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# Resistance redux

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# Resistance redux

**Abstract**

The last 15 years have witnessed renewed interest in resistance in and around organizations. In this essay, we offer a conceptual framework to thematise this burgeoning conceptual and empirical terrain. We critically explore scholarship that examines resistance in terms of its manifestations and political intent or impact. We offer four fields of possibility for resistance scholarship: individual infrapolitics, collective infrapolitics, insubordination, and insurrection (the "Four I's" of Resistance). We conclude by considering the relationship between resistance theory and praxis, and pose four questions, or provocations, for stimulating future resistance research and practice.

**Introduction**

> **"Resist."** (Greenpeace banner hanging from a
> construction crane behind the White House five days
> after Donald Trump's inauguration as President of
> the United States of America)

More than 20 years ago Paul Thompson and Stephen Ackroyd complained that,

after being a staple of Marxist-inspired industrial sociology for many years, research on

resistance had largely disappeared from the critical studies agenda (Thompson &

Ackroyd, 1995). Critical scholars, they argued, had been seduced by the post-

structuralist—particularly Foucauldian—turn to focus on "managerialist discourses"

and the totalizing disciplinary control processes of post-Fordism. By viewing the

workplace as simply one more site of disciplinary practice, they claimed that critical

scholars had lost sight of the specific character of employment and workplace relations

under capitalism, characterized as it is by the exploitive extraction of surplus value from

commodified, alienated, and recalcitrant workers. As such, critical research painted a

picture of totalizing regimes of workplace control and concomitant worker complicity

and quiescence that failed to document the complex and often contradictory dialectics

of struggle that have always defined the capitalist workplace.

While there may have been some merit to this argument—particularly the often

uncritical and crude appropriation of Foucault's ideas (see Newton, 1998, for a critique

of this work)—it is no longer the case that organization and management scholars are

ignoring resistance. The last 15 years or so have witnessed an explosion of research in

and around organizations, with scholars from a variety of theoretical perspectives

attempting to get to grips with the dynamics of workplace struggle and other forms of

protest.  Signs of this intense interest include: two special issues of *Management Communication Quarterly* (2005, 2008) on workplace resistance, a new *Journal of Resistance Studies* (established in 2015), a new *SAGE Handbook of Resistance* (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016), a recent "Dialog" section of *Journal of Management Inquiry* devoted to resistance (Courpasson, 2016; Fleming, 2016; Hardy, 2016), and the establishment of a resistance studies network organized by scholars at the universities of Gothenborg, Sussex and Massachusetts (http://resistancestudies.org). Given this widespread interest, then, the publication of this special issue comes at a propitious time for resistance studies.

However, research and theory development does not occur in a cultural, political, or economic vacuum. This essay starts, therefore, by reflecting briefly on the broader context for this scholarly ferment. Following this, the essay sets out a framework that thematises the conceptual and empirical terrain of resistance, identifying four main forms of resistance in and around organizations: individual infrapolitics, collective infrapolitics, insubordination and insurrection—what we call the "Four I's of Resistance." Finally, the essay closes by posing four broad questions or provocations for stimulating future resistance conversations and future resistance practices.

**Resistance research in context: Resistant times**

To start, we locate our debates on resistance in and around organizations in current developments within the wider neoliberal, post-Fordist milieu.  First, we are clearly living through a Zeitgeist in which challenges to the dominance of neoliberal capitalism have emerged from several quarters.  These challenges are not always coherent, nor are they always progressive in character (witness, for example, the rise of

Donald Trump in the US as the voice of white male working class disenfranchisement),

but they reflect widespread discontent with increasing economic and political

disparities that are perceived as diminishing the life chances of anyone beyond the

economic elite.  Indeed, Piketty's (2014) careful analysis and critique of economic

inequality under neoliberal capitalism has resonated precisely because it captured a

widespread sense of betrayal by the late 20th century narrative of "trickle down"

prosperity.  Thus, much of this opposition has been directed toward the principal agents

of neoliberal capitalism—global corporations, and in particular financial institutions—

that are viewed as increasingly responsible for a "YOYO" (You're On Your Own) political

and economic system. Such opposition has spawned numerous social movements,

including Occupy, UK and US Uncut, the "Indignados" in Spain, and the "San Precario"

movement in Europe, among others.

Second, the increasingly pervasive character of work and organization has led to

an expansion of possibilities for what counts as resistance. Under Fordism and

industrial capitalism work was largely characterized by antagonistic relationships

between managers and workers, with the effort bargain over work at the centre of this

antagonism. Resistance in this context largely consisted of various forms of individual

and collective behaviours—some surreptitious, some public—such as organized strike

action, "working to rule," systematic soldiering, "goldbricking" (Roy, 1952), machine

breaking, pilfering, and so forth. Most of these practices of resistance point to workers'

individual and collective assertions of autonomy in an organizational context where

boundaries—occupational, work-life, class, etc.—were relatively distinct. Under post-

Fordism, however, the shift to managerial discourses of participatory work cultures,

"meaningful work," identity management, enterprise selves, and the integration of work

and life has blurred these traditional boundaries.  Thus, just as managerial control

processes have shifted towards efforts to shape workplace meaning and employee identity, so in response worker performances of autonomy and resistance have also expanded. As such, struggles over meaning (e.g., around definitions of workplace culture) and worker deployment of resistant identity work (Collinson, 2003), including cynicism, irony, and humour, have become an important part of the repertoire of resistance practices (e.g., Fleming & Sewell, 2002; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Kunda, 1992). Studying resistance, then, requires a wide array of conceptual and methodological tools.

Third, and related, not only is work today pervasive and omnipresent, but it is increasingly precarious (Kalleberg, 2009, 2011). Moreover, evidence suggests that people are generally unhappy in their jobs, and that the low quality and high intensity of work itself is becoming increasingly deleterious to our health and wellbeing (Cederström & Fleming, 2012; Nadeem, 2011).  The old model of job security and career progression that prevailed under Fordism is giving way to the "gig" economy, zero hour contracts, the "precariat" (Standing, 2011), and "venture labor" (Neff, 2012).  While under industrial capitalism risk was assumed by capitalists themselves, under neo-liberal capitalism the burden of risk has been increasingly socialized and shifted to the workforce and, indeed, society in general (e.g., through corporate welfare). Such changes are creating enormous uncertainties, forcing individuals, as du Gay (1996) argues, to believe that they are responsible for their success or failure in the "business of life."

Moreover, even for workers with relative job stability (the so-called "core" knowledge workers; Apple, for example, employs a core workforce of 63,000 out of a total of 750,000 worldwide manufacturing Apple products), the work environment has become more intensified, with constant pressure to improve performance levels (see,

for example, Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015, for an eloquent exposé of Amazon's corporate culture and the constant pressures that full-time workers face).  The emergence of "ROWE" (Results Only Work Environments), while ostensibly an innovation that relieves workers of continuous monitoring and accountability, often means that work expands to fill all the time available to workers; under ROWE, work is invariably never done. Phenomena like "presence bleed" and "function creep" (Gregg, 2011) speak to work's increasing colonization of areas of our lives that, under the old Fordist regime, lay beyond the work realm. Many people feel constantly tethered to work, and aspects of their identities and daily lives, previously viewed as separate from work (emotion, sexuality, leisure, etc.) are now subject to "corporate capture" as a means to increase the creation of surplus value (Fleming, 2014b; Land & Taylor, 2010). Work, and its inherent value, is a defining, taken-for-granted feature of 21st century life—an imaginary that stands in stark contradiction to most people's actual experience of work.  There is, in this sense, a growing movement that argues for a need to disabuse ourselves of the notion that employment is self-evidently good for us and essential to our existential wellbeing and, in Livingston's pithy phrase, "Fuck Work" (2016, p. 28).

Finally, we might note that the renewed academic interest in workplace resistance is perhaps at least in part a reflection of the increased colonization of academia itself by neoliberal corporate models of performance accountability (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012). The tenure model is under threat or has disappeared, casual labour is replacing tenure-track faculty, corporate CEOs are being appointed as university presidents, and scholars are assessed through evaluation criteria that privilege *where* research is published rather than the quality of the research – note the so-called journal list fetishism among university decision makers (Tourish & Willmott, 2015; Willmott, 2011).  Concomitantly, students are now interpellated as consumers who demand

marketable skills rather than critical capacities.  In short, a market logic now prevails in the groves of academia (Heller, 2016).  Although this transformation of the prevailing model of tertiary education has been going on for several decades now (McMillan & Cheney, 1996), state hostility to public education and academic freedom has intensified in recent years as governments look to implement neoliberal austerity measures.

