Resisting self-management? On the possibility of dissolving oneself in fast food restaurants*

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abstract

Self-management is normally not associated with resistance. For the most part, self-management is rather conceived as a form of self-development, in which the subject realizes his- or herself while benefitting the organization. This study of blogs about work in fast food restaurants, however, shows two things: how self-managed workers use the freedom that comes with self-management to refrain from doing certain actions, and how this freedom is made possible due to the workers' ability to change their ways of being. Taken together, self-management is resisted when the techniques of self-management are in the service of and for the worker; whilst moving in the direction of dissolving one's sense of self.

> I am a robot. After several months working at the fast-food restaurant I've realized that I have become a slave to its codes and conducts. Everything is systematic, follows certain logics, and in addition I now talk in a special way.
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> […]
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> I just want to throw the food on the customers instead of putting it on the tray. In the past you could see me be happy and nice. But the fast-food restaurant changes everything about you as an individual, and of course also my body language. (Anonymous, *The fast food restaurant,* 26th of November 2007)[1]

The self-management literature almost exclusively focuses on knowledge work and the creative industries. Indeed, very few authors would describe work in fast-food restaurants as self-management. This paper, however, shows that self-management is important even in work settings that are highly standardized and controlled. The quotes above already give a hint of this. This fast-food worker would like to act according to *her* feelings, or behave in a manner that would satisfy *her* desires, not the corporation's. She would like to 'throw the food on the customers instead of putting it on the tray'.

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1 All translations from Swedish to English are by the author of this paper.

This suggests that she is engaging in self-management, albeit involuntarily. Her feelings urge a certain action, but she manages herself, at least for the moment.

The importance of controlling or managing one's emotions in service work has been central in Hochschild's (1983) study of flight attendants. In her book, Hochschild shows how flight attendants need to self-manage their emotions, to do 'emotional labour', in order to create a good atmosphere for their passengers. This is part of the way fast food workers manage themselves as well (see also Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990). But self-management is broader than emotional labour: it also includes the freedom to determine how to fulfill tasks that are defined by the organization (e.g. Markham and Markham, 1995). Traditionally, fast food workers enjoy very little of that freedom but, more recently, fast food restaurants have started to experiment with promoting 'mild' forms of self-management. For example, some of the self-managed workers in this study are given the task to do 'management', which includes the freedom on how to give content to this broad label.

In contrast to studies that emphasize the liberating and empowering effects of self-management, this paper shows how workers utilize the freedom that comes with self-management in resisting their work. To do 'management', self-managerially, is not something that these workers are happy about: it is rather seen as a burden that they could do without. The paper shows empirically that different tactics are employed in achieving this end.

The empirical material that this paper draws upon is taken from two blogs dedicated to the experience of working in fast food restaurants.[2] In these blogs, workers share, reflect and comment upon their work experiences. By doing so, they not only describe their experiences but also invent, develop and fantasize about different tactics that may be used to avoid the self-management that is imposed on them by the organization.

This study is structured as follows. In the first section, different notions of self-management are discussed, including related concepts such as self-leadership and empowerment. After this follows a section where resistance within self-management is elaborated. This part draws on Foucault's ideas on the possibility of resistance and also on others' interpretations and uses thereof. This section is followed by a short methodological section. In the subsequent empirical section, the tactics that workers employ to resist their work are analyzed in relation to the concept of self-management. In the discussion that follows, those tactics are put in relation to previous studies on resistance. From this, it is suggested that these tactics give new insights in how self-management is resisted in standardized and formal work settings

What is self-management?

Self-management has been described as an effective and efficient method for managing, but also for empowering, subordinates in an organization (Shipper and Manz, 1992;

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2   The blogs used for this paper are *The fast food restaurant* [http://fastfoodrestaurangen.blogg.se] and *Jamesy* [http://jamesy.blogg.se/]

Ross, 1994).[3] By flattening the organizational structure, and by defining tasks and goals clearly, costs of control could be lowered as subordinates could work, by and large, without superiors. Self-management is thus as much a consequence of cutting-back management (Barker, 1993; Freeman, 1999) as it is of human relations and empowerment ideas put into practice (Stewart and Manz, 1994).[4]

