new knowledge, nonetheless a number of problems have accompanied the introduction of the Internet into the workplace. Some of these problems include: _cyberslacking_, cyber- harassment and _Netiquette_. Employers have attempted to obviate these problems by developing Internet usage policies, implementing filtering software and monitoring their workers. It has also been suggested that psychological tests could assist employers in identifying potentially _problem_ employees. Although each of these methods have their uses, none of them have been successful in dealing with such problems. We argue that if we are better able to conceptualise cyberspace and the relationship workers have with this space, then we may be able to develop more effective solutions to deal with these new problems in the workplace. This paper attempts to do just that, by drawing upon object-relations theories, developed by Winnicott, Bollas and Klein. We also draw upon Serres_ work on quasi-objects. We believe that cyberspace is a unique and important tool for organisations to utilise, but if not understood well, the existing problems that have already emerged, and those yet to emerge, will continue to be ineffectively addressed.

Keywords: Internet; Workplace; Organisations; Object-relations; Winnicott; Klein; Bollas; Serres; Surveillance; Cyberslacking; Cyber-harassment; Netiquette

It is a very sad thing that nowadays there is so little useless information. – Oscar Wilde

1.1 Introduction

The Internet and email have indeed changed our workplace practices, but perhaps not in the ways we first envisaged. Although the computer and the Internet were first thought to be important tools that would alleviate much of the drudgery of our work, leaving more time to 'get the job done', the general view has been that computers and the Internet have, in turn, created more work for us. For example, Curley (1989) reported in the late 80s that computerisation had changed 'knowledge workers' jobs. These workers had to acquire new skills and productivity stemmed from skill-broadening rather than specialisation. Rather than reducing anxiety, computers have been a source of anxiety for many in the workplace, especially for older workers, and those not experienced with computers (Marquie, Thon, & Baracat, 1994).

It is, however, true that the Internet and email have in many ways transformed and improved the workplace. As Greenfield and Davis (2002) claim: "Technology has undoubtedly improved the quality and productivity of our lives at work. The Internet has further opened up new avenues for increased productivity, greater flexibility, and new applications for the work we do" (p. 351). We would agree with Greenfield and Davis' (2002) view that the Internet has not only provided a plethora of information available in an instance, but that the Internet can also be used to integrate office locations.

Lang (2001) also points out the advantages the Internet has brought the business world:

> The Internet is serving also as an intriguing new medium for marketing, and has even streamlined investing. Of course e-mail has vastly improved internal

> communications at most companies. And, as these changes are wrought, organizational environments are becoming more and more information, computation, and communication – rich, while product/service customization can be performed faster and cheaper. (p. 543)

However, while Lang (2001) acknowledges that the Internet can provide companies with an incredible amount of information, she quite rightly makes an important distinction between knowledge and mere information. She also argues that knowledge is "produced and held collectively rather than individually" (p.545-546). Lang suggests that "[m]eaningful knowledge cannot be simply retrieved from some database but must be actively reconstituted in the moment, in the context of who the community is, and what the particular needs are at that particular moment" (p.545). In order for this to be achieved the workplace needs to be structured to allow adequate time and space devoted to knowledge creation. This can be virtual or physical space (it is this virtual space that we are most interested in here). However, as Lang argues, "time, not physical space, is the corporate resource most likely to be begrudged to knowledge activists" (p.546).

In concert with Lang (2001) we also believe that cyberspace can be a potentially creative space, but that the way it is managed and used within organisations needs to be urgently redressed. It is argued in this paper that it is not simply how this space is used, but also how it is actually perceived and understood by individuals that ought to be reconsidered.

Before considering how we might better conceptualise cyberspace, and the ways people operate within this space at work, it is instructive to initially (and briefly) consider some of the problems that are emerging in the workplace since the introduction of the Internet and the nature of attempts by employers to deal with these problems. The

problems that we would like to particularly highlight, as insidious examples, are those of 'cyberslacking', harassment and 'Netiquette'. It is from a consideration of these problems, and the lack of success of employers in dealing with these problems, that the conceptualisation of cyberspace, argued in this paper, becomes most relevant.