In sum, there is ample evidence that work and organizing are contested terrains for many.  Under neo-liberalism and post-Fordism work is often simultaneously precarious, demanding, and soul-destroying, even for workers with relatively stable employment (Cederström & Fleming, 2012).  Resistance, then, has been and continues to be a key—perhaps defining—thematic of organizational life, and is manifest in many practices, running the gamut from "empty labor," in which idleness at work becomes a practice of resistance (Paulsen, 2014) to the autonomist refusal of work and the emergence of an anti- or post-work politics (Fleming, 2014a; Frayne, 2015; Livingston, 2016; Weeks, 2011).  Moreover, these resistance practices have been conceptualized and studied from a variety of perspectives, including various Marxist traditions, post-structuralism, a number of feminist perspectives, and post-colonial theory, to name a few.

How, then, do we make sense of this eclectic array of perspectives and practices? It is perhaps a good time to assess this robust and growing area of scholarship, see where we stand theoretically and empirically, and offer suggestions for a research agenda for resistance scholarship as we move forward.

**Conceptualizing resistance: Six guiding issues**

The history of organization and management thought during much of the 20th century is one of attempting to reconcile the alienated and resistant worker to the

conditions of capitalist work and organization. As such, one can argue, *pace* Marx, that the dynamics of power and resistance is a constitutive feature of capitalist relations of production. While they rarely acknowledged explicitly the problem of alienation, early 20th century management theorists were quick to recognize the disjuncture between the management vision of the rational and optimally productive organizational form, and the recalcitrance of employees in the face of this rational vision. In this sense, questions of resistance have always been a central, defining element of management studies, even if they were not explicitly acknowledged as such. From Frederick Taylor's (1911/1934) efforts to break the solidarity of workers engaged in systematic soldiering, through Donald Roy's (1952) studies of quota restriction and goldbricking, to Arnold Tannenbaum's (1968) characterization of organizations as "control processes [that] help circumscribe idiosyncratic behaviors and keep them conformant to the rational plan of the organization" (p. 3), the entire history of management thought is built on at least the implicit recognition of worker resistance—individual or collective—to managerial control efforts.

Indeed, if we accept the premise of autonomist Marxist theorists, then worker autonomy and agency is the default condition to which capitalism must continually try to adapt (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Tronti, 2012). There is an important sense, then, in which worker resistance does not just respond to management control efforts (though, of course, it does), but also represents autonomous practices that are at least in part the impetus for managerial innovation. Thus, one might argue that the emergence of neoliberal, global capitalism in the 1980s was "capital's counterattack" against the labour movement's ability to organize and limit capital's power during the three decades following World War II (Aronowitz, 2003, p. 27). As Aronowitz states, "After 1973 capital went on strike against the welfare state and in the 1980s against union

bargaining power" (2003, p. 28).  This semantic reversal of the typical capital-labour relationship speaks eloquently to the notion of worker resistance as a constitutive and generative feature of the capitalist mode of production.

This is important, since, while worker resistance is and was a counter-productive irritant for mainstream management thought—as the resistance to change literature so often notes (Thomas & Hardy, 2011)—our goal here is to conceptualize resistance from a perspective that assumes that it is a necessary and constructive—indeed, constitutive—response to organizational contexts of power and domination. Guiding such a conception is the notion that human emancipation and liberation is the telos of resistance practices (the multiple possibilities for defining emancipation and liberation notwithstanding).  Thus, as we frame and contextualize resistance, it is worth keeping in mind the following six issues, some of which are perhaps more obvious to readers than others.

First, as Foucault succinctly put it, "where there is power, there is resistance" (1980a, p. 95). Here, Foucault is not positioning resistance as exterior to power, as a reaction to power, but as an immanent and constitutive element of the exercise of power itself.  Thus, while much of the research on resistance tends to situate it in a binary relationship with power (Vallas, 2016), we conceive of power and resistance as co-constitutive and dialectical (Mumby, 2005), though dialectical in Adorno's (1973) "negative" sense rather than Hegel's (1977) "positive" sense.  Given the topic of this special issue, however, we frame this relationship as resistance/(power) rather than power/(resistance), foregrounding the multiple possibilities for organizational resistance. Echoing Foucault, "resistance comes first…; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. . . . *resistance* is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic" (1997, p. 167, emphasis in original).

Second, resistance and contradiction are frequent bedfellows. That is, resistance can both challenge extant relations of power and reproduce them, *even in a single act of resistance* (e.g., Collinson, 1988, 1992). In this sense, resistance always has multiple possible outcomes. Willis' (1977) famous study of working class "lads," for example, shows how in their collective (and creative) resistance to middle-class educational values, they create the conditions for their insertion as generalized abstract labour into the capitalist relations of production, thus reproducing their own conditions of marginality. Similarly, Collinson's (1988, 1992) critical ethnography of blue-collar workers' resistance to managerial authority is shown to emerge in part from decidedly regressive masculine identities rooted in the objectification of women and othering of femininity. Resistance, then, rarely has a single, coherent, and easily interpretable teleology.

Third, resistance is always situational and contextual. As such, studies of and theories about resistance need to be sensitive to its historical, economic, and political specificity. Willis' (1977) study, for example, is specific to mid-1970s Fordist Britain, where "the lads'" resistance to middle-class schooling and qualifications is based partly on a rational interrogation of the value of education for the semi- or unskilled work they are pursuing. The large-scale disappearance of such relatively well-paid blue-collar work with the onset of neoliberalism and post-Fordism means that such an analysis might well be impossible today, at least in the West.

Fourth, the prevalence of multiple theories of resistance notwithstanding, it is perhaps worth reminding readers that—following Marx's analysis of capital and consistent with Labour Process Theory—resistance is constitutive of work and organizing in large part because of the indeterminacy of labour (i.e., the problem of translating abstract labour power into actual labour). The primary task of management

is to transform this labour power into productive labour. However, this transformation process is always problematic because of the embodied and ultimately indeterminate character of productive labour (Thompson & Smith, 2000/2001). It is this indeterminacy that shapes the conflicts and struggles between capital and labour and is both medium and outcome of efforts at workplace innovation, including disciplinary forms of innovation.

Fifth, and related, we might argue that the shift from explicit and collective forms of resistance under Fordism (strikes, work to rule, factory occupations, etc.) to more "quiescent" and individual forms of resistance (e.g., struggles over meaning and identity) under post-Fordism reflects how struggles around the indeterminacy of labour take on different forms. As organizational control has shifted from a focus on the overt behaviour of employees toward a focus on identity management and struggles around the meaning of work and its place in workers' lives (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005), so too have employees increasingly engaged in resistance practices that respond to this shift. Many post-Fordist organizations see the management of employee affect and identity as the "last frontier" of control in their efforts to determine the indeterminate, and workers respond appropriately through the subtle construction of resistant meanings (cynicism, irony, etc.), alternate work identities, and unsanctioned forms of affect (Fleming, 2014a; Murphy, 1998; Scott, 1990; P. Taylor & Bain, 2003; Thomas, Mills, & Mills, 2004; Tracy, 2000).

Finally, analyses of workplace resistance need to develop nuanced conceptions of the complex relationship between autonomy and resistance. As Aronowitz has indicated, "The new problematic of the capitalist workplace is struggles over the question of the autonomy of qualified workers in the labour process rather than the condition of abjection shared by traditional industrial workers in rapidly shrinking

factories" (2003, p. 55). The irony of the "new workplace," then, is that many workers simultaneously have greater autonomy as creative "knowledge workers" and "symbol manipulators," but increasingly find their non-work selves captured by corporate efforts to harness this creativity (Fleming, 2014b). This manifests itself particularly with the emphasis on "cultures of enterprise" where employees are expected to turn their entire lives into a form of human capital (Fleming, 2017; Foucault, 2008; Land & Taylor, 2010; Marwick, 2013, 2015). In some respects, resistance to such all-encompassing forms of "corporate capture" may only be possible through the articulation of a "post-work" politics that seeks alternatives to the current configurations of work-life relations (Fleming, 2014a; Frayne, 2015; Weeks, 2011). Of course, this is not to ignore the fact that a high percentage of employees continue to work under conditions of abjection and precarity, although even under such conditions a discourse of enterprise can find purchase, as Monahan and Fisher's (2015) study of regular plasma donors suggests.

