



## 'Lines Of Flight': A History of Resistance and the Thematic of Ethics, Death and Animality\*

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### abstract

Critical organization studies and broader social theory has recently refocused on how subjects of control and power often engage in acts of resistance. The conception of resistance increasingly deployed is one derived from the post-structuralist turn in social theory and in particular the work of Michel Foucault. This paper will demonstrate the very specific philosophical history that quietly informs this approach to resistance, a history that does not begin nor end with Foucault. This tradition of scholarship involves a turn to ethics (especially the ethics of death and animality) and in theorising an 'after organization studies' it will be argued that this emphasis can both enrich contemporary analysis and create some poignant limitations.

### Introduction

In much recent critical organization studies it has become almost obligatory to point out the varied and often subtle ways those subjected to domination in the employment situation may resist, challenge and change relations of power. The realisation that workers can resist the techniques that solidify managerial control is by no means new or novel. Indeed, even a cursory glance at both the Marxist and Weberian traditions of research, for example, is telling of how prominent the theme has been, especially in relation to industrial struggle and conflict. For many years critical scholars have stressed not only the unequal and uneven distribution of power that so often characterises contemporary work but also the diverse and sometimes creative ways workers subvert the order of things (e.g. Hyman, 1972; Beynon, 1973; Friedman, 1977; Edwards, 1979). Given this rich history of industrial research it was surprising to see subsequent interest in worker resistance 'dry up' and all but disappear in many radical investigations. As a number of accounts have argued, critical studies of work tended to present an over-totalising vision of new management controls (corporate culture, surveillance, self-managing teams, etc.) that were seen to be so pervasive and normalizing that it erased

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not only the means of resistance but also the desire (Collinson, 1994; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Fournier and Grey, 1999). Indeed, the 'worker-as-docile-automaton' portrayal of organizations has been so seductive in some research that even negativity, dissent and opposition were deemed functional to managerial hegemony (for an analysis of this literature see Fleming and Spicer, 2002 and forthcoming).

Over the last few years the concept of resistance has begun to reappear in critical research. Even though it is probably fair to say that the reason for the initial hiatus was due to a particular reading of Foucault, as many have argued, it is also true that the renewed emphasis on resistance has a definite Foucauldian flavour. Indeed, traditional approaches to resistance predominantly treated it as a synonym for 'industrial struggle' whereby opposition only took the form of overt, organized and confrontational practices (Kondo, 1990; Bennett, 1998). There are some exceptions to this generalisation (see Roy, 1952, 1958; Burawoy, 1979) but it has been the evocation of Foucauldian motifs that has allowed us to think about resistance in new and broader ways that do not rest solely upon the nomenclature of dialectics, true interests and overt antagonism. For Foucault, because power is increasingly mobilised at the often imperceptible level of subjectivity, self and the ethical body in non-absolutist states, it is also here that an ambiguous site of various practices of subversion and escape attempts appears. He argued, for example, why transgressive acts "against the submission of subjectivity – is becoming more and more important, even though the struggle against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared. Quite the contrary" (Foucault, 1982: 213). So although industrial struggle, for example, is still a notable modality of dissent, the spread of 'high commitment' organizations and hyper-surveillance has seen the development of an investigative framework more attuned to identity, subjectivity and everyday ethical practices to register resistant activities. This Foucauldian sensibility seems to have shifted our attention away from class politics to those subtle micro-practices that do not necessarily aim for 'revolution' but nevertheless allow subordinates to construct counter-spheres within forms of domination, change the trajectory of controls and quietly challenge power relations without necessarily leaving them (de Certeau, 1984).

This approach to employee resistance has become increasingly popular in critical organization studies with identity, alternative discourses and quotidian subversions (especially in organizations that aim to colonize the subjectivities of workers) coming to the fore in many accounts of recalcitrance (e.g. McKinlay and Taylor, 1996; Knights and McCabe, 1998, 2000; Ezzamel, *et al.*, 2001). In accordance with the theme of this special issue I want to demonstrate how this approach to resistance does not begin nor end with Foucault, an impression one may have when reading the literature. In theorising an 'after organization studies' it will be argued that currently popular conceptions of employee resistance must be positioned in a highly specific tradition of thought that has already jumped ahead of what has been referred to as a Foucauldian analytic of workplace transgression (for example see Jermier *et al.*, 1994). I maintain that it is crucial to understand this moving intellectual history if one is to have a more complete knowledge of the tools we are employing to explain resistance in contemporary organizations. It has been argued elsewhere that Foucault is often extracted from his contextual tradition (Jones, 2002) and similarly there is a danger of this happening with many fashionable approaches to resistance that appeal to his *oeuvre*