1.1 Cyberslacking

Cyberslacking is the overuse of the Internet in the workplace for purposes other than work. Obviously, cyberslacking can be a problem for companies as this can lead to loss of productivity and could be considered a waste of companies' resources. As Davis (2001) points out, the U.S. Treasury Department found that Internet activities, such a personal emails, using chat rooms, shopping and checking personal finances and stocks accounted for 51% of employee's time spent online. In one of our own studies conducted within Australia, there was an overall consensus that the Internet and email should also be used for non-work related purposes in the workplace (Whitty, 2002, 2004). Some of these non-work related activities included: personal emails, information, such as news and politics, entertainment, banking, education, research, job search, porn, chat rooms and jokes. Interestingly, while some argued quite strongly that the Internet and email should only be used for work purposes; others provided the counter-argument that there should be no restrictions to what workers should be allowed to access within the workplace. As pointed out by Lang (2001) earlier on in this paper, time is a company's greatest resource, hence, cyberslacking can create huge problems for a company and its 'bottom-line'.

1.2 Cyber-harassment

Cyber-harassment is increasingly being acknowledged as a problem in the workplace. This type of harassment can take the form of obscene or hate email that threatens or frightens, or emails that contain offensive content, such as sexist or racist material. What is unique about this type of workplace harassment, compared to more traditional forms of harassment, is that this material can be sent by people in addition to work colleagues, but other individuals outside of the workplace (either known or not known to the person) or even in the form of spam. In 1998 Novell carried out a study in the UK on spamming (cited in Driscoll, 1999). A serendipitous finding was that 41% of the women in their sample had been sent pornographic material or had been harassed or stalked on the Internet. The problem with spam is that it can (and often does) contain sexual and/or illegal material, however, it is an extremely difficult problem to obviate and it is difficult to locate the source of the email.

Other studies have most recently identified similar problems with the Internet and email in the workplace. In 2001, Elron reported that about one in ten participants stated they had seen fellow workers accessing adult web sites (Elron Software, 2001). Moreover, one out of three participants stated that they received sexist material via email and one out of eight participants stated that they received racist material via email.

In Whitty's (2002, 2004) recent research, similar concerns arose. In this Australian wide study, 17% of participants stated that they had been harassed in emails in their workplace, while 49% said they had received offensive emails. In response to what type of material should be banned in the workplace, a significant proportion of women (67%) compared to men (55%) stated that offensive material such as porn should be

banned. Furthermore, women disagreed more strongly than men did in their responses to whether workers should be permitted to access sexual material from the web at work.

While individuals are overall concerned about the material available at work on the Internet and the types of annoying emails they receive, they nevertheless approve of using the Internet and email for personal usage. What appears to be a stark contradiction is that some of this personal usage could, in turn, annoy, offend or potentially harass others. For example, in the aforementioned Elron study, 70% of participants stated that they commonly send jokes and chain mail via email (Elron Software, 2001). In one of our own studies, we were somewhat surprised with the finding that one third of our sample of 524 participants believed it was acceptable for workers to discuss sexual matters at work (Whitty, 2002, 2004). What particularly concerns us about this result are three major questions: (1). What kind of sexual details are being discussed? (2). Are these emails ever seen by other employees and if so is this construed as harassment? and, (3). Have there been instances were employees have accidentally sent these emails to someone for whom it was not intended?

In considering the above empirical research, there is a noteworthy corollary of ignoring this form of harassment. If effective strategies are not implemented to prevent cyber-harassment, women could begin to fear using the Internet (even if this type of harassment has not directly affected them). We single out women here given that to date women are said to be more cyber-harassed than men (Hatcher, 1997). There are a number of disadvantages that accompany fear of using the Internet. For example, women are disadvantaged in the workplace, where the Internet is a resource that is increasingly being utilised. Furthermore, women are disadvantaged in educational settings where educators

are required to use the Internet as an educational tool. Recently, the Nielsen ratings (2002) found that the number of women online has increased to equal proportions of men to women. However, they also found that men go online more often, spend more time online and view more pages than women do. Researchers, such as Brail (1996), have noted that sexual harassment on the Internet means that cyberspace is not a 'safe' and friendly environment for women. She argues that this, in part, explains why women spend less time online than men spend. If the fear of sexual harassment on the net were to increase, the gradual advances that are being made to narrow the gender gap online will be to no avail.