With these points in mind, this essay now turns to the development of an organizing frame to help stimulate future conversations on the nature of resistance in and around organizations.

**Framing resistance**

Any attempt to thematise the burgeoning conceptual and empirical terrain of organizational resistance studies runs the risk of being an arbitrary attempt at "botanical classification" that imposes "restrictive conditions on the object of . . . analysis" (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016, p. 5). The framework that we develop here, however, is less an effort to provide a definitive typology of resistance (the field of study being anything but unified), or a comprehensive map and review of the vast conceptual, methodological and empirical discussions on resistance. Rather, it should be viewed as

an attempt to articulate different possibilities for theorizing and making sense of the

rich and complex landscape of the oppositional and subversive practices that are an

endemic feature of life and work under late capitalism.  Of course, this is only one of

myriad ways in which the terrain of resistance can be mapped (see, for example,

Hodson, 1995; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Williams, 2009) .

Among the multiple existing heuristic possibilities, we believe that a fruitful

organizing frame needs to take up two of the central questions around resistance

(Thomas & Davies, 2005a): "What counts as resistance?" (i.e., what is and is not

included in the definition of resistance), and "When does resistance count?" (i.e., the

significance of the political intent or impact).  Viewed as intersecting dimensions, these

two questions move us beyond an "all or nothing," either/or conception of resistance

and enable the development of a more nuanced approach that focuses on its

complexities as both a theoretical construct and an empirical phenomenon.  As such,

our framework pushes us to think about resistance as "a socially constructed category

emerging out of the multiple interpretations of both workplace actors and academic

researchers" (Prasad & Prasad, 1998, p. 251).  This approach enables us to avoid

ontologising resistance and instead frames it as an emergent process that is both

medium and outcome of particular discursive, political, and economic conjunctures.  We

provide the figure below as a provisional starting point.

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Figure 1 About Here

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To think about "what counts" as resistance is to—at least provisionally—raise

the question of what practices and discourses potentially challenge the institutional

structures that construct meanings through processes of inclusion and exclusion,

always recognizing that this question must be framed contextually. What counts as resistance in one socio-political context may not count in another context. For example, de Certeau's (1984) illustration of the secretary engaging in tactics of micro-resistance by writing personal letters on company time might count as resistance in a formal bureaucratic organization where work and leisure time is clearly delineated, but not in a post-Fordist "ROWE" work environment where work and leisure often blend almost seamlessly.  Moreover, people might find different means to find a voice to "make themselves of some account" (Rancière, 1999, p. 27), sometimes ambiguously and/or anonymously, others openly, clearly owned and attributable. Thus, as one dimension in our framework we can think about what counts as resistance as ranging along a continuum from hidden and politically invisible, under the threshold of observation and/or anonymous or non-attributable, through to public, open and/or owned by the resister(s), a distinction most famously characterized by Scott (1990) in his study of subaltern cultures. This distinction has invited scholars of resistance to focus not only on visible and more or less dramatic practices of resistance but also on other practices of everyday "infrapolitics" which might operate in contexts where public displays of resistance might be inadvisable and even dangerous. As suggested above, resistance and power are co-constitutive and dialectical: particular forms of power relations preclude but also foreground different possibilities and expressions of resistance. For instance, accounts of the Holocaust suggest multiple forms of resistance by Jews which, depending on the circumstances, oscillated from organized but hidden collective acts (e.g., an illegal press, theatre performances and the school system in the Warsaw ghetto), to violent overt confrontations (e.g., revolt in the last days of the Auschwitz death camp), to silent, anonymous acts (e.g., of sabotage and foot dragging), to

individual, ambiguous, small-scale efforts (e.g., washing one's face or walking erect – see

Levi, 2007; Martí & Fernández, 2013).

The other dimension in our framework focuses on "when resistance counts."

This dimension connects epistemology and politics, addressing how resistance can, in

Foucault's (1980b) sense, challenge the prevailing games of truth and create an

"insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (pp. 81-2); that is, forms of knowledge that,

traditionally, have been marginalized but when activated have "ruptural effects of

conflict and struggle" on the dominant orthodoxy.  Resistance is thus political in that it

occurs in the context of particular regimes of power, and thus "counts" when these

prevailing structures of power are made visible, denaturalized, and the metrics for their

operation is placed under scrutiny and questioned. Thus, as a second dimension in our

framework, again framed as a continuum, we can think about when resistance "counts"

as ranging from individual "small wins"—micro-political behavioural and discursive, or

symbolic forms that are individual, localized and spontaneous and that might not seem

sufficiently political in their approach to qualify as resistance—to collective, macro-

political, large-scale social and political transformations.  Such a distinction, of course,

contains a degree of arbitrariness, and certainly "small wins" are sometimes the catalyst

for larger changes. Rosa Parks' individual act of everyday disobedience in refusing to

give up her seat to a white person led to the Montgomery bus boycott which, in turn,

helped to precipitate the civil rights movement in the U.S. Similarly, the 1969 uprising at

the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City catalysed the modern gay

rights movement.  More recently, Mohamed Bouaziz's act of self-immolation in Tunisia

on 17 December 2010, became the catalyst for the Tunisian Revolution and the later

Arab Spring. It is worth remembering that no form of resistance takes place outside of

its discursive and political context. Indeed, the ability of "small wins" to translate into

social change depends, in many respects, on the ability of these discursive contexts to be shaped in a way that favours the goals of the resisters.

Combining these two dimensions leaves us with a matrix of four fields for examining possibilities of resistance (see Figure 1). As with all forms of classification, there are problems with suppressing differences within the categories as well as giving the false impression that the different categories are mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, it is difficult to grasp the social world without using categories and frameworks (Hetherington & Munro, 1997). Our aim is to hopefully provide a generative mechanism for posing questions and starting future conversations over how we might theorize and study organizational resistance.

## "Four I's" of resistance

We set out below some of the key influences in the vast conceptual and empirical discussions on resistance in and around organizations (see Table 1 for indicative references for the different resistance practices).

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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### *Individual infrapolitics: Hidden forms of micro-resistance*

We start with individual infrapolitics. The term "infrapolitics" was originally coined by Scott (1990) in his ethnographic research on peasant protest and resistance in South East Asia, to capture a range of practices, including "a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name" (Scott, 1990, p. 19). In his study of struggles between Malay peasants and their powerful landowners, Scott

identified myriad small acts involving petty forms of sabotage, foot dragging, feigned

ignorance, character assassinations, gossip, rumour and idle threats that are

encapsulated in the concept of "hidden transcripts."

Since Scott's original research, a vast panoply of other forms of careful and

evasive politics have been identified, ranging from "accidentally" spilling coffee on a

keyboard (Prasad & Prasad, 2000), to de Certeau's (1984) notion of "la perruque," to

shirking, cyberloafing, and ways of "being absent while at work" (Paulsen, 2014, 2015).

One particular strand of this research points to resistance through dis-identification and

disengagement to corporate attempts at identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott,

2002), including cynicism, irony, scepticism, humour, fantasy and ambivalence

(Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 1988, 2003; Fleming & Sewell, 2002; Gabriel,

1999; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Rhodes & Westwood, 2007;

Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995). Here, employees are seen to dis-identify and distance

themselves from the organization to keep their autonomy and personal beliefs (Žižek,

1999).