for legitimacy. It is not just a case of arguing that as opposed to Marxist analysis, for example, the Foucauldian perspective concentrates on identity formation, subjective enactments and everyday practices because without implying historical depth to this take on resistance the differences inevitably remain superficial and forced. So if we have histories of a non-Leviathan conception of power then surely we should also attend to a similar history, however modest and sketchy, of the recalcitrant subject of control? And more importantly, if we reflect on some of the intellectual roots that inform and underpin this presently in-vogue conception of dissent then could we not become more sensitised to the problems that invariably trouble it?

Although this philosophical history is obviously complex, fluid and occasionally contradictory, I will simplify matters by concentrating on the key figures of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari as in some way representative of a particular stream of thought (with many tributaries) but that is by no means completely allied in axioms or influences. Notwithstanding this heterogeneity, from Nietzsche onward, *ethics* (as in *ēthos*, conduct of self, minuscule semiotics, style etc.) is established as a domain of paramount importance for resistance. Here, the object of resistance is not only capitalism but also certain processes associated with modernity and the self-structuring flows of force that characterises the moral and technical milieu of modernism. And rather than resistance obeying a mechanistic or Newtonian image whereby every force constitutes an equal and opposite force (the dialectic of domination and resistance), we instead envision power (the Law) as a line or threshold that is crossed in the transgressive act. The quintessential lines being *death* and *animality*, significant pre-occupations with this mode of thought. The investigation proceeds in a rather linear fashion and is by no means comprehensive, beginning with a discussion of Nietzsche and Heidegger on the question of ethics, then onto Bataille and Foucault and finally Deleuze and Guattari. I will conclude with some provocations about the limitations that this tradition of scholarship may have for contemporary social theory and organizational studies.

## A Question of Ethics

In conducting a conceptual history of what has commonly been referred to as a Foucauldian analytic of resistance our first stop must inevitably be the extremely influential works of Friedrich Nietzsche. It is customary to posit the now classic Foucault article 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971/1977) as the most substantial connection between a Foucauldian power/resistance matrix and the general works of Nietzsche. Indeed, the ritual of genealogy as the source of resistant knowledge and the corollary admonition to 'historize, historize!' would seem the most natural influence on how we appreciate oppositional practices. But I would argue that this runs the risk of missing Nietzsche's fervent turn to ethics as probably of more consequential import to understanding current approaches to resistance. Nietzsche generally found the mechanisms of politics in the formal sense at best suspicious and at worst vile. Politics as an overpowering organization of bodies was something to be superseded and carefully cleaved from the organism through an emphasis on *ēthos*, conduct of self and style as a line of escape from the asceticism and moral nihilism that he saw engulfing

the modern polity. Such a distinction is, of course, entirely arbitrary, and, if taken to extremes, comes to look more like the apolitical privatism of bourgeois liberalism than radical praxis (see for example Rorty, 1989). But if we go to the other extreme and collapse ethics into politics then other problems arise whereby conduct of self is merely another political territory no different from the state or civil society (see for example Sartre [1976] in relation to political philosophy and Wray-Bliss [2002] in organization studies). The rough distinction alludes to the idea that we can be organized by others (politics) but cannot be ontologically *lived* by others (ethics). For Nietzsche, self is intimately linked to *ēthos* or what each of us make of those small freedoms of everyday life and limited capacities to invent a gesture that constitutes a style of self and *poiēsis* (a skilled bringing forth) of conduct. This angle on sociality takes us beyond the levelling banality of 'everything is political' and allows us to tease out the different plateaus interconnecting the personal and political in any given form of life.

It is undoubtedly this privileging of ethics as a space of agency and self-transmogrification that forms a key antecedent for current Foucauldian conceptions of resistance. For Nietzsche the perennial ethical question of 'how should I (we) live?' must be supplemented with a judgement regarding the context in which the question is borne and asked. In *The Twilight of the Idols* this judgment takes on a forlorn, menacing tone: "In every age the wisest have passed the identical judgement on life: it is worthless" (1888/1974: 9). Nietzsche's own repetition of this judgement serves as an indictment about the impending nihilism that only the lone madman in the street presages and the crowd laughs off as impossible. Only when there is no longer any up and down nor day and night, when the strictures of Christian morality have run their course and have become but empty shells that the herd nevertheless worship as a timeless right, does Nietzsche ask his question: 'how should I live?' In his masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5/1974), we see the question posed not as a political quandary but an ethical incitement, an integral precursor to some of Foucault's concerns with minor knowledges and sexuality. This somewhat rabid book argues that it is *Geist* achieved as *ēthos*, as the art of bricolage and manipulation that should become the pre-eminent location of struggle. If the weight of all man's errors and follies (how else could our histories be represented?) hangs over us like a nightmare then is it not the immured soul that needs to be passed through if one is to live anterior to subjugation? If it is true that us moderns are *our own* burden, having instituted self as Law, then for this burden to be repealed is it not at the very expense of ourselves? And what exactly would this Joycean 'waking up' from the nightmare of self look like when we are the very presence we are trying to escape?