1.3 Netiquette

Another unexpected problem that has emerged in the workplace is the variety of types of emails individuals construct and indiscriminately send to others they know. While offensive emails might appear to be an obvious concern, a surprising result that emerged from one of our studies is the concern employees have with having to waste time sifting through and deleting email from known sources - typically friends (Whitty, 2002, 2004). In this Australian survey, it was found that chain emails (90%) were more objectionable than spam types of email such as credit offers (88%) and porn (77%). Interestingly, 17% of the sample found joke email objectionable. These results are extraordinary, given that the problem is created by people's own volition. Contrary to the suspicion that workers are all cyberslacking, these results suggest that employees want to desist wasting time on unwanted emails. These results also clearly highlight they we need to re-think how we use the Internet and email and develop a better Netiquette. For

example, developing lists of friends and unquestioning pressing the send key which delivers an email that the individual found funny or interesting might not be the appropriate way to deal with email. It appears, however, that once people put their message in cyberspace they do not consider the consequences of that email at the other end.

1.4 Attempts at solving these problems

Companies have attempted to deal with these problems noted above, most commonly by devising Internet usage policies. Greenfield and Davis (2002) report that 83% of the companies they surveyed had such policies in place. In our recent Australian study (Whitty, 2002), we found that 62% of participants worked in a company that had an Internet usage policy. However, what was alarming was that 19% of the sample did not know if they had a policy (Whitty, 2002, 2004). This suggests that policies are not always clearly communicated to employees. However, the other problem that has emerged is that even when the policies are transparent workers are not all adhering to these policies, as illustrated in the following quote: ‘‘I work in a large workforce, and it is difficult to oversee usage of Internet. Although policies are in place, some choose to ignore’’ (cited in, Whitty, 2003a). The question we then need to ask is why are people ignoring their work policies? We would like to suggest here that one reason might be that the work rules stand in some conflict with the seductivenature of the Internet. Hence, disciplinary measures might not be the most effective way of dealing with these problems and instead solutions might arise from considerations
of the seductive nature of the net.

In addition to considerations of the nature of cyberspace we also need to remind ourselves that anti-discrimination laws and workplace policies have already been in place for years to obviate problems in respect to discrimination in the workplace. It is interesting that while individuals understand that this might relate to pictures they display on the wall or a calendar, and the way they address others, that they do not always generalise such laws and policies to the Internet and email. This paper makes an attempt to explain why this might be so.

Another way organisations are attempting to deal with the Internet problems outlined above, is through implementing surveillance technology and filtering software. Employers use these devises to either monitor or block-out certain sites or emails that a company deems inappropriate in the workplace. In the aforementioned Australian survey 43% of the sample worked in a company where the Internet and email were being filtered, however, a sizeable proportion (17%) were again oblivious to whether they were being filtered or not. Greenfield and Davis (2002) found that 79% of the companies they surveyed were making either a considerable or at least some effort to monitor employee use of the Internet. They found that the type of methods employed to monitor included: 38% of companies used filtering software, 22% used self-oversight and 37% had managerial oversight.

Again monitoring techniques and filtering software are not always successful. One reason for this is because filtering software is not yet sophisticated enough and can either still allow access to Internet sites and emails that are not deemed appropriate to a particular organisation, or sometimes block sites that are deemed appropriate and necessary to access for that particular company. The other problem is how surveillance

and filtering techniques affect employees' morale. For example, Chalykoff and Kochan (1989) have argued that employees' satisfaction with computer-aided monitoring has a large impact on overall job satisfaction. In our own research, while we have found that many participants are happy to have some web sites and emails filtered, 19% opposed any kind of Internet filtering in the workplace (Whitty, 2002, 2004). Reasons given as to why people are opposed to filtering include: a belief that employee's have a right to use the web for some play or personal, non-work related activities, that filtering constrains people's freedom (which they have a right to) and that people should be trusted and should take responsibility for their own actions (Whitty, 2003a) - some of these attitudes are nicely illustrated in the following quotes from participants in this previous study:

"Time spent using Internet for personal reasons should remain private and I always make sure I make this time up. Allowing people to take personal responsibility for their personal use lifts moral which benefits productivity in the long term."