Although self-management could be understood as a 'substitute for leadership' (Manz et al., 1980), this does not mean control or management is absent. On the contrary, in self-managing teams, peer-groups consist of 'about 10 to 15 people who assume total responsibility for their area of accountability whether they work in a service, manufacturing, or information industry' (Barker and Tompkins, 1994: 225). In such peer-pressure environments, 'identification becomes a key variable essential for the functional control of work' (*ibid.*: 226). Kirkman and Rosen (1999) also found that the more responsibility a team is given, the more it is empowered and also productive. So, for self-management to work, a high degree of identification with the organization is necessary. In case of dis-identification, individuals may be severely sanctioned by the other team members. This implies that individual responsibility is present after all, although formally the team is the responsible entity. That said, identification is sometimes not more than a façade, not more than management talk, as workers sneeringly, reflexively and cynically distance themselves from such attempts to regulate identity (Kunda, 1992; Cederström and Grassman, 2008). Needless to say, over the years, scholars interested in self-management have been moving away from behavioral programming (Manz and Sims et al, 1980) to emphasizing organizational design (Mills, 1983; Manz et al., 1990; Manz, 1992), to management of culture and norms (Shipper and Manz, 1992) and the benefits of empowering subordinates (Ross, 1994).

The role of leadership in self-management has also been discussed (Manz and Sims, 1987). Stewart and Manz (1995: 750) summarize the challenge in this by posing the following question: 'How does one lead others who are supposed to lead themselves?' In their answer, they stress how leaders ought to engage in 'social learning'. Neck and Manz (1992; 1996) similarly argue that self-management can be learnt by 'thought self-leadership training' and that this results in more optimistic perceptions of the situation at hand and, consequently, self-efficacy. Wageman (2001) as well as Druskat and Wheeler (2004) reaffirm the belief that self-managing teams need an external leader in order to be efficient. External leaders need to balance between building relationships, and empowering and persuading their teams for them to function (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Along the same lines, Langfred (2004) points out that a high degree of trust weakens peer-pressure. Through this, small self-managing teams might end up being less functional than intended (see also Uhl-Bien and Graen, 1998).

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3   Historically, self-management has been a way for workers to organize production themselves. In Yugoslavia, for example, the task of organizing factories and production was transferred from the federal state to the workers. In Chile, during the 1970s, before the coupe d'état, workers also self-managed production to some extent (Petras and H Veltmeyer, 2006; Flaherty, 2003)

4   In heath care, self-management could be seen as a way to cut costs by letting the patient take care of his or her own health treatment (see e.g. Groessl and Cronan, 2000).

Self-management has also been criticized. Markham and Markham (1995) argue that the level of analysis in self-management is wrong; or, rather, that it misses its target. Self-management focuses too much, they claim, on the individual, his or her well-being, and not the tasks to be performed or the well-being of the organization. They argue that self-leadership is a more adequate concept, or at least broader, in the sense that it also includes self-management. Drawing upon Manz (1992), Markham and Markham (1995) differentiate the concepts by saying that 'the application of self-management techniques tends to allow employees significant self-influence regarding how to complete a task to meet a standard (as defined by the system), whereas self-leadership addresses *what* should be done and *why,* in addition to *how* to do it' (Markham and Markham, 1995: 346). They admit that such a distinction is hard to identify empirically as their rewards are not that easily separated into different categories (i.e. system and personal rewards). Yet, they claim that to 'lead oneself' is different from managing oneself, mainly due to the fact that the former does not include task-descriptions whereas the latter does.

Autonomy and self-efficacy is required for self-leadership (Norris, 2008). When the employee is granted autonomy, self-leadership is moreover supposed to be empowering. Empowerment, however, relies on self-regulatory behavior, which seems to come into conflict with the simultaneously granted autonomy. In order to reconcile this contradiction, Neck and Houghton (2006: 271) argue that self-leadership aims at 'a self-influence process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform', and 'consists of specific behavioral and cognitive strategies designed to positively influence personal effectiveness'. So, for self-leadership to work, it is necessary to have a 'hierarchical organization of the self-regulatory system in the form of superordinate and subordinate feedback loops or goals' (Neck and Houghton, 2006: 276). It is noteworthy that hierarchies of self-regulatory systems, and thus of managerial control, are required for self-leadership and also for self-management to work. Although this effectively reaffirms the notions of normative (Kunda, 1992) and/or concertive controls (Barker, 1993) in post-bureaucratic organizations, where employees have a high degree of autonomy, it does not provide any satisfactory answer to the question of how self-management, in more formal and standardized work settings, is taking place, or how it possibly can be resisted.