In the character of Zarathustra, Nietzsche maps a line of flight with the concept of *overcoming* (*Überwindung* or *Verwindung*) when he argues that the 'polluted stream' of man (or what is constructed as 'man' in a given historical and cultural location) is something to be superseded through the ethical transvaluation of self: "man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss... what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end" (Nietzsche, 1883-5/1974: 9). In this trope, modern humanity is both the rope and the lowly beast. The analogy of the beast should therefore never be confused with animality or Nature. Indeed, the sublime figure of the non-human animal is the joyous presentiment of what humans could signify because they can *forget* (*selbstvergessen*). Why else would Zarathustra prefer the company of animals to

people? In order to overcome the normalized self (the abnegating Christian subjectivity in this case), Zarathustra teaches us how to become a non-(hu)man or what we are not. This concept is very close to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal because the animal (the majestic eagle or the crafty serpent) does not languish under the spellbinding curse of self-consciousness and so listens to its body and not its soul (Deleuze, 1983). Zarathustra teaches us how to listen and see with our ears. According to Nietzsche, physiognomy is the surfaced loci of *phrónēsis* (or practical wisdom) and the way one deports oneself forms the ground of an ethical practice, whereby a visceral expressive knowledge of small but brutal truths (the dog-like Diogenes, for example, pissing and masturbating in the marketplace) can potentially short-circuit an over-cumbersome morality. What makes Zarathustra particularly interesting is how he never stipulates what kind of animal-self one is to ultimately become. He was no *zoon politikon* in the modern sense because he did not want to organize nor be organized. When his small band of followers requested a political doctrine, he refused and told them that, in order to follow his example, they must paradoxically forsake him (making infraction the *sine qua non* of ethical freedom). Self-overcoming (or forgetting) is apparently an aleatory affair and not easily reduced to a programme.

For Heidegger, Nietzsche's seductive herd is transformed into *das Man* or 'the They' that is always there before us and this is the point of departure for a line of flight. In *Being and Time* (1927/1996) *Dasein's* temporal sequencing comprises of *Existenz* (the futural running ahead of ourselves, being as expectation), thrownness (we are always already here, the past we cannot get behind) and falling (prey to habits, entanglement in tradition, objects and *das Man* – the present). This third element of *Dasein* is extremely important, according to Heidegger, because we are always falling away from ourselves in the endless labyrinth of objects and language. The desire for *Eigentlichkeit* or authenticity (*ownness* not of a 'true self' but a non-self), according to Heidegger, is not to be explained in terms of fidelity versus mendacity (the theological cogito) but a becoming-unto-ourselves as an uninterchangeable ontological Being anchored only as potential or possibility. Selfhood is first and foremost a processual openness and for *Dasein* to come to itself (as non-self) it must embrace its utmost possibility of not-being-here-any-more: *death*. With time comes change, passing and disintegration, and it is the radical singularity of our death (it is truly our own, no one can encounter our own death for us) that attunes us to the indissociable actuality and presence of Being within the noisy hustle and bustle of contemporary life.<sup>1</sup> Only within the passing middle ground of non-being is it apparent that 'we are not what we are' precisely because *Dasein* never 'is' in the first place.

We see people dying around us and we have medical science to explain death but it is still not our own – it is distant, in the future and often forgotten about. In order to overcome our modern selves and ironically become truly modern, according to

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1 This argument has been challenged by Levinas (1998, 2000) because it privileges *Dasein's* own death and ignores the death of others and acts of sacrifice. For Levinas, even *Dasein's* ontic field is imbued with otherness. But as Derrida (1995) points out, giving our life *for* another does not constitute a 'gifting' of death because that death is always still our own. The ontology of death cannot be gifted to another, only to *Dasein* itself in that "[by] means of the passage to death the soul attains its own freedom" (Derrida, 1995: 40).