"I strongly believe that some things such as music, and other things which help people relax are highly beneficial to the workplace. If it helps me work, then my employers should be happy and encourage this sort of stuff."

"I believe everyone should have the freedom of perusing the internet, and for most people this will empower them. A small minority will abuse access at the expense of their work."

'"Rules" are better than filters. Trust is a better thing for employee moral than a big brother software solution. It's a small company - I think that any web access policy would be honoured by the employees."

Another way to deal with the problem, according to Davis et al. (2002) is to use preventative measures such as identifying who the workers are who have problematic Internet use. In their study, they identified a latent construct, they name "*Problematic Internet Use"*, which was determined by four indicators, including, impulsivity, loneliness/depression, distraction and social comfort. Hence, they found that *Problematic*

Internet Use is more than simply spending too much time online. These researchers suggest that instead of using reactive solutions to Internet problem behaviour in the workplace, we should be using preventative strategies. While we believe that Davis et al.'s research is an important contribution to the rather scant empirical research available on Problematic Internet Use, we would like to point out a couple of limitations in its application. First, the type of problematic behaviours these authors are referring to are more severe psychological problems. As a consequence, their study still does not address some of the problems we outlined above, such as harassing problems, less severe forms of cyberslacking (which still cost companies considerable amounts of money) and Netiquette issues. Moreover, by screening people out to either decide on whether they should be allowed to work in an organisation or to set up different conditions for them in a workplace seems to us to be considerably discriminatory, especially when 100% reliability of the test cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, these authors argue that similar tests are already in place in organisations to predict theft; however, we would question whether Internet problem behaviour ought to be treated in the same way as people who steal.

2. Object-relations theory

While we believe that all of the above strategies have their merits, we would like to advance an argument that we think also contributes to the ongoing exploration of possible solutions to Internet and email problems in the workplace. In grappling with how people understand and work within cyberspace we think it is instructive to draw from

object-relations theory, in particular to use a conceptual lens that comes from the work of Donald Winnicott, Christopher Bollas and Melanie Klein.

Donald Woods Winnicott used the term *'potential space'* to mean the space between the mother and the infant. He contrasted this "potential space (a) with the inner world (which is related to the psychosomatic partnership) and (b) with actual, or external reality" (1971/1997, p.41). Winnicott understood potential spaces to be an area of intermediate experiencing that is between inner and outer worlds, "between the subjective object and the object objectively perceived" (Winnicott, 1971/1997, p. 100). Winnicott (1971/1997) argued that the potential space is:

> the hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object (mother of part of mother) during the phase of the repudiation of the object as not-me, that is, at the end of being merged in with the object. (p. 107)

Although Winnicott believed that potential space originates between the mother and the infant, he also argued that later on it becomes possible for the individual child or adult to develop his/her own capacity to generate potential space. For example, he proposed that such spaces could exist between the patient and analyst. While Winnicott could be criticised for developing a universal assumption about the relationship between the mother and infant, (and he often wrote in a very patronising tone towards mothers) Winnicott's notions are still highly useful.

According to Winnicott, potential space is the place where play takes place. As Winnicott expresses:

> The place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play. (p. 100)

Potential space is not inner psychic reality, rather, it "is outside the individual, but it is not the external world" (Winnicott, 1971/1997, p. 51). Potential space is not pure fantasy, but nor is it pure reality. As Carr and Downs (2004, in press) clearly express:

> …play is intersubjective, and play creates a separate reality. Winnicott viewed play as creative communication, as intersubjective. Play would not occur in the context of the subject alone. Play takes into account other subjectivites and an environment that responds to the subject. In addition, Winnicott viewed play as creating and sustaining illusion, which can be maintained if kept within a frame of its own – a frame that separates it from ordinary life.