What actually constitutes self-management is still debated however (Castaneda et al., 1999; Markham and Markham, 1995; Millikin et al., 2010; Neck and Houghton, 2006; Norris, 2008). Although most scholars have moved away from proposing behavioral programming (e.g. Pearce and Manz, 2005; Tsui and Ashford, 1994), the quotes above, from the blog, nonetheless suggest that this, at least to some extent, is prevalent in fast-food restaurants. Remarkably though, most previous research has studied self-management in teams, between teams, or in terms of (thought) self-leadership, but not how selves become manageable, managed and held responsible through self-management in formal and standardized work settings.

Resistance as self-management

In the fast food restaurant, to 'manage' is not only something done by managers. Workers also do managerial tasks, sometimes against their will. But, when resisting,

what are the workers struggling against when doing self-management, oneself or the management? To answer this question, it is not necessary to look into resistance as such, nor into the specific kind of resistance that has be labeled sabotage, parody, cynicism, etc. Either such acts of resistance are 'decaf', i.e. not involving real acts of opposition (Contu, 2008), or 'unproductive' insofar as the subject is seen as already-present and hence not produced while resisting power (Fleming, 2005a). Instead, what is called for is a notion that can elucidate the connection between self-management and acts of resistance. Such a notion of resistance moreover needs to show how selves become manageable through techniques of power, on the one hand, and how manageable selves can enact resistance, on the other hand.

Foucault does not explicitly mention the concept of self-management (e.g. Spoelstra, 2007). A common thread in many of his analyses of power, however, is how one is managing oneself. When following Foucault, resistance and power are inseparable. It is said that power needs resistance to function, but resistance also needs power to exist (Hoy, 2004). The mere existence of resistance represents perhaps the clearest sign that power, in one way or another, is functioning. If power would not be functioning, resistance would not exist. The idea that power requires resistance is perhaps best captured in an oft-quoted phrase by Foucault: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1998: 95). This phrase, its notion of resistance and the implications thereof, have been discussed widely and in various contexts. Also in the context of self-management, defined broadly, some tentative implications have been discussed. For one thing, if power requires resistance, then the subject must have agency if only to choose to align with the present power relation (e.g. Smart, 1982; Taylor, 1984). Otherwise, power would be absolute. Additionally, if the subject is able to go beyond the present power relation, the subject must necessarily have autonomy, or degrees thereof, hence making resistance possible (Thompson, 2003; Wisnewski, 2000).

It is assumed that power comes from below, exists in relationships and is found everywhere (Foucault, 1998). Moreover, by being neutral, relations of power are reproduced whilst also being asymmetrical and unequal. The key question then is whether power works through domination or on a voluntary basis. For Foucault (1998), the short answer is that power works through domination, within forced relations. There is no voluntarism involved in upholding any relations of power. If this is correct, then the relations on which power is dependent for reproducing itself can be disclosed *and* inverted, thereby causing a change in the way power functions. That said, Foucault (1984/1987) emphasizes that he does not speak about power in general. There is no universal, ahistorical or objective theory of power in his writings (cf. Fraser, 1989). Instead, he speaks about 'relationships of power', nothing else. It follows that relations of power, their technologies and deployments (disciplinary, bio-power, governmental etc), have to be studied in particular contexts.

Even though domination and force are key concepts for Foucault, he did change his view on power (Hoy, 1985). In his later work, Foucault seeks to describe how conduct and action work in shaping the relationships of power and, in particular, how it works within and through the subject. This is made most clear in the influential and much debated essay 'The subject and power'. Here, Foucault writes that 'what defines a

relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future' (1982: 789). That is to say, once again, power seeks to produce subjects through conditioning the context, thereby forcing the subject to manage herself. Not only does this tend to reproduce present power relations but it also shows that the foremost outcome of relationships of power is the self-managing subject. Insofar as the subject is an outcome *of* power, not merely a condition *for* it, one could say that power produces useful, adaptable and appropriate human subjects through domination *and* the self (Foucault, 1982; 1984/1987; and 1993), and this is done by narrowing the possible ways of conduct in the temporal category of the futural (Hoy, 2009).