Heidegger, we must live life as an anticipation of the immense and expansive NOT that is our fate, our ownmost and ultimate possibility that underlies all possibilities. This being free-unto-death is the most seditious form of praxis according to Heidegger, especially in a climate of bourgeois denial and fear of nothingness, because in death we behave otherwise in relation to *das Man* and the Law. This could be one reason for Heidegger's (1959/1978) fascination with Sophocles' *Antigone* (1974). In this eerie play, Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, is ethically constituted not only through her flouting of the patriarchal command issued by Creon (who orders the carrion of her brother be left unburied), but also by her impending demise as punishment for her disobedience. What Creon and the Chorus find so unsettling and intractable about Antigone is how the prospect of non-living does not generate acquiescence. She does not conceive her death as a gift of external darkness bequeathed by another because, as she puts it, 'I am already dead' – she is already herself in nothingness. Rather than choosing life as a lone positivity (as her sister did) she violates the decree and buries her dead brother because death is both her life and freedom. Such an overcoming of self and Law through the call and reception of Thanatos is something exemplary because it renders power ineffectual by embracing punishment as a deep-seated and perplexing freedom.

## Sex and Death

The turn to ethics in the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger established a horizon in which typically political concepts such as conflict, opposition and resistance could be transmuted into concerns relating to gesture, conduct and *phrónêsis*. Here we see a sort of tarrying between the two spheres creating a sometimes tenuous aporia within which the *transgressive self* comes to the fore in analysis. In Bataille's *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (1962) the ethical act *par excellence* is the sexual encounter or more precisely the erotic experience that Bataille argues may not even be linked to the act of sex in any nominal sense. Given its contiguous proximity to *ēthos*, it is not surprising, he argues, that the erotic nexus can potentially press subjectivity closer to its limit than almost any other experience. This is why sex and death are so intimately connected because, as Heidegger pointed out, death is the ultimate limit that structures Being. And, of course, to complete the theorem, traversing and joining both the erotic limit-experience and death is the transgressive act. There is a lot happening here so let's unpack some of it.

Eroticism can only be constituted within the context of Law, prohibition and punishment. Bataille frames erotic pleasure not in the realm of bio-reproduction but as an indeterminate and deeply alluring *fascination* with a forbidden act that the prohibition itself has helped create. The desire to breach the Law of pleasure is in itself a source of pleasure that does not originate *a priori* to the Law. Indeed, it is the taboo that augments the prohibition and the transgressive fascination glows as an under-current of desire upon the founding of the 'thou shalt not'. The strict rules for libidinous expression accompanying Catholicism and Protestantism, for example, are important Law-making discourses in which the erotic act finds sustenance – but Bataille also mentions mysticism, pre-Christian sects and other regulative orders. However, it is with

the appearance of de Sade in the climate of Christian morality, Bataille suspects, that we truly discover the contradictory attraction between the rule-making process regarding sexual conduct (taboo, obscenity) and the will to transgress (erotic pleasure). In the introduction to the *120 Days of Sodom*, de Sade makes the disturbing remark that "there is nothing that can set the bounds to licentiousness ... the best way of enlarging and multiplying one's desires is to try and limit them" (1966: 208).

Given this symbiosis between taboo and its crossing, why is death so important for understanding the erotic act of transgression? In Bataille, Nietzsche's herd and Heidegger's *das Man* becomes *l'homme normal* or the normal man, those sexual mores and habits dulled by the rhythms of the Christian Law machine. The normal man as 'decent sexual self' relies upon a sealed centre that may be fractured by a line of flight called erotic pleasures, the consummate act of transgression. Perhaps echoing Freud's (1920/1961) concept of the death instinct, Bataille maintains that the erotic event violently ruptures the stable (bourgeois individual) sense of self at the very moment the spectre of carnality jolts the fragile mirage of reason. The ensuing dissolution of self resembles a limit like that of death because "what does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners? – a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?" (Bataille, 1962: 17). The edging violation of the erotic moment – remember Freud said that if a child witnesses his or her parents making love it always appears as an act of brutal violence – thus abets the Nietzschean 'rope' for an overcoming of self:

The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained characters of the participators as they are in their normal lives...Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognised and stable individuality. (Bataille, 1962: 17-18)

This overcoded individuality is transmitted to us by *l'homme normal* as a regulated and self-contained role, which paradoxically provides the conditions for its own subversion through eroticism. And herein lies an important feature of Bataille's thought. Because of our deep anticipation of oblivion, the erotic 'practitioner' finds the audacity to grasp the proscribed pleasure that is as fleeting (we will never be here again) as the charge that forbids it. Death compels rather than repels and in the lonely orb of lust the scent of nothingness is palpable. It is important, of course, not to mindlessly celebrate erotic transgression, especially given the nefarious horrors it may entail. Although a profound weakness of Bataille's philosophy is its phallogocentricity (see Surkis, 1996), he is still able to tread a cautious path between irresponsible jubilation and reactionary indignation. One does not always side with those who resist and the challenge of a science of transgression is to understand without polarities (Bataille, 1957/1995).