Three papers in this special issue also examine practices of hidden micro-

resistance. Harding et al. (2017) examine senior managers' micro-resistance in the

context of the implementation of a new talent management strategy in the English

National Health System (NHS). Drawing on Judith Butler's and Karen Barad's theories of

performativity they argue that everyday micro-resistance can be understood as a

reaction to the denial of one's self-hood or identity. As they write: "in the mundane

world of work, resistance may take the form of a refusal to accept challenges to one's

identity or sense of self that threaten to reduce one to abjection, to not knowing who or

what one is, and to being unable to speak from such a position" (p. XXX). Such resistance

practices manifest themselves in seemingly insignificant material-discursive moves, such as the insistence on particular interpretations or the use of masculine imagery. Horvers and Ybema (2017) examine micro-resistance in the context of a planned change program at the Amsterdam municipality's Department of Work and Income. The authors identify practices of resistance that combined resistant and compliant behaviours, which they labelled "frontstage resistance cum backstage compliance" (i.e., openly contesting the change program while complying with it in private), and "backstage resistance cum frontstage compliance" (i.e., openly supporting the change program while privately subverting it). The latter constitutes a particularly interesting form of individual infrapolitics. The authors argue that displaying conformance on the frontstage allowed the employees to fly under management's radar and thereby create unmanaged space for backstage subversion. The article by Bristow et al. (2017) identifies different resistance narratives of early-career CMS academics. Several of these narratives, which they also refer to as "diplomatic narratives", involve the public display of conformance with the ethos of business school neoliberalism while resisting behind the scenes when engaging with other CMS scholars.

All practices of individual micro-politics have in common the fact that they are based on individual and hidden deployments of alternative meanings that individuals "who have no right to be counted as speaking beings" (Rancière, 1999, p. 27) construct "behind the scenes," belying their apparent conformity to the powerholders. As such, they are inherently equivocal practices that do not quite make the mark as direct challenges and therefore are difficult to censure, either because there is ambiguity over whether or not they are oppositional, or because they appear insufficiently disruptive to legitimate a response by elites.

The adequacy of infrapolitics as an effort to disrupt the spaces and times that an individual is expected to inhabit within contemporary capitalism has been the focus of much debate and criticism (Contu, 2008; Kondo, 1990; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Thompson, 2016). Does silent farting (Scott, 1990), polishing one's shoes (Levi, 2007; Martí & Fernández, 2013), or secret subjective attitudes of cynicism and irony (Fleming & Spicer, 2002, 2003) challenge existing prevailing patterns of inclusion and exclusion? Contu (2008) suggests that infrapolitical forms of opposition constitute "decaf resistance" as they offer a bogus notion of self-determination and a fantasy of autonomy, which ultimately reinforces normative controls. Similarly, Thompson (2016) argues that micro-political forms of resistance lack real emancipatory possibilities in that they fail to threaten existing power relations. In other words, unlike "real" resistance, individual infrapolitics works as a release valve or coping mechanism to channel dissatisfaction and disaffection, leaving power relations fundamentally unaltered. Finally, Kondo (1990) offers perhaps the most important critique, arguing that Scott tends to view infrapolitics as emanating from an authentic "space" of resistance. She suggests that this position essentializes the resistant subject and theorizes resistance as far more internally coherent than it actually is in everyday practice (as Kondo's ethnography so effectively demonstrates).

Scott, however, argues that individual infrapolitical forms of opposition should not be underestimated, as the power of thousands of 'petty' acts of resistance "rather like snowflakes on a steep mountainside," can "set off an avalanche" (Scott, 1990, p. 192). Consistent with this position, Courpasson (In Press) shows that this so-called "politics of everyday" in the workplace has the potential to change power relations "in ways that proceed through the multiplication of moments where minds shift away, hands are used for something else than typing on a computer, bodies are going for a

while in a different direction and in other places than those prescribed by management." Similarly, Horvers and Ybema (2017) stress that backstage resistance cum frontstage compliance can have manifest consequences. For example, even though the managers in their study failed to halt the change program, they managed to delegitimize and delay the change process.  We use Scott's term, then, to draw attention to the everyday, low-profile character of many resistant acts, while at the same time recognizing that the kind of coherence that Scott implicitly attributes to the "hidden transcripts" of resistance underestimates the complexities of routine forms of organizational resistance. It is that complexity that this essay tries to capture.

### Collective infrapolitics: Hidden forms of macro-resistance

The concept of collective infrapolitics focuses on those forms of collective, yet quiet, disguised, hidden or anonymous resistance that serve to challenge or unsettle the dominant discourse. Collective forms of infrapolitics can be seen as mobilizations that do not meet the criteria for widely recognized forms of collective action, although they might be a prefiguring of a movement to come (Marche, 2012). Most notably, they tend to be either anonymous collective forms of rebellion, or parodic forms of challenge that mock or pervert the dominant but in ways that ostensibly have no political intent. For instance, Scott (1990) refers to the mass desertion of non-slave holding White hill people as determining, far more than any other factor, the defeat of the Confederacy in the US Civil War. To the extent that the resisters remain anonymous and under the radar, collective infrapolitics is hard to challenge directly – particularly since it is, at best, only ambiguously perceived as oppositional.

The idea of collective infrapolitics is encapsulated in Gouldner's search for ways in which the process of bureaucratization could be tamed (Stein, 1982). The conviction

which guided his classic study of a gypsum mine was that while the rationalized and bureaucratized world "is grey and foredoomed, the world of everyday life is green with possibilities which need to be cultivated" (Gouldner, 1954, p. 29). Accordingly, collective infrapolitics can be seen as beneath the threshold of political detectability, but not necessarily as organized or "self-reflexive" practices (Giddens, 1991). It enables people deprived of access to legitimate channels of expression to vent their concerns with matters over which they are deeply troubled in order to resist existing patterns of exclusion. Collective infrapolitical movements include the Diggers of the English Civil War (Hill, 1975), Guerrilla Gardeners (Baudry & Eudes, 2016; McKay, 2011), and group-based and under-the-radar actions like illegal gas, water, and electricity reconnection (Bayat, 2010; Martí & Fernández, 2016).

Two studies in this special issue examine collective forms of infrapolitics. First, Gagnon and Collinson (2017) examine how international teams in a global leadership development program engaged with normative controls. They show how one of the teams created an informal space "out of view of the programme's disciplining 'gaze'" (p. XXX), using the cultural diversity of their members as a resource for opposing normalizing practices imposed on them. While the other teams marginalized the team members who did not fit the Anglo-Saxon mainstream, in this team "[cultural] difference was constructed as a productive resource that provided an effective way for team members to connect with each other and resist the hierarchies and controlling practices of the programme" (p. XXX). For example, by translating key terms of the leadership program literally into other languages, in which they did not make much sense, the team members mocked the program and thereby undermined the status hierarchies associated with them. Ironically, due to their hidden subversion of the practices imposed by the program, the team outperformed the other teams. Second,

Courpasson (2017) examines the four-and-a-half-year struggle of a group of dismissed employees against their former employer. He describes how the employees connected to each other through the posting of anonymous messages on a shared blog in which they criticized their unfair dismissal and described their ways of coping with it. This exchange allowed them to reconnect to their occupational identities that they felt they had been unfairly stripped off. As he writes, these exchanges of messages clarified for the bloggers "the injustice of their situation, while expressing common feelings of still belonging to a similar occupational group" (p. XXX). As we will describe below, these hidden practices of group resistance gave rise to and complemented overt forms of collective resistance.

Such studies on hidden collective resistance are still rare compared to open forms of collective resistance that directly challenge authority. One might argue that this is because they are barely visible or considered inconsequential. Nevertheless, Taylor's (1911/1934) efforts to break what he called systematic soldiering say otherwise and highlight how such efforts can be potentially disturbing: "This common tendency to 'take it easy' is greatly increased by bringing a number of men together on similar work and at a uniform standard rate of pay by the day. Under this plan the better men gradually but surely slow down their gait to that of the poorest and least efficient" (F. W. Taylor, 1903/1964, p. 31). While Taylor was well aware of the negative consequences of systematic soldiering, such enactments of collective infrapolitics are often viewed as non-destructive, thus making these forms of resistance unlikely to be challenged or opposed. Indeed, why are practices such as gardening, dressing or consuming differently not seen as harmful to anyone? However, as Baudry (2012) and others have shown:

small actions such as throwing seeds over a fence or planting a flower in a crack

of the wall can become acts of protest on the part of people with little or no

power of any kind, as well as activists and artists looking for new and

nonaggressive ways to express their views about contemporary life. (p. 32)

Such actions are a way to express alternative uses and rights to urban space and what

urban space itself should look like (Lefebvre, 1968). More importantly, Courpasson

(2017) shows that collective infrapolitics can have a significant political impact and

serve as a precursor to overt collective confrontation. In his study, the solidarity and

mutual support expressed through in-group transcripts reassured the resisters of their

own strength and the vulnerability of the corporation, enabling them to engage in overt

formal politics.