Winnicott (1971/1997) also believed that play is as an important activity during adulthood as it is in childhood. He went as far to argue that play is central to individual growth. It is in Winnicott's potential space that meanings and self are continually being created and re-created. Winnicott (1971/1997) strongly contended that "it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self" (p.54). Hence, he argued that given a "good enough" environment the interplay of the inner world and external reality promotes the development of self and facilitates growth. In other words, *it is play that is the universal*, and that belongs to health:

> playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships; playing can be a form of communication in psychotherapy; and lastly, psychoanalysis has been developed as a highly specialised form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others. (Winnicott, 1971/1997, p. 41)

The rules that are formed during play are also a notable aspect of Winnicott's theory. How we play the game and what rules we develop in order for play to take place, are questions we need to consider when we explore Winnicott's potential space. Modell (1990) explains the rules of the game as:

> Playing takes place in a certain space and has certain limitations regarding the duration of time, as in games that are "played out" within a certain limit of time. Yet playing may have its own quality of timelessness. Playing is also separated from ordinary life by the "rules of the game": all play has its rules that pertain to the temporary world in which playing takes places. Rules are in effect a means of containing a space in which illusions can flourish. (p. 27)

Therefore, while play does have a sense of freedom, it is nonetheless constrained by rules. As Carr and Downs (2004, in press) argue "On the one had the fundamental essence of play is the freedom and the license to create. Yet, on the other hand, constraint in the form of rules is required." Given this juxtaposition between play and constraint, Carr (2001) contends that play transcends the serious and non-serious oppositional binary.

Winnicott used the term "*transitional object"* to refer to the object that connects self and other. Winnicott noticed, for example, how an infant would suck and hug a doll or blanket. He suggested that the doll or blanket did not represent a doll or blanket as such, but is rather an *as-if object*. The infant makes use of the illusion that although this is not the breast, treating it as such will allow an appreciation of what is "me" and what is "not-me" (Winnicott, 1971/1997, p. 41). Although referred to as a transitional object, "it is not the object, of course that is transitional" (Winnicott, 1971/1997, p. 14). The object is the initial manifestation of a different positioning of the infant in the world. The doll or blanket, thus, connects to subjective experience, but is in the objective world.

According to object-relations theorists, objects are often symbolically charged, typically at an unconscious level. As Carr and Downs have highlighted, Freud (1905/1977; 1933/1988) believed that "objects are the targets towards which action or desire is directed in order to satisfy instinctual satisfaction."

Christopher Bollas has elaborated further on Winnicott's work, with a particular focus on the nature of transitional objects. According to Bollas (1987; 1992) transitional objects, like all objects, themselves leave a trace within us. Bollas (1992, p. 59) argues that "as we encounter the object world … we are substantially metamorphosed by the structure of objects; internally transformed by objects that leave their trace within us". Some objects seem to have much more inner meaning for us and unlock unconscious thought processes and affective states. In a sense, Bollas argues, these objects are "transformational" and may act like "psychic keys" (see also Carr, 2003). The objects themselves, in acting as psychic keys, appear to enable past unconscious experiences to be released to inform present behaviour. In respect to online interactions, we would suggest that the transitional objects such as, the computers, monitors, keyboards, mice, modems, and so forth "leave a trace" within us such that they trigger emotional responses, such as expectations, passion, and curiosity which are reminders of previous Internet 'encounters'.