It is here that Foucault makes his earliest foray into the question of transgression and resistance that prefigures some of the key contributions he was to make about the topic in later works. In his essay on Bataille, 'A Preface to Transgression' (1963/1977), Foucault took an important step in drawing out some of the political elements of Bataille's ethics and established an *aesthetic-politico* conception of transgression that challenged the dialectical imaginary of Western Marxism (represented primarily in Sartre). It is safe to say that the political content was still nascent and he is by no means treating sexuality, for example, as a *dispositif* like he does in latter works on the history

of sexuality and administration of life and death (Foucault, 1978). According to Foucault, the 'death of God' or what Blanchot called an "unheard-of-caving-in of scrap iron and human organs" (1949/1995: 10) transformed the modern sexual *ēthos* into a contested terrain proper, because boundaries could no longer be presumed to be determined by a radically exterior force but instead by mortal hands and a transient language. In this respect, de Sade permanently enervated the 'thou shalt not' structure of sexuality with scandalous insolence (de Sade's godless hyper-reason was the backbone of his cruel language) and thus inaugurated the province of selfhood as the ultimate threshold to be crossed and re-crossed (Foucault, 1963/1977).

When we frame transgression conducted at the ethical level (such as sexuality) in dialectical terms, the motifs of binary and dualism immediately appear to help us reason through the complex relationships and connections between those who infringe and the force that is being resisted. This dialectical understanding implicitly pits dissent and power against each other as dualistic entities, with divided origins that collide, clash and sublimate. The problem is that dialectics explains the power/resistance matrix from an outside *telos* whereas transgression is an endogenous experience that signifies *nothing* from without: "No form of dialectical movement, no analysis of constitutions and of their transcendental ground can serve as support for thinking about such an experience or even as access to this experience" (Foucault, 1963/1977: 37). The idea of transgression instead imagines a line that belongs to both dissent and power and is crossed and recrossed simultaneously. Foucault argues that power and transgression (as resistance) do not originate from separate worlds that necessarily antagonise each other in a contradictory fashion but are of the same family, pieced together by desire and the limit. That is to say, opposition relies upon, appropriates and absorbs the very power that it attempts to escape and this also means that power creates (in complicated and often unpredictable ways) the unstable conditions for its own resistance.

In these interstices of sex and death we witness the birth of subjectivity as an ethico-political engagement, those acts of transgression that attempt to construct an alternative praxis of self from the building blocks of subjection (Aronowitz, 1992). Transgressive resistance at the level of subjectivity is not a form of identity 'protection' or 'defence', as it is so often referred to in critical organization studies. As we have seen, transgression involves *crossing* a line and not the reinforcement of an already established one. So rather than transgression consisting of the defence of a boundary between a treasured forenamed self and a foreign imposed one (by the company, patriarchy, empire etc.), it is more a traversing of the boundary to create a new and different ethical praxis. Transgression exerts a *forward* motion as a non-teleological becoming and the making of something new and not a *backward* motion or the protection of something old or pre-given. Even if employee identities, for example, have been established in the past it is still troublesome to claim that they are being 'protected' from, say, corporate culture management practices because even the past must be retro-activated in the present and projected into the future. The analogy of resistance therefore changes from a military one (defence, guarding, patrolling – the language of a policed fortress) to a nomadic one (traversing, permeating, crossing the uncharted, establishing a new space – the language of flight).