### *Insubordination: Public forms of micro-resistance*

While individual infrapolitics capture hidden, ambiguous, non-authored struggles

against the current forms of the distributions of the sensible, insubordination shifts our

attention to how people struggle individually and openly through practices such as

misbehaviour (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999), whistleblowing (Munro, 2016; Rothschild

& Miethe, 1994; Weiskopf & Tobias-Miersch, 2016), and hunger strikes (Courpasson,

2016) to re-appropriate that which the capitalist (and post-capitalist) workplace has

taken, including, for example, their time, work, product and self-identity (Ackroyd &

Thompson, 1999). As such, insubordination covers forms of public but micro-levels of

contestation that intervene in the material context of power relations and are

confrontational and productive. This is not simply at the level of subjectivity, but also

through organizational practices.

Despite their micro-political form, it is argued that such forms of resistance can have a significant impact (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012, p. 802). Recent interest in generative (Thomas & Davies, 2005b), productive (Courpasson, Dany & Clegg, 2012), or facilitative (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011) resistance has pointed to managerial--particularly middle-managerial--resistance, aimed at improving organizational practices through forms of micro-contestation over discourses and identities. Much of the interest in managerial resistance relates to organizational change, focusing on middle managers' "skillful acts" (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012, p. 802) in questioning change initiatives by top managers or change agents that are viewed as inappropriate or ineffectual (Thomas & Davies, 2005b; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011). Productive managerial resistance contrasts with oppositional struggles arising from structural relations of class antagonism by pointing to ongoing and situated practices undertaken by managers in their daily work to facilitate accommodation by top managers to their demands (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012, p. 802). Crucially, such challenges are seen to be successful because of middle-managerial skill in realigning power relations and in framing suggestions in ways that are seen to be beneficial to the organization.

Public forms of micro-resistance are also, given their public and open nature, potentially self-sacrificial, as illustrated in Arendt's reference to pious people who stood against the rise of the Nazi Party:

> Like an artisan (...) who preferred having his independent existence destroyed and becoming a simple worker in a factory to taking upon himself the 'little formality' of entering the Nazi Party. A few still took an oath seriously and preferred, for example, to renounce an academic career rather than swear by Hitler's name. (Arendt, 1973, p. 338)

Research on insubordination in the form of organizational misbehaviour (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) reflects its Labour Process Theory heritage, pointing to how workers, as an expression of structured antagonism with management (Braverman, 1974), engage in activities that "should not happen" and that entail a "challenge to dominant modes of operating or to dominant interests in the organization" (Watson, 2003, p. 230). Misbehaviour has a long history, tracing back to machine breaking ("Luddism") during early days of the industrial revolution (Hobsbawm, 1968), and continues (Anteby, 2003; Barnes, 2007; Townsend, 2005) to be a common way to resist through "direct action" (Spicer & Bohm, 2007).

Whistleblowing, as a form of parrhesia (Foucault, 2001), translated as "fearless speech," is defined as "the process by which insiders 'go public' with their claims of malpractices by, or within, powerful organizations" (Perry, 1998, p. 235). Such resistance practices tend to be "individualistic, ephemeral, and disorganized" (Gabriel, 2008) and undertaken by actors across the hierarchy (LaNuez & Jermier, 1994). By speaking out against institutionalized practices and beliefs that they perceive as unjustifiable, whistleblowing is a high risk activity for which the 'fearless speaker' also "[takes] on the risk of all its consequences" (Weiskopf & Willmott, 2013, p. 483). Institutional censure can be particularly severe (Adams, 1984), although following the collapse of Enron and other high profile ethical scandals, governments have encouraged organizations to bureaucratise and legitimise practices of whistleblowing. This might provide some protection for individual whistleblowers, but also runs the risk of curtailing whistleblowing's radical potential by bringing it within organizational control.

Two papers in this special issue address aspects of insubordination. One of them is Bristow et al.'s (2017) study of early-career CMS scholars. In addition to their

resistance narratives mentioned earlier, they identified several narratives of open

micro-resistance, some of which they labelled "combative narrative": overtly

challenging the status quo in meetings, steering critical discussions about the

supremacy of certain publication outlets, and publicly asserting "the right to work with

'undesirables'" (p. XXX). The second is Horvers and Ybema's (2017) study mentioned

above. In that study, "frontstage resistance cum backstage compliance" can be

understood as a form of insubordination. As the authors highlight, because the

respective employees were generally known to do their work, as requested by the top

management, they were in a strong position to be able to protest openly against the

change program. Thus, "The legitimacy of the public display of resistance was

dependent on the speaker's reputation as dedicated employee, and on his or her

capacity to maintain inoffensive and cooperative backstage relationships" (p. XXX).

### Insurrection: Public forms of macro-resistance

The concept of insurrection focuses on those forms of collective, owned and

publicly declared forms of resistance that aim to challenge or unsettle existing social

relations, forms of organizing, and/or institutions that may involve "domination,

exploitation, subjection at the material, symbolic, or psychological level" (Routledge,

1997, p. 69). Such challenges, which embody different forms of mutuality with or

without hierarchy, are characterized by a lack of access to institutional channels.

Insurrection can take many forms, from loosely networked groups of people, to highly

visible, large-scale mass marches and protests enacted by bureaucratic and formal

social movement organizations (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013), to full-blown political

revolution.  Perhaps most memorably, the 1994 insurrection by the Zapatista National

Liberation Army in the Chiapas region of Mexico (in support of indigenous rights, and

which began the day following the signing of the NAFTA free trade agreement) resulted in the establishment of an independent local government which still exists to this day (Barmeyer, 2008; Graeber, 2009; Khasnabish, 2010; Stalker-Sholk, 2007).

Consideration of the effectiveness of direct and public challenges in disturbing existing patterns of domination intersect with crucial questions about intentionality, subjectivity, identities and power. The different forms for which insurrection is manifest coincide with socio-political and historical power relations, ranging from mass strikes and different forms of political and social activism that respond to the Fordist model of production, through to the decentralized, flexible, 'Uberized' economy and associated creative forms of public and organized resistance, epitomized in new terms like "the multitude," "horizontalism," "radical democracy," "occupation," "hacktivism," "bossnapping," "sickouts" and the so-called "post-work movement" (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Juris, 2008; Parsons, 2013; Sitrin, 2017; Weeks, 2011). Looking at these "new" forms of insurrection invites us to interrogate and broaden the meaning of "the political" to include tactics, forms of organizing, discourses and strategies that might not only challenge the status quo and the existing distributions of power, but also try to envision and enact new subjectivities, meanings and alternative modes of socioeconomic, political, cultural, and political organizing (Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017; Hardt & Negri, 2004; Juris & Khasnabish, 2013). However, such efforts can be interpreted as too large, broad, or vague which, while helpful in creating a unifying frame –such as the famous claim to speak for the 99% in the case of Occupy, or the "Que se vayan todos" in the 2001-2002 Argentinian street protests, or the "Democracia Real Ya" for the Indignados in Spain – are seen as potentially limiting their political traction by not signalling a clear ideological consensus or an identifiable target (Calhoun, 2013), not being realistic, or not offering a clear alternative (Castells, 2012; Gitlin, 2012).

Two papers in this special issue are explicitly, though not exclusively, concerned with insurrection. Daskalaki & Kokkinidis (2017) examine the socio-spatial resistance practices of two contemporary solidarity initiatives in Greece. The collective resistance in these two cases involves both local spaces, such as resistance workshops or assemblies, and translocal spaces, such as the "Caravan for Struggle and Solidarity" that travelled around the country communicating the solidarity initiative's cause and aim. The authors show how these different spaces are entangled with each other and how they evolve over time resulting in new social-spatial arrangements. Second, Courpasson's (2017) study of the struggle of the group of dismissed employees against their former employer shows how collective resistance started with hidden practices but then increasingly turned also to public confrontation, involving public campaigns through the mass media and official authorities.