Another theory we would like to draw up in this paper is Melanie Klein's (1975) well known object-relations theory. One of the aspects of her theory that we are utilising in this paper is her notion of splitting. According to Klein, splitting behaviour involves dichotomising the world into 'good' objects and 'bad' objects. Klein believed that the infant in the paranoid-schizoid position wants to posses the contents of the mother's body, while at the same time wanting to destroy her. She believed these responses arose from the death instinct. This is succinctly summarised by Doane and Hodges (1992) when they observe that:

> The infant is motivated to both possess and destroy the mother not only by constitutional aggression but also because of simultaneous perception of the mother as

> the source of all good things. Yet the mother is not simply a source of plenitude, given the infant's ability to fragment in phantasy, the mother into "part objects" – milk, feces, breast, penis, children. (p. 9)

Klein also included in her object-relations theory other defence mechanisms delineated by Freud, including introjection and denial. To quote from Klein (1986):

> Idealization is bound up with the splitting of the object, for the good aspects of the breast are exaggerated as a safeguard against the fear of the persecuting breast. While idealization is thus the corollary of persecutory fear, it also springs from the power of the instinctual desires which aim at unlimited gratification and therefore create the picture of an inexhaustible and always bountiful breast – an ideal breast….The denial of psychic reality becomes possible only through strong feelings of omnipotence – an essential characteristic of early mentality. Omnipotent denial of the existence of the bad object and of the painful situation is in the unconscious equal to annihilation by the destructive impulse. It is, however, not only a situation and an object that are denied and annihilated – it is an object relation which suffers this fate… (p. 182).

3.Getting beyond the problems: Conceptualising cyberspace

We have previously proposed that cyberspace could be understood as potential space (Whitty, 2003b; Whitty & Carr, 2003). We have argued this in respect to cyber-flirting and the games people play at love on the Internet. However, we believe this view of cyberspace can be equally applied to the workplace. As we have suggested in the past, cyberspace could be considered as a space somewhere outside the individual, but is still not the external world. Important to the arguments formed in this paper, we contend that the participants, the computers, monitors, keyboards, mice, software, modems, text, cables, telephone lines, and so forth all occupy this potential space; this space between the individuals who interact within this space. We would even go as far to state that the web should be conceptualised as a potential playground.

It is in such a context that we argue that a new space has been introduced in the workplace, this new space, allows for new kinds of play within organisations, between

organisations and even inclusive of individuals outside of the workplace. As described earlier in this paper, in Winnicott's potential space, meanings are created and re-created. Playing in such as space promotes the development of self. We would like to extend this to argue that it can promote the development of an organisation. If it is agreed that cyberspace can be understood as a potential space, then individuals can play within such a space to develop the growth of themselves and, in turn, their organisations.

Lang's (2001) distinction between information and knowledge is an important one and would like to relate this to our understanding of cyberspace being a kind of potential space. One can download incredible amounts of information from the Internet, however, if one is not engaging with the material or 'playing' with the material, then is knowledge really being created? As Lang contends, knowledge is produced collectively. Cyberspace provides an opportunity for individuals to work together to engage with material, play with material and hence create knowledge. What is also unique to cyberspace, unlike other mediums, is the greater access to playmates, which individuals can choose to converse with simultaneously. We believe that it is through this playing that organisations can reap the benefits of cyberspace.

One common way people have used their short break time in the workplace is by chatting round the water-cooler or whilst making cups of tea, or having cigarette breaks. While this may have been perceived by both the people engaging in this activity and their fellow workers as more play-time than work-time, nevertheless there has been some utility in having these conversations and time out from what is formally constituted as 'work'. These interactions can be a way of sharing information, which leads to creating knowledges. We would like to make the point that in a similar way cyberspace can be a

place where this kind of play or break-time can be spent. This is illustrated from the following extracts from participants in one of our previous studies (Whitty, 2003a):

"The WWW and email are an increasingly important communication and information tool. People need to practice to build up expertise in both using the technology and interpreting (value-adding) to info they access by ICT."

"Considering some of the hours that people are required to work these days, people are often isolated from the rest of the working Australia, ie, the bank, news, current events etc. It helps staff remain in touch with society."

"I have no problem with being updated on what is happening in the world while I am stuck in a little office, as long as people are not just sitting there constantly browsing the web etc…"

Of course, people's break time around the water-cooler is not solely spent on creating new knowledge. It can be simply a way to have a short break, so that one can move back to their work with a fresh mind and as a consequence of the short break be more productive. Again, cyberspace can also be used in this way as expressed by some of the participants in our previous work:

"People occasionally need some down time regardless of whether they have a break or not, and our job is too all encompassing to rule out anything as non work related."