Probably the most obvious extensions of this approach to transgressive resistance are Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997) theory of *performativity* in relation to gendering, queer politics and sexuality and de Certeau's (1984) concept of *tactics* (in the sphere of consumption, walking, writing). For Butler gender cannot be traced back to a cherished stasis but is performed in an ongoing manner through word-deeds issuing from the signifying body. Subversion is a practice of appropriating gendering domination in order to make ourselves into 'what we are not'. Similarly, de Certeau's tactics are an ensemble of 'ruses and devices' that use the dominant cultural logic (or strategy) in a manner that opens up a sphere of relative autonomy. Tactics are borne within power and feed off the spatial complex of an assemblage of domination that provides 'some time' (tactics unfold in time through processes of 'making do') to establish a modestly subversive enclave. As he famously states, one can, in this way, evade a hegemonic power relationship without actually leaving it. In some of his most cogent analyses, de Certeau argues that strategic power involves a kind of 'writing the body' (especially the legal and medical machines which are compared to Kafka's body-writing-apparatus in *In the Penal Colony*). And here it is again, death and dying that announces an excess or trace that cannot be completely subsumed in the writing machine and thus resides on the fringe as something enigmatic and dangerous. Because *everyday dying* is one of our most institutionalised rituals in which the subject is virtually wordless, it can become a social text of much transgressive weight in light of the taboo's that cut it off from *phrónesis*, in Western societies at least:

As a dead man on reprieve, the dying man *falls* outside the thinkable, which is identified with what one can *do*. In leaving the field circumscribed by the possibilities of treatment, it enters a region of meaninglessness. Nothing can be said in a place where nothing can be done...[the dying] are intolerable in a society in which the disappearance of subjects is everywhere compensated for and camouflaged by the multiplication of tasks to be preformed. (de Certeau, 1984: 190-191, emphases in original)

For sure, this is morbid stuff, but germane given that an *ēthos* of dying-unto-death can counter the de-voicing power that attempts to render such a basic and 'everyday practice' obscene and 'unnameable'.

## Lines of Flight, or Losing Face

We now seem to be a long way from organizations, but in many ways we are closer than we think. In evoking a theory of resistance 'in the name of Foucault' to explain employee dissent and subversion, for better or for worse, this is the kind of history we stir up. But such a tradition of analysing resistance did not begin nor end with Foucault, although his work has become indicative of this mode of thought. The themes have mutated and crossed over in complicated ways. One interesting manifestation can be found in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, especially *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), who developed the concept of 'lines of flight' as a metaphor for everyday resistance. In this book modern capitalist societies consist of roughly three spheres. On one side is the *abstract machine* that acts as a rationalising network, a symptom of modernity that has in true Frankensteinian fashion gained an impetus of its own. This machine manifests as *strata*, levels of organization that encompasses significance (what and how we speak),

subjectivity (who we are), the organism (the constitution of bodies) and faciality (the domination of expression that becomes the axes for speech and the unconscious). And on the opposite side is the *plane of consistency*, a latent surface of non-organization, non-significance, non-subjectivity that does not recognise any differences or hierarchies and upon which everything is made the same as a kind of Absolute nothingness. The power of the capitalist and modernist machine works through organizing our politico-ethico space in a manner that articulates what we say, who we are, our bodily practices, our desiring unconscious and facial arrangements. In some ways this is their version of normalization. They write:

You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you're just deprived. You will be a signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you're just a tramp. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 159)

Thus the aim of schizo-analysis is to coax these strata of domination into revealing themselves and illustrate the different ways in which they can be escaped, pointing to the various periphery experiences of the schizophrenic, the drug user (as failed lines of flight) and the artist who all fly from the machine without leaving it. Resistance for Deleuze and Guattari is captured by the pithy phrase 'line of flight' (the Jews leaving Babylon, Hegira, "a narrow overpass above the dark abyss" [*ibid.*: 202]) and is intended to represent the tangential catapulting that flings us out of the spiral of domination, which a sedimentation of strata has legislated as centre. A line of flight is an opportunity made on a particular stratum that affords a partial undoing of our hyper-organized *Lebenswelt*. One way in which this is done is to make yourself into a body without organs (BwO), not a body with no organs but with no organization as it has been constructed by the abstract machine. Thus, "the organism is not at all the body, the BwO; rather, it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labour from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences" (*ibid.*: 159). The bodily stratum (see Artaud, 1947/1976) organizes our bodies through a number of institutional forces that dominate the corporeal experience (the medical gaze, sexualisation, work discipline etc). To become a BwO is to draw a line of flight towards the plane of consistency that breaks the organism (a small death) and dissolve our inherited and policed subjectivity imbricated into the body by other strata. The BwO is a strange creature. With the aid of the plane of consistency it entails the appropriation of the mangled stratum in order to sense the self as a stream of unorganized impressions:

Is it really so sad and dangerous to be fed up with seeing with your eyes, breathing with your lungs, swallowing with your mouth, talking with your tongue, thinking with your brain... why not walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin, breath with your belly: the simple Thing, the Entity, the full Body, the stationary Voyage, Anorexia, cutaneous Vision, Yoga, Krishna, Love, Experimentation. Where psychoanalysis says, 'Stop, find your self again,' we should say instead, 'let's go further still, we still haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self'. (*ibid.*: 151)