Criticisms of Foucault have focused on a variety of issues, ranging from the lack of a normative standpoint and of justifications for resistance (Fraser, 1985; 1989), to the incoherence of his argumentation (Taylor, 1984) and the question of agency (Smart, 1982; Taylor, 1984). Foucault responded to some of this criticism in his later writings (and interviews). Regarding the latter issue, i.e. the question of agency, Foucault (1982; 1984/1987) asserts that power needs 'free' subjects to function. In an oft-quoted phrase, Foucault also writes that 'Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are "free"' (1982: 790). By this he is often said to mean that relations of power designate and disseminate 'free' subjects, but because they are 'free' they also become trajectories for retaining the present relationship of power. Conversely, suppose subjects were not to be 'free', then power would be absolute. As this is not the case, presumably, this implies that if the subject is 'free' to manage herself by way of consent, this would at least require agency. To act 'freely' only within present power relations is not sufficient for radical change though. Rather, the subject has to go beyond, even while staying within present relations of power. Insofar as the subject must go beyond present relations, resistance cannot solely be based on agency but must have a basis in autonomy also (Healy, 2001; Thompson, 2003; Wisnewski, 2000). The question, then, is whether this is possible.

Although Foucault does not speak about agency or autonomy, per se, the later Foucault (1982; 1984/1987) speaks about liberty and freedom, and how this is required for both power to function and for resistance to exist.[5] The importance, here, of autonomy has also been recognized by some scholars (e.g. Healy, 2001; Thompson, 2003; Wisnewski, 2000). Yet, Bevir (1999) claims, and rightly so according to me, that autonomy is unfeasible as subjects always work against a pre-individual background from which they cannot escape. Similarly, Thompson argues that 'to develop resistances against these [existing] practices from within them would remain merely reactive; they would do nothing other than counter the subjugation that the technologies of subjectivity seek to forge' (2003: 131). If so, then self-managing subjects operate only within the area defined by the relationships of power, thereby limiting the possibility of resistance to this area.

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5   The exeption to this are the published lectures from 1982-1983, *Government of self and others*. Here Foucault (2010) frequently mentions autonomy when lecturing on Kant.

Resisting self-management might seem like an unfeasible or even impossible task. Despite this, or perhaps rather, thanks to this, several scholars have tried to understand the possibility of resistance – sometimes by referring to Foucault, sometimes not. One stream of thought which draws on Foucault's ideas suggests, it is by contesting oneself as a subject, or by de-centering one's sense of self, that resistance becomes possible. To resist is accordingly about 'dissolving your sense of who you are and disrupting your sense of what the right thing to do is' (Hoy, 2004: 89). Which is to say, resistance is about dissolving oneself and not so much about 'providing an alternative account of who you are and what you ought to do' (*ibid.*). Foucault also asks himself (and the reader): 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are' (1982: 785). From this question follows the idea that resisting self-management is a matter of reclaiming the self, of placing the relations of power in the service *of* and *for* ourselves (Thompson, 2003).

Approaching the blogs

The blogs referred to in this article are about work in fast food restaurants. Since many of the blog posts describe the typical work in fast food restaurants, they are used as a source of empirical evidence. I followed them on and off for about six months, during the second half of 2009. I was an observer and did not participate in any discussion. Still, one may wonder, what do one or two blogs about work in fast food restaurants say about all the things happening in such a place? Or, are fast food restaurants even particularly appropriate workplaces to study if one is interested in self-management, and how this can possibly be resisted? I do not know the answer to these questions; it is left for the reader to answer. Additionally, I do not know if it is possible to study work in fast-food restaurants online, through blogs, at all. The assumption is nonetheless that blogs, as being part of an online world, stand in relation to the offline world. Wittel (2000, paragraph 22) also argues that 'e-mailing, online chatting, web surfing and other interactive practices are very real experiences for the people performing them'. He continues by arguing that '[i]t has to be acknowledged that the use of interactive media for communication can be as real as a talk on the phone or a face-to-face dialogue' (*ibid.*). That is to say, to be online is as real as being offline. Similarly, Ward asserts that '[t]he notion of a purely virtual community and the idea of the post-human are both extremely optimistic and rather grand given that the majority of people do not have the opportunity to live their lives as "pure information"'. 'Instead', she persists, 'they continue to fight their social and political battles in the wider, concrete social world' (Ward, 1999: 103). I agree with Wittel's argument as well as with Ward's conclusion that 'any individual virtual community must be perceived as being in a relationship with the wider physical world', for better or for worse.