"Innocuous content should be available to workers. Sometimes it helps me take a short break from a mammoth task I've been working on for 3 hours straight, it helps me relax for a bit so that I can complete the task."

Hence, while some playtime might not be spent directly on work tasks, it can still be a means of increasing an individual's productivity.

Although we do make the claim that cyberspace can be an important and productive place for workers to play in, we do not dismiss employers' concerns that their

workers are cyberslacking, harassing or using the Internet and email inappropriately in the workplace. While cyberspace is a place where new important creative processes can take place, we need to question what happens if an individual strays too close to the borders of reality or fantasy? As Civin (2000) has emphatically argued "Just as cyberspace may potentiate, it may also thwart and debilitate" (p.40).

When we consider that cyberspace is a new place to play in the workplace, we also need to consider the rules that accompany this new activity. As pointed out earlier, Winnicott contends that we need to consider the rules of the game, as while play is separated from the ordinary world, it is still constrained by the rules. We believe that the rules on how to play in cyberspace at work are still currently being devised. We mentioned earlier on in this paper that while clear policies have been constructed in the workplace in respect to harassing and discriminatory behaviour, these rules are not consistently applied by workers in respect to the Internet and email behaviour. One reason we would like to offer for this is because cyberspace is considered to be a different kind of space in the workplace, a place where the rules are still being negotiated and defined. It would be reasonable to assume that this space is perceived by workers to be a more private space and quite separate to the 'real' world. An employee might see this as a space that is, in a sense, more one's own space where an employer has not right to intrude upon and effectively spy on an individual. The conceptual optic developed in this paper would suggest that it is perceived to be a space where people can feel more liberated and free, which could be in stark contrast to the physical office space these individuals work in. This illusion of privacy is perhaps sustained given that work colleagues are not necessary privy to the conversations that take place online and the information that is

downloaded. This is quite different to the conversations that take place in the workplace in either face to face or telephone, where one is accountable for one's actions given that others can witness them. Of course, the reality is that while workers might be sustaining an illusion in respect to cyberspace being a more private space, this is not the case. Others can see colleagues' computer monitors, the computer keeps a trace of where the individual has been surfing on the Internet, those who have access to the server have access to emails being sent back and forth, and commonly emails are accidentally sent to people they were not intended for. That being said, we nonetheless would argue that people often separate themselves from this reality when they log on into cyberspace. Hence given the separateness of this space to other spaces, are not applying old rules to this new form of communication.

It is here that we believe Klein's theory is useful. According to Klein, part of a paranoid-schizoid defensive condition is splitting the world into 'good' objects and 'bad' objects. The implications are noted by Doane and Hodges (1992) when they argue that:

> By greedily introjecting good part objects, splitting them off from bad part objects (objects created by the infant's own aggression in the mirror of its own sadism), the infant defends itself in this position from complete disintegration. The bad objects are felt to persecute the infant – hence its paranoia – and this anxiety leads to the defenses of splitting, projection, and introjection. In turn, these defenses are vulnerable. (p.9)

If we consider, as argued earlier, that one of the objects that occupy cyberspace is the text, we can identify some interesting splitting behaviour that appears to take place here. A type of splitting between good and bad objects has been identified in our empirical work (Whitty, 2002, 2004). We pointed out earlier on in this paper the contradictions in people's attitudes towards Internet and email behaviour in the workplace. It appears that

for some, double standards are being applied, where it is acceptable for an individual to talk about sexual matters or to send chain or joke emails, while at that same time disapproving of sexual content on the web, offensive emails and being sent chain emails.

We could also again consider Lang's (2001) distinction between information and knowledge here. If people are greedily searching for and collecting information, the good part objects, from the web, one is not necessarily using the web in the best possible way. People's quest for too much information can be a determent to both the individual as well as the organisation they are working for. Put in this light, it is not necessary the content we need to be concerned with or the even necessarily the time people are spending online, but rather how they are using the information they are collecting. This, we believe, frames cyberslacking in a different light.