Deleuze and Guattari are not advocating the abolition of subjectivity and the organism *in toto*. Such a process would precipitate the annihilation of the person, something that is often sadly the outcome for those suffering schizophrenia as groups like the *Hearing*

*Voices Network* would attest. Instead, "if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death" (*ibid.*: 160). Courting a more symbolic death is suggested, rather than ending life completely, because the BwO is not a death drive. Thanatos has not yet conquered the heliotropic life instinct. The dismantling of self should be a line of flight that dodges subjectification but in a way that still lets us 'get by' as subjects of domination without wildly destroying the body or bringing the weight of power down even harder via the mental health, police or capitalist apparatuses. Although some aspects of subjugation are inimitable, they suggest one must employ a mimetic cunningness and hold onto at least a small part of the stratum in order to fool the abstract machine:

You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own system when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata. (*ibid.*: 160)

But what does the BwO look like exactly? How do we know it when we see it in ourselves and others? According to Deleuze and Guattari it looks something like becoming-animal. One should recall here the high esteem Zarathustra had for animals as complete projects opposed to humans as grossly postponed. A line of flight resembles a becoming non-human and an overcoming of the anti-animality that modernity has injected into us. A great example of this line of flight can be found in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* where the travelling salesman, Gregor, turns his back on his father, family and company by becoming a non-man insect. A typical interpretation of the story posits the insect as metaphor. The insect is small, irrelevant, dirty and something to be exterminated by copious amounts of bug-powder and this represents the spiritual imprisonment of Gregor by an exploitative company and family. But a line of flight is unfolding here that defies the dualistic image of an external power and internal resistance. Gregor is not distancing himself from power but assimilating it. Gregor lodges himself on the organism stratum and literally becomes what the abstract machines of family and capitalism have until now treated him as: an insect. He resists by embracing their judgement a little too much ('Yes, I am insignificant, I am nothing, I am imperceptible, I am no-one, grey upon grey') and thus finds himself installed on the vector of the non-human. Humanity taken too far always begins to look very inhuman. The insect is harmless if it remains a mere self-reflecting metaphor but is dangerous when it assumes a material presence and this is why his family and boss are so shocked. Gregor repeats the Law over and over in his tiny bedroom and amidst the piecing insect-shrill of this whirling repetition he witnesses his transgressive *ēthos* emerge (he did not rationally choose to become an insect but woke up as one) in a rather harrowing transformation. This becoming-animal-insect is Deleuze and Guattari's way of explaining a post-linguistic line of flight, a mechanism for overcoming the strata and a partial supersession of the kinds of subjectivity it engenders.

## Discussion

In many of the studies that evoke subjectivity and identity as both a site of control (corporate culture, ideology, teamwork) and resistance by appealing to a Foucauldian vocabulary, a precise history is affirmed. From the limited material presented, it is apparent that this history marks a strong ethical turn to frame questions of power and transgression, with modes of self-constitution and care considered important features of resistance under the weight of modern social conditions. On the barren edge of politics is the *Existenz* that no one else can ontologically live (or die) in our place, and it is this ethical space which presents possibilities for various 'devices and ruses' that allow us to escape hegemony without leaving it or bringing its repression down harder. According to this tradition of thought, at the level of the ethical self, small and modest manipulations can be achieved even under the harshest regimes. The overriding concern has therefore been the problem of how one escapes the 'poison river' of selfhood when it is so phenomenologically close. Subjectivity cannot be just taken off and put aside like a jacket. We cannot stand entirely outside of ourselves, or get behind identity. As Terry Eagleton (1991) has succinctly put it, this ethical conundrum "thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves" (Eagleton, 1991: xiii-xiv). The various lines of flight discussed above have addressed this problem in different ways but all have referred to the tactical *ēthos* of the subject of domination and a non-dialectical understanding of the transgressive act as beginning points for thinking through the problem.