The fast food restaurant and its blogging workers

Fast food restaurants are well-know organizations, and for various reasons. There is no need to give a detailed description of a particular restaurant or to give a bird's eye-view of the whole industry. Instead, let us begin straightaway, and do so where the action begins: at the cashier.

The cashier

> I repeat everything as I've learned to do this when working at the cashier. The problem is that this mental injury, coming from the work, penetrates into other elements of life and work. For example, I repeat everything my supervisor asks me to do, as if I were an idiot. (Anonymous, *The fast food restaurant,* 26th of November 2007)

The cashier is the employee who meets costumers. At the register, the cashier is supposed to repeat what the customers order. The cashier does so in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Any misunderstandings that cause mistakes in the order will take time and resources away from doing other things. Not only is the cashier supposed to repeat every order but he or she is also supposed to follow certain standardized scripts.

> I hate my cashier-voice, it is so fuuucking inferior and pathetic. "Is there aaaanything else I could do for youuuu?" (Jamesy, *The fast food restaurant*, 26th of November 2007)

Jamesy's mind gets twisted at, and by, work when describing how her voice adapts to corporate policies. She is obviously disdainful about it but not without still paying due respect to customers. One might even say that she is reflective about her behavior in a masochistic way (Cederström and Grassman, 2008), as she now, on the whole, looks back scornfully and, in doing so, distances herself from her own conduct. To distance oneself from the organization, to dis-identify, has earlier been described as a strategy for resistance (Collinson, 1994). But to dis-identify in this position is difficult as customers identify the employee working at the cash register as (a member of) the organization. Consequently, in addition to the demands stemming from the organization and its management, customers are also demanding.

> On one side, you have an unpleasant, grumpy and unrealistic customer that you have to smile in the face, even though you only want to jump over the counter, swinging a left hook and let hell break loose. On the other side, you have a nasty supervisor whose face you just want to press down into the deep-fat fryer. (Anonymous, *The fast food restaurant*, the 21st of Sept 2007)

Here, the blogger is squeezed between the customer on one hand and by the manager on the other. Against her will, she has to smile towards the customers and follow her supervisor's instructions. But what she really wants to do is to use physical violence towards both of them. Still, she is aware of her position in which she reifies present relationships of power. On one side, there is management 'whose face you just want to press down into the deep-fat fryer'. On another side, there is the customer who is 'unpleasant, grumpy and unrealistic'. Occasionally customers also report to management if they are unhappy with the service. So, instead of jumping 'over the counter, swinging the left hook and start the inferno', she smiles. In addition there are the co-workers. If co-workers do not get along with one another, for any reason, they might inform management of what is happening, spreading rumors. All in all, management, customers and co-workers are the three primary relations of power at work in the fast food restaurant (see also Lopez, 2010).

As suggested by this, the fast-food worker is surrounded by relations of power. Yet, the work at the cash register is standardized and controlled, leaving almost no space open for self-management. It is when management imposes this task as such to the workers, that they are allowed to self-manage themselves. It follows that self-management has to

be learnt by the worker somehow. Markham and Markham (1995: 347) also argue that 'the formal superior must take some type of proactive stance with respect to developing his or her subordinates so that they can reach the desirable end state of self-management (or, if the situation warrants it, self-leadership)'. But while formal superiors try to assist the subordinates so that they will be able to self-manage, they are also opening up the possibility for them to resist.