### *Linking the quadrants*

So far, we have described each of the "Four I's" of resistance individually; however, the boundaries around the four quadrants are clearly permeable and, as many of the studies discussed, the different quadrants are variously interconnected. To start with the first dimension, public and hidden practices of resistance often relate and build on each other. We often find that resistance switches between hidden and public resistance practice over time. As Scott (1990, p. 188) reminds us, individual or collective infrapolitics sometimes "flares up into flames," turning into public confrontation. More importantly, several studies have also shown that hidden and public resistance practices are often also complementary in the sense that the one enables the other. Courpasson (2017), for example, highlights "the mutual reinforcement of quiet and often anonymous expressions and public assertions of

dissent and critique" (p. XXX). Moreover, individual resistance practices themselves can often shift from being hidden away from public scrutiny to being openly exposed. For example, in Courpasson's study the blog posts of dismissed employees, while initially only read by the group members, over time attracted wider public attention. More generally, the extent to which practices are public or hidden needs to be understood as a matter of degrees rather than as an absolute value.

Similar interconnections can be seen in the second dimension regarding individual and collective resistance. As many studies have shown, resistance might start with single individuals resisting in private or in public, but over time other people might join in and turn this into a collective struggle. The extent to which resistance is individual or collective can therefore also be understood as a matter of degrees. For example, Bristow et al. (2017) already talk about collective resistance when *two* CMS scholars joined forces and together employed "group guerrilla tactics" (p. XXX) to counter the domination of journal rankings. Apart from that, we often find that the resistance practices of single individuals get enrolled in more collective forms of resistance. For example, in Courpasson's (2017) study, Rick's individual act of going on hunger strike became part of a much larger, concerted campaign.

**Questions and provocations: The future of resistance studies**

> *The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it* (Marx, 1976, p. 571)

During the preparation of this special issue something unthinkable happened: Donald J. Trump was elected President of the United States of America. While the global consequences of this event have yet to unfold fully, it is increasingly clear that we are living through a moment in history when both the theory and practice of resistance

have been catapulted to the forefront of social and political life in the U.S., Europe, and the rest of the world. Previously taken-for-granted assumptions about democracy, dialogue and deliberation and, indeed, the very nature of truth have been turned upside down with the human embodiment of the unfettered neoliberal capitalist id now occupying the most powerful office in the world. In this context, debating the nature of resistance, what counts as resistance (e.g., is farting at work resistance?), or how we might theorize resistance in a more nuanced manner seems at best precious or, at worst, runs the risk of us taking up residence in the "Grand Hotel Abyss"—the phrase Gyorgy Lukács coined to characterize the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and the tendency of its members to engage in comfortable, armchair theorizing about the parlous state of capitalism, all the while refusing direct political engagement with the suffering and struggles of regular people (Jeffries, 2016).

As critical organization studies scholars, is it our fate to take up permanent residence in the Grand Hotel Abyss, safe in our academic enclave but comfortably detached from the politics of an "anarcho-liberal" (Foucault, 2008) Trumpian world? In this last section we want to suggest that, unlike Hotel California, checking out of the Grand Hotel Abyss is possible. However, it requires that we do what Frankfurt School members were not always good at—understand and explore the dialectical relationship between theory and praxis.

As we have indicated in this essay, there is a rich heritage of research on resistance that has recently experienced a significant resurgence. Part of the problem, however, is that much of that rich tradition developed in a world that neoliberalism has erased—a world that Zygmunt Bauman characterized as "heavy modernity," in which "capital, management, and labour were all, for better or worse, doomed to stay in one another's company for a long time to come, perhaps forever—tied down by the

combination of huge factory buildings, heavy machinery, and massive labour forces"
(Bauman, 2000, p. 57). In this context, resistance research (e.g., Ackroyd & Thompson,
1999) focused on the dialectical struggle of capital and workers around the
indeterminacy of labour that defined Fordist capitalism. In other words, who got to
control the labour process "at the point of production?" Today, however, what counts as
"the point of production" has shifted radically. In the era of "liquid modernity" (Bauman,
2000), neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism involves a vampiric effort to transform every
social context and relationship into a form of work and bleed it dry of its monetizing
possibilities. In other words, Marx's "hidden abode" of production has morphed into the
"social factory" (Gill & Pratt, 2008) in which every activity has the potential to be
expropriated labour.

        In this sense, we can no longer afford simply to study resistance "at work" or "in
organizations," but instead must think more expansively about resistance "in and
around organizations," as the title of this special issue suggests. In other words, how
does neoliberal capitalism construct us through work and organization, and how can we
theorize and create possibilities for resistance that are both immanent to and
transcendent of this construction process? What enduring challenges does this present
to us? We address these challenges and possibilities below, posing four questions, or
provocations.

        We start by asking, *when is something worthy of the name 'resistance'?* This shift
in the locus of work and organizing requires us to think differently about *what counts as
resistance*.  As we have demonstrated, much of the scholarly debate on resistance has
been over its definition. This raises questions, some enduring ones, reflecting the
empirical, epistemological and ontological tensions over the nature of resistance and
the actors involved. Some researchers believe that resistance has become too broad a

concept, as it has embraced a myriad of infrapolitical acts (the fart with the bow), leading Thompson (2016, p. 2)—among others (e.g., Deetz, 2008)—to ask whether "too many things have been lumped and linked together under the resistance category?" Are we in danger of having too broad a definition of resistance, where almost any act or talk can be labelled as oppositional? Does resistance, too broadly defined, struggle to retain a conceptual purchase and political clout? What isn't resistance? And ultimately, who gets to decide what is worthy of its name?

In some respects, this broadening of what counts as resistance can be viewed as a capitulation to the victory of neoliberal capitalism. The largely successful 1980s neoliberal counterattack against the power of the post-war labour movement has reduced critical scholars to turning over every rock for the smallest signs of resistance, including the most innocuous forms of individual dissent (e.g., posting a humorous cartoon, engaging in irony and [gasp] cynicism). However, it is worth noting that neoliberalism's success is quite heavily rooted in the shift from struggles over the indeterminacy of labour to struggles over the indeterminacy of meaning (Mumby, 2016). In other words, much of the political and economic strength of neoliberal capitalism derives from its ability to mediate successfully and shape everyday experience through branding processes; there is much profit (both political and economic) to be had in meaning and affect management (as Donald Trump has so vividly demonstrated). Indeed, as Kornberger (2010) argues, in the last 30 years, organizations have been turned inside out, as brands now shape organizations, rather than organizations shaping brands.

In terms of what counts as resistance, then, the strength of neoliberal capitalism is also its weakness; it generates wealth and power by appropriating and mediating human meaning and identity formation, but it can also be subverted on the terrain of

meaning. Much of the vulnerability of the modern, "liquid" organization lies precisely in the damage that can be done to its brand; these days, even a misplaced or inartfully worded tweet can erase millions from a company's value. For example, Uber's brand has come under increased scrutiny in part because of a video recording of a heated exchange between Travis Kalanick, Uber's CEO, and an Uber driver. The driver criticized Kalanick for changes in Uber's business model that had hurt his ability to make a living. Kalanick responded by telling the driver that "some people don't like to take responsibility for their own shit" (Penny, 2017). The public outrage was swift, with commentary pointing out the irony of such a remark from the CEO of a company currently beset with several scandals, including corporate sexual harassment scandals and strike-breaking, all on top of a business model rooted in worker precarity. As Fleming (2017) has recently pointed out, workers are pushing back against what he calls the "human capital hoax," in which a model of self-interested individualism frames economic failure as a purely individual responsibility.  Uber drivers, for example, have begun collectively organizing to be recognized as employees rather than "independent contractors."

Our point is that resistance always needs to be understood contextually; what counts as resistance shifts with the economic, political, and socio-cultural terrain. Neoliberal capitalism requires a different kind of engagement than Fordist capitalism; different Discourses (of enterprising selves, individual autonomy/precarity, affective relations, and so forth) are operant. Perhaps, then, we need to be less caught up in definitional issues and more focused on how we engage in struggle as intellectual (de)construction workers who are aware of the shifting relationship between everyday discourses and practices and macro-level Discourses of power and control. What role can we play, for example, in exploring the gap between corporate efforts to mediate and

shape human (worker, consumer, community member, etc.) experience and their real-world effects on human lives? Perhaps as critical organization scholars we face a good old-fashioned Gramscian hegemonic struggle; how do we participate in a "war of position" that fights for hearts and minds and turns common sense into critical-philosophical good sense (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 333-334), where "common sense" becomes a site of political struggle. For example, critiquing Uber as "a social engineering outfit masquerading as a tech firm" (Penny, 2017) is perhaps one small example that helps to destabilize "common sense neoliberalism" (Hall & O'Shea, 2013) by challenging the normalization of human capital theory as an acceptable economic philosophy.