The relationship people have with these objects that occupy cyberspace also needs to be considered. As mentioned earlier, Winnicott believed that objects that occupy potential space can be transitional. However, we need to be clear that it is not the object itself that is transitional. In turn, not all objects in cyberspace will act as transitional objects. Hence, it is how people relate to and use objects in cyberspace that has some important repercussions in the workplace. If we use and play with these objects creatively, then there is the opportunity to create knowledge.

Bollas' view that transitional objects leave a trace within us is an important point to consider when we examine objects in cyberspace. By way of example, Lupton (1995) has described the affect of turning on her computer:

> When I turn my personal computer…it makes a little sound. This little sound I sometimes playfully interpret as a cheerful 'Good morning' greeting, for the action of

> bringing my computer to life usually happens first thing in the morning….In conjunction with my cup of tea, the sound helps to prepare me emotionally and physically for the working day ahead, a day that will involve much tapping on the computer keyboard and staring into the pale blue face of the display monitor… (p.97)

The computer in some ways can been seen as an extension of self, which is perhaps why people feel this is an object that contains private information. Hence, individuals ascribe a very different meaning to their computer than they would to other objects in an office. For example, putting a calendar on the wall is seen as inappropriate perhaps because this is understood to be a public space.

In a similar way to Lupton's reaction, the sound of a new email could also act as a psychic key. However, if spam increases, together with offensive Internet material and nuisance email, then it is possible that reactions to our computers and cyberspace could change in meaning. This is something companies need to be aware of if they want to use cyberspace as an asset to their companies.

Finally, we would like to highlight the importance of how we play with the objects in cyberspace. In doing so we would like to draw from Michel Serres' (1995) work on quasi-objects. Carr and Downs (2004, in press) have suggested a parallel between Winnicott's notion of transitional objects and Serres' work on quasi-objects. The difference they state is the while Winnicott was interested in an individual's relationship with an object, Serres has focused how "an object pass through a social group and, in so doing, forms relations among the members of that group." To quote from Serres'(1995) :

> Look at those children out there, playing ball. The clumsy ones are playing with the ball as if it was an object, while the more skillful ones handle it as if it were playing with them: they move and change position according to how the ball moves and bounces. As we see it, the ball is being manipulated by human subjects; this is a

> mistake – the ball is creating the relationships between them. It is in the following its trajectory that their team is created, knows itself and represents itself. Yes, the ball is active. It is the ball that is playing. (pp. 47 –48)

We can see that Serres' notion of quasi-objects can also be applied to cyberspace and the workplace. With the advent of the Internet individuals have greater access to communicate and create knowledge not only with other colleagues within that organisation, but also with individuals who work in other organisations and those who do not identify themselves with any workplace. Watching how the ball is playing can be observed in the interactions that are played out in chat rooms, through instant messaging, discussion boards and so forth.

4. Some final thoughts: A quest for new beginnings

This paper commenced with an identification of problems that have arisen in the 'management' of access to cyberspace and the manner in which employees have 'engaged' the object called the computer in what might be considered to be non-productive behaviour. In general, the measures employed thus far to curb the excesses and difficulties with such behaviour have been partially successful while, at the same time, being less than aware of the seductive and productive nature of the Internet. Clearly before we can start to be effective in excesses of some employees, we first need to adequately conceptualise why employees seek to engage in such behaviour in the first place. Moreover, we need a conceptual lens that helps us appreciate the benefits of Internet access to the employees' state of wellbeing as well as how that is transformed into a healthier and productive workforce.

At the moment research into Internet usage has yielded, putatively, a 'puzzling' array of findings that on the surface seem to complicate simple notions of Internet behaviour at work. These research findings are less puzzling when viewed through the conceptual lens of object relations that is outlined in this paper. The new rules in the workplace over the use of the Internet, clearly need to be communicated to all employees and designed in a manner that, from an objects relations perspective, integrates with a recognition that the Internet is a potential space for play. There is also a need for new research that seeks to frame its' observations in a manner that admits an object relations perspective – in doing so we may more effectively target our 'rules' in the workplace to enhance the productive use of the Internet.

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