If we are not at least partially attendant to this tradition of thought and its concerns a number of problems and dangers may appear. If we treat resistance through a Foucauldian lens as a historyless concept, then it comes to be seen as a set of phenomena existing 'out there' independent of any network of past or dead labour. As a result we fall into a kind of bland empiricism that posits resistant and transgressive practices as positive 'things in themselves', a misleading and analytically impoverished reading of the social field. This is not to say that we must now place sex, death and ethics at the heart of our research of resistance but to simply acknowledge a tradition that will invariably change emphasis, nuance and, to a certain extent, explanations. A more controversial problem that emanates from forgetting this history concerns the substitution of a purely political framework to explain ethical practices. The turn to ethics in this tradition of scholarship means that it is perhaps erroneous to ask whether ethical practices such as irony, cynicism or 'making out' truly challenge the power structure of late capitalism in any transformative manner. In asking this we run the risk of expecting too much from ethical lines of flight and fetishizing subjectivity, which is not to say that ethical practice can not play a role in collective action, strikes and revolutionary praxis. It is common to see scholarship refer to various tactical ruses deployed by workers as 'safety valves' that allow subordinates to 'let off' steam without really making a difference to the status quo of late capitalism (see Fleming and Spicer, forthcoming). According to this interpretation, resistance either overthrows dominant power relations or reproduces them, an unnecessary double bind that collapses all dissent into its open, confrontational and collective variant. This does not mean, however, that we cannot query the reproductive-political effects of ethical resistance (for example see Wilson, 1993) but we should definitely remember that this is not the only register or criterion by which we render resistance intelligible to the scholarly gaze

(Fleming and Sewell, 2002). Moreover, this circumspection avoids the problem of pitting collective and organized forms of resistance against informal, subtle and modest lines of flight, a division that increasingly casts the former type of action as 'grandiose', 'modernist', and 'outdated,' an evidently troublesome assertion (see for example Alvesson and Willmott, 1992).

Embedding current conceptions of resistance in a specific tradition that reaches back into the murky recesses of philosophical thought also gives us a better feeling for some of the limitations with this approach to power and transgression. The most obvious one is that the attention on ethics can quickly lead to an unhelpful celebration and fetishization of the most banal of social practices. In her polemically charged essay 'Banality in Cultural Studies' (1996), Meaghan Morris plays with the notion of banality as both the object of analysis and outcome of research in contemporary cultural studies. The obsession with the prosaic has ushered in a new kind of cultural criticism that envisions anything and everything as 'subversive'. Morris quotes Judith Williamson's criticisms of British Cultural Studies, which, she contends, consists of "left-wing academics...picking out strands of 'subversion' in every piece of pop culture from Street Style to Soap Opera" (Williamson, 1986: 14-15). This is not a necessary consequence of studying the transgressive elements of everyday practices, but it still stands as a cautious reminder about how and why we interpret things as we do. In relating these concerns to critical organization studies we could ask some provocative questions. For example, might not some of the activities we label 'transgressive' more plausibly be termed 'discretion', 'autonomy,' 'initiative' or whatever? What exactly makes the tactical social enactments we discover in organizations specifically practices of resistance and what are the criteria we use to judge? Brushing these troubling questions under the carpet, especially if it is also at the expense of traditional areas of analysis such as exploitation, class struggle and other so-called 'bad objects,' may run "the risk of lapsing intermittingly into an unqualified apologetics for ordinary practices" (Ahearne, 1995: 151, quoted in Bennett, 1998: 174).

Related to this tendency is the urge to aestheticize or even poeticize everyday transgressive ethics so that it becomes a deeply mysterious sphere of subversive activity. In Bennett's (1998) measured critique of de Certeau (1984), he argues that the concepts of tactics and ruses are menacingly devoid of any analytical crispness. In transforming the pedestrian and doxical habitus into an enigmatic and arcane scene that is impervious to scientificity, we are no longer able to document or categorise the logistics of particular practices in any sociological manner. It is as if the dense greyness of common-day subversions is so opaque that any judicious investigation is futile. Thus it is left to intuitive inferences that merge fiction with documental observation to tease out what may and may not count as resistance. Romanticism can be both blinding and misleading. Although a 'poetics of the oppressed,' as Bennet calls it, has a seductive ring about it, the spectre of romanticising ordinary activities is a real dilemma for any analysis of resistance that draws upon the ethical emphasis outlined above. Overplaying the significance and meaningfulness of quotidian behaviours, gestures and discourses may create a self-referential system whereby we simply see what we desire to see.

Positing an 'after organization studies' in relation to resistance studies invites a sensibility for both past and future traditions that constitute the field of research. An

active acknowledgment of the 'passing past' can only enrich our understandings of what dissent entails empirically, conceptually and passionately according to this framework. I have traced a rather sketchy history that underpins a currently popular approach to resistance in the workplace with the hope of shedding light on some important antecedent sources and the problems that are raised by contemporary applications.

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