Our second question is *when or how might resistance count – a case of recognition vs. post-recognition politics?* One of the more interesting and potentially generative recent debates regarding resistance in and around organizations involves the relationship between recognition and post-recognition politics (Fleming, 2016). This is not so much a debate between two opposing sets of possibilities, but rather an effort to think of resistance more broadly and expand the terrain for how resistance might count. In many ways, the relationship between recognition and post-recognition politics parallels the relationship between Fordism and liberal democracy on the one hand, and post-Fordism and neoliberalism on the other hand. Recognition politics, then, reflects the decades-long struggle of workers against monopoly capitalism and their efforts to be recognized as having a legitimate voice. This struggle occurred within the broader discourse of modernist democracy and the fight for emancipation from arbitrary and capricious corporate power, resulting in the post-WWII social contract between capital and labour. As Fleming indicates, however, such a conception of resistance "invariably posits emancipatory movements in a secondary relation to power, as a reaction to a primacy first mover" (2016, p. 107). The post-recognition turn in worker resistance, on

the other hand, involves an act of refusal that views dialogue and engagement as a weapon of the dominant order—the "tyranny of team ideology" for example (Sinclair, 1992). Post-recognition worker resistance, then, "attempts to fully or partially depart power's hold . . . and develop emancipatory projects for their own sake rather than react to the edicts of power in the hope that it might finally include you" (Fleming, 2016, p. 108).

Such a post-recognition view of worker resistance is, of course, quite consistent with the Italian "workerist" (autonomist) movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Tronti, 2012), and has burgeoned into a concerted effort to articulate post-work imaginaries that attempt to re-envision fundamentally our relationship to work in neoliberal capitalism (Frayne, 2015; Hardt & Negri, 2004; Livingston, 2016; Povinelli, 2011; Weeks, 2011). And it raises interesting questions regarding how we think about possibilities for resistance in and around organizations, particularly given that—true to the vampiric qualities of neoliberal capitalism—resistance is increasingly celebrated (Thomas & Hardy, 2011) as an important resource in introducing effective organizational change (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008), viewed as "positive intentions" (Piderit, 2000, p. 783), or "feedback" (Ford et al., 2008), and incorporated as an integral part of corporate change management.

Given the ability of capitalist organization to continually appropriate resistance to serve its own ends, perhaps it is time for us to take more seriously the dialectical relation between recognition and post-recognition politics. Are there ways for us to continue to examine practices of resistance "in" organizations and "at" work while at the same time paying attention to a) the ways in which work and organizing increasingly colonize human interaction, and b) the possibilities for resistance that move beyond subjective forms of "micro-emancipation" and refuse neoliberal capitalist work

arrangements?  What might this look like?  How can we, as Elizabeth Povinelli asks, meditate on "alternative worlds in the shadow of contemporary transformations of late liberalism" (2011, p. 1)?

Our third question concerns the practicalities of researching resistance to ask: *what is the where, who, when, and how of research design?* The seemingly mundane decisions we take when we research organizational life have profound consequences for the knowledge produced. The '*where, who, when, and how'* decisions may result in us overlooking important resistance practices, identities, and contexts, while privileging others.  First, given that resistance is a fundamentally socially situated practice, with the nature, form and intent of resistance being contingent on context, this draws attention to *where* we conduct our research, to consider how resistance might play out in different settings (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016). The foundations of much of what we know about resistance is based on studies from industrial sociology, mostly in factory settings. More recent studies, taking context seriously, have considered new sites of resistance, for example, in care work (Lee-Treweek, 1997), university service work (Holmer Nadesan, 1996), family-owned businesses (Kondo, 1990), knowledge work (Karreman & Alvesson, 2009; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006), strip clubs (Murphy, 2003), and social welfare organizations (Trethewey, 1997). Moreover, research on resistance still tends to be dominated by organizations marked by hierarchical relations. We know little about resistance in organizations where hierarchical relations are less distinct, for example, in civil society organizations and cooperatives. In addition, we might look to trans-organizational forms (Russell & McCabe, 2015) as well as forms of e-resistance, such as worker blogs (Gossett & Kilker, 2006) and other forms of social media (Juris, 2012), such as tweets (Gerbaudo, 2012). For example, the German retail trade union, Ver.di, received in excess of 3,500 responses on their weblog that invited Lidl workers

to report on their poor working conditions and practices, resulting in the publication of the exposé report, the "Black Book" on Lidl (Hamann & Giese, 2005). Other studies have shown the role of e-activism in engendering resistant identities and providing a focal point for collective protest (see, for example, Parker, 2014, on the role of union discussion boards). Given the potential for social media to connect disparate groups of individuals, research might examine how this can lead to new forms of solidarity, new forms of resistance, and to give voice to marginalized and relatively powerless groups (Clark, 2009).

Secondly, we might question further our assumptions around researching resistant identities. Recent studies have expanded our conceptualization of *who* is resisting beyond the classic blue-collar worker, to include organizational elites, such as professional workers (Dick & Hyde, 2006; Pieterse, Marjolein, & Homan, 2012; Strier & Bershtling, 2016) and middle managers (Balogun, Jarzabkowski, & Vaara, 2011; Courpasson et al., 2012; Courpasson & Thoenig, 2010; LaNuez & Jermier, 1994). But what of other actors? We know little, for example, about resistance to bottom up change initiatives (Agócs, 1997) by top management. Must such practices inevitably be viewed only as exercises of power by virtue of their privileged position in the hierarchy? What insights – and what costs - might there be from understanding top managers as resisting in such circumstances? When it comes to *who* is resisting, we might also ask how are resistant identities formed? In particular, how might engagement in macro-political and overt forms of insurrection encourage the formation of other resistant identities, and vice versa (Kellogg, 2009).

Third, the questions of *when* and *how* resistance occurs are interrelated, pointing to the methods that we select in researching resistance in and around organizations. Asking questions (interviews) leads us to those who "own" (Prasad & Prasad, 2000)

resistance, and self-identify as resisters. Exploring the day-to-day experiences of oppositional practices avoids the trap of imposing pre-constructed checklists in determining whether or not a practice is worthy of the name of resistance. Ethnographic research offers greater opportunities to capture the infrapolitical forms of resistance that fall under the radar, particularly if there is access to the informal aspects of organizational life where 'hanging out' (Barley & Kunda, 2001) exposes the researcher to its mundane and routine aspects. Even here, however, *when* research is undertaken (as well as *where*) the 'off-script', infrapolitical forms of resistance – the covert and anonymous - might be overlooked, suggesting the need to 'hang out' beyond the formal workplace settings to hear the resistance talk (e.g., Murphy, 1998): in the café, in the bar after work, even when holding baby showers (Lamphere, 1987).

The methods chosen will also have a bearing on how we understand the connections between different resistance practices and intents, particularly how everyday practices of infrapolitics and insubordination might translate into collective forms of insurrection. Longitudinal and ethnographic methods (see Courpasson, 2017) enable us to appreciate the unfolding of resistance over space and time (Kellogg, 2009). This can provide insights into how micro-political forms of daily oppositional practices might be 'scaled up' (Hardy, 2004) to collective forms of struggle (Kelly, 1998) as well as how the thousands of petty acts (Scott, 1990) might in themselves result in major change. Thus, longitudinal methods are better able to make the link between specific practices of resistance, their political intent and subsequent effects. Thus, by giving thought to the relationship between the '*where, who, when, how'* and '*with what effects?*' we might understand better the 'anatomy' of resistance.

*Finally, we ask, what of academic resistance?* As we well know, the academy is just as heavily implicated in the economics and politics of neoliberalism as any other

work sphere. Higher education (and the research that takes place therein) is increasingly subject to commodification and creeping managerialism (Bristow et al., 2017; Butler & Spoelstra, 2012; Heller, 2016; Parker, 2014).  A culture of enterprise increasingly pervades the groves of academe, with researchers subject to increasingly instrumental metrics. Moreover, the state is increasingly challenging the idea of higher education as a public good tied to democratic principles, and for-profit colleges (frequently targeting and recruiting the most precarious and vulnerable in society; witness, for example, "Trump University") are multiplying (Cottom, 2017).