Resisting management

When workers carry out managerial tasks and are held responsible for doing so, the idea of self-management emerges (Manz, Sims et al, 1980; Manz, 1982). It also stems from the development of the objectives of self-management: from cutting costs to motivating and empowering the workers (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999; Ross, 1994; Shipper and Manz, 1992). It is by giving responsibility to the workers, i.e. by wanting them to want to do management tasks, that managers try to empower them. The workers, however, receive this reluctantly, as expressed by Jamesy:

> For some reason I do not yet understand, many at work trust or rely on me. Or, of course my colleagues trust me. They know that I would never gossip, pass things on or manage them. They know that I do not care if they violate nonsense-rules, take breaks or eat French fries when supervisors are not present. But there is another kind of trust or confidence I'm talking about. Work leaders' trust. They seem to think that I'm honest and obedient, a good worker simply.
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> […]
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> In any case, many more have gotten the idea that they can trust me, to keep an eye on things when they are away/in a different part of the restaurant. Increasingly, I hear 'Anna, do you tell the cashiers to blah blah.., Anna, make sure this gets done when I do some paper work? etc...'. (Jamesy, *Jamesy's blog*, 17th of Jan 2008)[6]

Having trust from someone suggests that control is not necessary since trust is the main ingredient for self-managing teams to function, although too much of it can weaken the indispensable peer-pressure (Langfred, 2004). But this is not simply the delegation of authority as what is delegated, sticking to this managerial concept, is in fact managerial tasks. Instead, what is happening here is the downsourcing of managements' responsibility through the means of self-management. Insofar as management is taking advantage of the asymmetrical, non-reciprocal and unequal relation of power, trust allows the worker, Jamesy in this case, to go about the tasks that she has been given: it allows her to self-managerially do management tasks. Now she is not only a worker, doing manual labor, but also an 'empowered' worker with managerial responsibility. Allegedly, she is not ready to cope with this; but nevertheless she seems to cope with the situation by way of consent, by accepting the power relation temporarily. Still, she is more of a bystander than a manager doing management as she allows events to occur without intervening. By having managerial responsibility, she is able to turn self-management within the existing relation of power against the intentions of management.

To master against one's will

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6   Anna is not her real name according to the blog.

In addition to management and customers, the relation between co-workers is also enmeshed in power. When subordinates are obligated to carry out tasks beyond their formal responsibilities, for instance management tasks, they are, as previously mentioned, empowered (e.g. Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). This, however, implies that workers identify with the organization. But this is not always the case. Jamesy does not identify with the organization. It becomes clear as she writes about the responsibilities inherent in the managerial attempt to impose managerial tasks and the kinds of dilemmas this puts her into.

> This puts me in a difficult situation. I have to pass on orders to my co-workers, which puts me over them. I cannot do that. I'm really uncomfortable in such a situation. Firstly, I do not want to do that, and secondly, I am almost unable to do so. Not that I cannot take initiative, lead a group if needed, and the like. But to give orders is quite another matter. I did not understand the difference in full until now. In my circles, open hierarchies in which such things prevail are non-existent; to take the lead there is always on the mandate of the others. I do not find that a job in today's society gives a mandate like that, and definitely not over others with the same occupation. It's called to master, which I hate when others do to me at work. (Jamesy, *Jamey's blog*, 17th of January 2008)

To 'master' is against her will. To 'master' without mandate from others is unthinkable in her circles, as she puts it. However, this does not mean that there is no will to power on her side. Instead, the will to power manifests as power to resist mastering others. Following this, one could say that power is de-amplified, or, rather, that the relation of power is weakened. What makes this possible is the fact that her subjectivity is not entirely colonized by the organization. Her idea of self is formed exterior to the relations in fast food restaurant. The 'circles' she mentions are such an exterior space for de-subjectification of the self. Not that power is excluded there either, as a state of post-power is not possible, but it allows another (additional) sense of self to emerge.