In this context, how can we as academics practice resistance? What is our responsibility, given our own efforts to theorize and examine resistance practices among workers, to engage in more than armchair theorizing? Is our role as critical commentators enough, particularly if we are publishing exclusively in outlets read only by other academics? Is there an academic equivalent of a post-recognition politics? How might we refuse the publication treadmill and develop forms of engagement with social issues that develop emancipatory projects for their own sake, for reasons other than a notch on the CV? What are the possibilities for engagement in the wider sphere as public intellectuals, particularly in an era when "the expert" has diminished in value and an "alt-fact" sensibility pervades social and political life?

Perhaps there is only one option for us as critical scholars of work and organization:

> Scream, then. Throw away ambivalence. Say with confidence: the only
> scientific question left is, How do we secure a future for humanity? And
> this includes: How do we get rid of the system that is destroying us? How
> do we think of our studies as part of the struggles against capitalism and
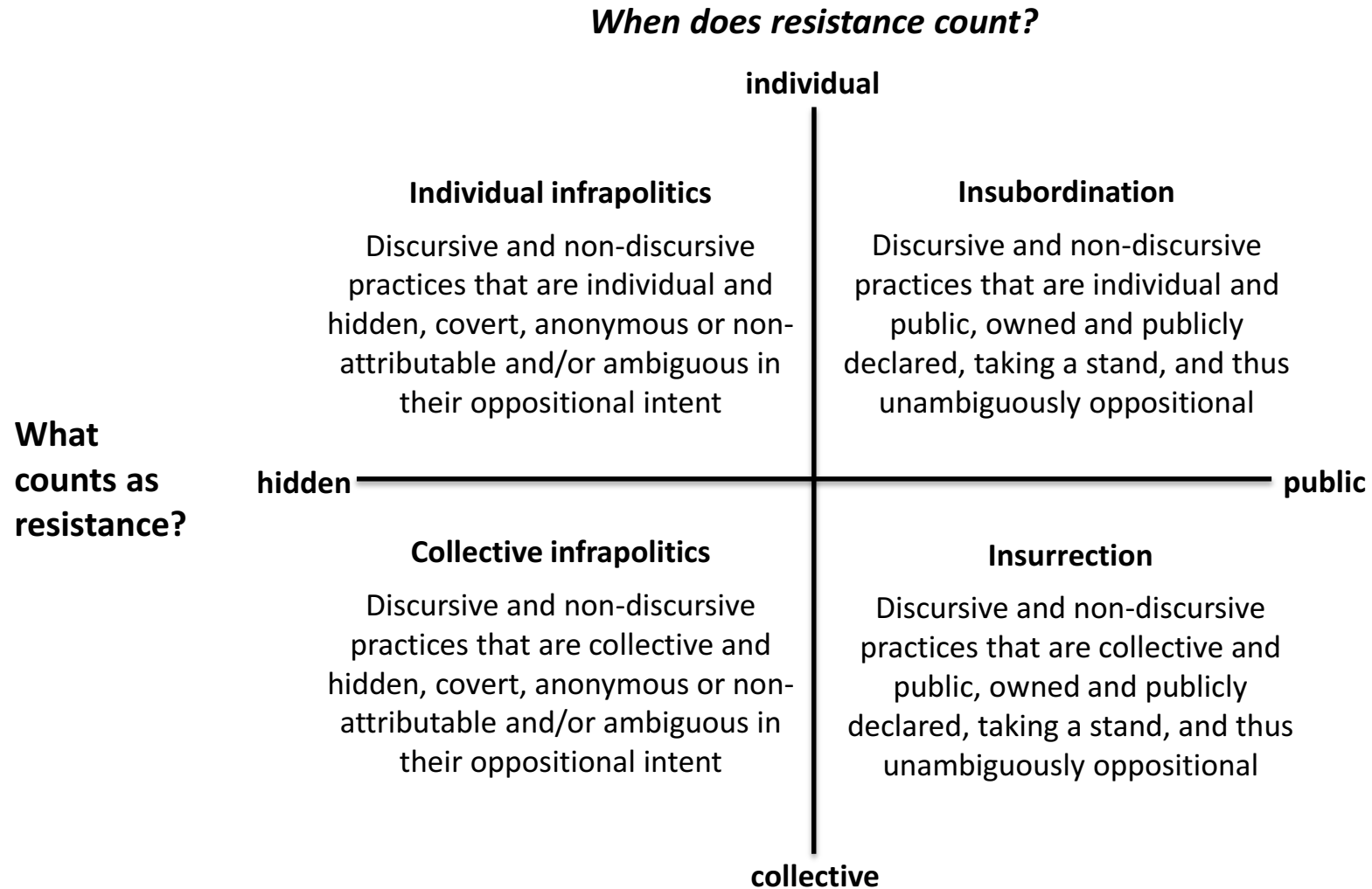> to create a different world? (Holloway, 2015, p. 14)

If the current configuration of work and organization under neoliberal capitalism is, indeed, injurious to the human condition, then perhaps it is time for us to vacate the Grand Hotel Abyss and get busy.

**Table 1: Overview of resistant practices and indicative literature**

| Resistance Practice | Examples | Key references and applications in and around organizations |
|---|---|---|
| Individual infrapolitics | Discursive identity work | Ashcraft (2005); **Bristow et al., (2017) *; Harding et al., (2017)*;** Thomas & Davies (2005b); Thornborrow & Brown (2009); Tracy (2000); Trethewey (1997); Watson (2008) |
| | "La perruque" and empty labour | Anteby (2003); de Certeau (1984); Fleming & Sewell (2002); Paulsen (2014) |
| | Irony, humour, scepticism, fantasy | Ackroyd & Thompson (1999); Collinson (1988); Rhodes & Westwood (2007); Scott (1990) |
| | Hidden transcripts | **Horvers & Ybema (2017)*;** Marti & Fernandez (2013); Murphy (1998); Schoneboom (2007); Scott (1990) |
| Collective infrapolitics | Guerrilla gardening | Baudry & Eudes (2016); McKay (2011) |
| | Systematic soldiering and group solidarity | Taylor (1911/1934); **Gagnon & Collinson (2017)*** |
| | Theft and appropriation | Bayat (2010) |
| | E-resistance | **Courpasson (2017)*;** Gerbaudo (2012); Gossett & Kilker (2006); Juris (2012); Parker (2014) |
| Insubordination | Misbehaviour (various forms) | Barnes (2007); Ackroyd & Thompson (1999); Anteby (2003); Willis (1977) |
| | Hunger strikes | Courpasson (2016) |
| | Whistleblowing | Perry (1998); Rothschild & Miethe (1994); Weiskopf & Tobias-Miersch (2016); Weiskopf & Willmott (2013) |
| Insurrection | Strikes | Hyman (1972) ; Cloud (2005); Roscigno & Hodson (2004); Taylor & Moore (2014) |
| | (New) social movements and (new) anarchism | Benford & Snow (2000); Castells (2012); Juris & Khasnabish (2013); Melucci (1989); Tilly (2004); van Bommel & Spicer (2011); Graeber (2002, 2009) |
| | Local resistant spaces | **Daskalaki & Kokkinidis (2017)*;** Calhoun (2013) |
| | Public campaigns | **Courpasson (2017)*;** Ainsworth et al. (2014) |
| | Post-work movement | Weeks (2011); Graziano & Trogal (2017) |
| | Occupations and bossnapping | Parsons (2013); Contrepois (2011) Cullinan & Dundon (2011) |
| | Zapatista Movement | De Angelis (2000); Holloway (2002); Stalker-Sholk (2007); Barmeyer (2008) |

**\* papers in this special issue.**

**Figure 1: The "four I's" of resistance**

*When does resistance count?*

individual

| | |
|---|---|
| **Individual infrapolitics**<br><br>Discursive and non-discursive practices that are individual and hidden, covert, anonymous or non-attributable and/or ambiguous in their oppositional intent | **Insubordination**<br><br>Discursive and non-discursive practices that are individual and public, owned and publicly declared, taking a stand, and thus unambiguously oppositional |
| **Collective infrapolitics**<br><br>Discursive and non-discursive practices that are collective and hidden, covert, anonymous or non-attributable and/or ambiguous in their oppositional intent | **Insurrection**<br><br>Discursive and non-discursive practices that are collective and public, owned and publicly declared, taking a stand, and thus unambiguously oppositional |

**What counts as resistance?**

hidden ———————————————————— public

collective

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