Changing positions

It seems Jamesy can bear with the fact of managing herself. But doing management tasks generally is conceived as a burden, something imposed, not as rewarding or empowering (cf. Kirkman and Rosen, 1999; Shipper and Manz, 1992). Yet, Jamesy copes with the situation by consent, or, rather, by turning into a temporary self-management mode. In other words, she is complying by simply forwarding orders given by management. When doing this, she emphasizes that it is not her that is being responsible for the orders as such, but instead the work-leader or manager. She states this by saying that:

> My tactic so far has been to nod and smile, and then let the others stand still [to have short break] and rest a bit before saying that X wants us to sweep and wipe off. Nothing forced, nothing that is personally addressed. But they comply anyhow. And I stand there and feel uncomfortable. If it is not obvious, I usually lie to the supervisor when s/he comes back and say that we did not have the time, but usually it is too obvious. When I avoid saying anything at all and pretending it is nothing, I am the one who has to take the invisible punch. This is nothing that I have anything against; I rather take irritated eyes than have to command others. […]
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> I'm thinking of saying it straight out the next time it comes up. To simply say 'Nope, orders, those you have to give yourself. I am not a manager. It is not part of my job tasks'. (Jamesy, *Jamesy's blog*, 17th of Jan 2008)

A comment by someone called nicx, on the same blog-posting, advocates that she should:

> Argue! Otherwise there is a risk that unconsciously you will start to give orders to people even though the manager did not ask for it. You don't get paid for bossing around, say it simply and clearly if the WL [work leader] complains. (nicx quoted in, *Jamsey's blog*, 17th of Jan 2008)

These quotes elucidate how attempts of imposing management tasks are both conceived and contested by the workers. Jamesy, for example, emphasizes that giving orders is done without force, as she does not want to be held responsible amongst her co-workers. She manages herself on the one hand, while allowing the manager to speak 'through' her on the other hand. By emphasizing that this is what manager or work leader X want 'us' to do, she is circumventing the responsibility of carrying out managerial tasks amongst her co-workers. She is still responsible though to the work leader. But, in this relation, she can take 'the invisible punch', if so necessary.

Finding new tactics

The quotes above suggest that bloggers write about emotions, resistance and much else happing at work, even at home presumably. To be that engaged or committed to work while at home could be seen as the corporate colonization of nonwork space and time (Caproni, 2004; Cerulo, 1997; Hill et al, 1998), and subsequently the heart of a managed subjectivity (cf. Fleming, 2005b; Hochschild, 1983). But instead of seeing these blogs as an expression of the corporate colonization of non-work space and time, they could be seen as spaces where to discover new ways of being and doing resistance. For example, the blog 'The Post Office' [*Postverket*] carries an email from one of its readers:

> I have spread the word about the blog a little. Basically, I have talked about it, when at the coffee machine, to colleagues that I usually hang out with at work. A number of small positive, more or less obvious, effects have come from the blog. Colleagues whom I talked to about it, spreads it further and discuss it with others. A few colleagues with whom I in earlier discussions more or less taught how things were, they have now read the blog and since become much more active as they have "read" and "know" stuff that I have before had to burp up. They participate in discussions with more confidence. A few motivational suggestions have come up, such as "we could also do that" and discussions of how things should be done on both a small and a larger scale. The blog has thus opened up more and more direct discussion about our situation. The funny thing is that in the past, I was usually the one initiating these discussions, whereas it is now my co-workers who start them – sometimes, by referring to the blog. (*Postverket,* no date, March 2009)

Indeed, what the boss says can actually be questioned, contested and resisted as this has virtually been done before. Meanwhile writing, reading and commenting on blogs, it is possible to gain insights into novel tactics of how to resist self-management. This might also effect what is happening in the offline world, as illustrated in the Post Office blog. If so, then offline and online worlds are connected, as suggested by both Wittell (2000) and Ward (1999).

Discussion

Self-management is often seen as a way to cut costs, to empower employees, and so a 'substitute for leadership' (Manz, Sims et al, 1980). Usually it is also understood as involving responsibility and autonomy as far as the worker is 'free' to fulfill tasks as defined by the organization (Markham and Markham, 1995). Yet a self-regulatory hierarchical system is   needed for self-management, let alone for self-leadership, to work as intended (Neck and Houghton, 2003). Along these lines, the proponents of self-management argue for its benefits, both, for the organization and for the individual employee. This relates in various ways to the notions of power and resistance in the later Foucault (e.g. 1982; 1984/1987; 1993; 1998). If the relations of power produce 'free' subjects, then these 'free' subjects have no choice but to 'freely' manage themselves. As any other technology, however, self-management is neutral, without properties. Self-management can thus be used in both negative and positive ways.

In the fast food restaurant, self-management is made possible due to management's attempts at imposing, or rather downsourcing, the task of doing management as such to the trustworthy and reliable worker. For the worker, in that situation, there is no choice but to be empowered, to be forced to self-manage. But as it turns out, the freedom inherent in self-management also makes resistance possible. Freedom, as here understood, is limited to the possibility of refusing and not refusing to fulfill what one is expected to in specific designated positions. One could say, echoing Foucault (1998), that resistance is only exerted within the freedom granted by the relations of power, neither beyond nor exterior to them. As this freedom is within the realm of the relations of power, i.e. the fast food restaurant, it resembles agency (Bevir, 1999) more than autonomy (Thompson, 2003; Wisnewski, 2000). The self-managed worker can, in other words, by means of being 'free', refuse to be master over others. It follows from this that *resistance is more about resisting oneself from doing certain actions at certain times*, and about *resisting oneself from being in certain position at certain times*, than anything else. Put differently, *resistance is about resisting one self from being and doing what one is 'free' to do.*

Turning to previous studies, it has been repeatedly shown, perhaps most notably by Kunda (1992), how workers use different means in order to rebut attempts to normatively control them. Some of the strategies or techniques of resistance include distancing (Collinson, 1994; Fleming and Spicer, 2003), coping (Carls, 2007; Pedersen, 2009), or circumventing and speaking (Prasad and Prasad, 2000). What a lot of these have in common is that resistance is part of a dis-identification process, away from, and against, the organization. It has also been suggested that dis-identification processes are part of the production of a new sense of self. When so doing, not only is one distancing oneself from the organization, but one is also distancing oneself from oneself (Fleming, 2005a). Still, if cynicism is the subject's production of subjectivities, or identity-based resistance, is this not merely following the call for 'flexibility' in the contemporary employability regime? As far as this regime usually goes, workers are expected to stay at work, while at home, yet being 'flexible' enough to search for other jobs continuously (Contu, 2008; Maravelias, 2007). Since the occupational self is insecure (Collinson, 2003), let alone singular, the self is placed socially in-between work, home, and the possibility of having to search for a new job. This makes identity-based

resistance more of an outcome of power than a means of resistance. Therefore, it is not enough to 'just be yourself' insofar as this is a form of neo-normative control (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). Instead, one must seek to go beyond dis-identification practices, and Costas and Fleming (2009) consequently argue that self-alienation is the way forward.

This study contributes to this body of knowledge by arguing that resistance is not so much about the creative production of subjectivities, but rather, that resistance is about derailing the entire notion of subjectivity. In order to achieve this end, self-management has to be employed.[7] The self needs to be reclaimed by means of self-management, and the relations of power need to be placed in the service *of* and *for* ourselves (Thompson, 2003). This is done to a certain extent, as it were, also in the extremely standardized and formal workplace setting of the fast food restaurant. Here, self-management is imposed, seen as a burden, and subsequently something individual workers attempt to resist. However, within the freedom granted by self-management, one may 'freely' change positions. That is to say, it is possible to resist relations of power insofar as one is 'free' to self-manage within these. But resistance is not about changing positions; rather, changing positions makes it possible to go in the direction of refusing what we are (Foucault, 1982: 785), or of dissolving oneself (Hoy, 2004). So, if the freedom inherent in self-management allows the worker to 'freely' change positions within the relations of power, then, *resistance is most of all about resisting oneself.*

Conclusion

In this article it has been showed that self-management can be resisted. It can be resisted as the self-managed workers use the freedom that comes with self-management to refrain from doing certain actions. The freedom of refraining from certain actions is made possible due to the workers' ability to change their ways of being (within the present relations of power, i.e. the restaurant). The workers' ability to change their ways of being illustrates that the freedom inherent in self-management is not only used against management's intent, but against oneself as a subject. Resisting self-management is thus a matter of managing oneself in such a way that one is resisting oneself. When resisting oneself, the worker is on his or her way of dissolving one's sense of self in the fast food restaurant.

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7   After having read these blogs, someone might actually end up resisting imposed self-management. Apart from being the empirical material for this study, these blogs are also part of the internet, and by that also part of a larger public sphere from which others can gain access about new ways of being (i.e. not being 'workers') and of doing (not 'working').

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