Unruly Subjects: Misbehaviour in the Workplace

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Stephen Ackroyd and Paul Thompson

> You have found out something:
> The hand that knows his business won't be told
> To work better or faster – those two things.
>
> **Robert Frost, Collected Poems**

Now you see it, now you don't

There is little that more graphically indicates the normative character of much social science than its handling of misbehaviour. There is a great deal of evidence, particularly gathered from ethnographic research, indicating that misbehaviour at work is prevalent at all levels and amongst all types of employment (Fleming and Spicer, 2007). Research has revealed tendencies to misbehave – and especially for employees to innovate non-sanctioned ways of responding to work and of evading attempts to control what they do. Yet, at the same time, there are also tendencies amongst social scientists and others to overlook such behaviour or to minimize its importance.

Perhaps the most glaring example of selective myopia is the way that, when it is noticed at all, it is the misbehaviour of ordinary employees that is the main subject of concern. This is despite the abundant indications of professional and managerial misbehaviour, as well as that relating to ordinary employees. In recent decades there have been constant scandals and revelations regarding the conduct of executives ranging from the award of unprecedentedly high remuneration packages for them, to high profile examples of corporate miss-selling, adoption of highly risky policies, financial malfeasance and the routine use of tax avoidance practices. Managerial misbehavior, of course, often gives rise to costs that dwarf what ordinary employees do. Yet, the misbehaviour of executives and managers has been, with some honorable exceptions (Punch, 1996; Jackall, 2010) almost entirely ignored by contemporary social science. Indeed there are some indications managerial misbehaviour is becoming more rather than less prevalent (Sayles and Smith, 2005; Prechel and Morris, 2010). Despite this, research-based and especially ethnographic work in these areas is limited and, in practice, there is little possibility of treating misbehaviour by all levels of employees in the same depth and with comparable rigour. Thus, reluctantly, and for reasons of expediency much more than of principle, as with many before us, we shall discuss the misbehaviour of ordinary employees almost exclusively in this chapter. The difference in this treatment is that the reasons why the consideration of misbehaviour by social scientists is partial or absent are also examined.

One of our key points is that the willingness to notice workplace misbehaviour has varied considerably, and there are some surprising contrasts of viewpoint. Only now and then are social scientists disposed to acknowledge misbehaviour at all. True, it is in the early stages of industrialism, when modern methods of production are first imposed, that work limitation practices are most obvious. They are an obvious response of employees to industrial discipline everywhere. Such practices as going slow and pretending to work, and, where feasible, employees interfering with

productive machinery were evident and commonplace. There are several ideas concerning the origin of the term sabotage, but the leading candidate is the practice of 16th century French and Belgian weavers, who reportedly placed their clogs (sabots) in the works of their looms to disable them. In the early decades of industrialization in many locations similar practices were noted. But what we also want to draw attention to here, however, are the marked differences in the understanding of - and the publicity given to - such behaviour. Some early unionists, most notably syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists, made much of this misbehavior, seeing it as evidence for fundamental resistance of workers to capitalism and the growing point for more extensive and concerted opposition (Dubois, 1977; Billington, 1980). Similarly, almost all the early consultancy based research into industrial behaviour, from that by Fredrick Taylor in the very early 20th century to the Hawthorne research popularized by Elton Mayo concluded in 1940's, was focused on conceptualizing, measuring and attempting to control non-conforming behaviour amongst workers (Brown, 1977). By contrast with these responses to misbehaviour which have drawn attention to it, we can compare the outlook of other trade unionists and many academics. Perhaps because they have some interest in convincing employers that employees are basically willing to work and well-disposed towards employment, little is actually heard of misbehaviour from many commentators.

For a long period after the Second World War, for example, in the period when industrial sociology and organizational behaviour were first identified as subjects and were first being taught, it was widely asserted that there was little misbehaviour to bother about. According to many authors and researchers, if there was misbehaviour, then it could be safely attributable to the odd 'bad apple' employee. At the worst such things were the product of heavy-handed and unenlightened management. Luthans' opinion is typical of the prevailing mood: "Virtually all available evidence indicates that actual work behaviour is orderly and purposeful, and appears to support the goals of the organization" (1972: 287). And yet, this post-war period was the very time when ethnographic research was showing, not for the first time, that misbehaviour in the workplace is widespread. The misbehaviour that was painstakingly uncovered by researchers in the post-war period was distinctive and exhibited some common patterns, as we shall see. However, in many cases and in many places, misbehaviour at work involved testing the limits of rules set up to govern conduct. Typically any rules introduced would be difficult to enforce and / or yet more activities would be innovated to evade them. In short, preventative measures and their avoidance become subject to continuous negotiation and re-negotiation.   The significance of this misbehaviour was also considered. It was found to lie between concerted and formally organized resistance to managerial direction on the one hand and complete acquiescence to direction on the other. The latter was much more apparent than real. Be that as it may, it is the character and potential for change in misbehaviour that makes it interesting and important to study. Thus we argue here that research has shown - and continues to show - that misbehaviour is an incipient tendency everywhere at work. Further, although there are semi-institutionalized forms of misbehavior, it is by its nature potentially volatile.

Today, in academic circles, the problem is not so much that misbehaviour is not seen, but that there are recurrent tendencies to misunderstand it, and in particular to minimize its actual and potential importance. Many contemporary commentators veer between saying misbehaviour is everywhere, and almost everything people do at work may be considered to be misbehaviour, and saying that it is largely devoid of significance. Many relapse into pessimism about the possibilities and meaning of misbehaviour, which seems to them, to be obviously without importance. We argue that these tendencies are indicative of a 'calibration problem' in which, as a consequence of the assumptions brought to the analysis, it is impossible for many to estimate the significance of different examples of misbehaviour. Studies of misbehaviour today include examples that are frankly trivial alongside those that are of much more significance (cf Fleming and Spicer, 2007), but have an inability to discriminate between them. This failure is a product of the perspectives brought to bear on this

subject which do not allow appropriate assessments to be made. We argue that this is because of a neglect of analysis of the context in which misbehaviour occurs. Lacking this, there is not much hope of contemporary analysts making much sense of it.

This chapter is in three major parts. The first, '**Now You See It'**, traces the initial discovery of workplace misbehaviour in the post-war period. As we argue, this was an extended process; but the section concludes by setting out the comprehensive understanding of misbehaviour that was established. The second part of the paper, '**Now You Don't Again',** suggests why and how the well-established understanding of misbehaviour became occluded and compromised. This we argue was because misbehaviour came to be viewed through post-structuralist lenses, and the context, which was not given enough emphasis in these perspectives, had in fact substantially changed. In the third section of the paper, '**Rediscovering Misbehaviour'**, we conclude by suggesting a way of looking at misbehaviour at the present which rescues the contemporary understanding of misbehaviour from relativism and reconstructs our knowledge of this important subject.

I Now You See It.

There are two traditions of analysis which were influential and which brought misbehaviour in the workplace sharply into focus. These were anthropology applied to industrial work, and labour process analysis. Both were key sources of insight into industrial behaviour and of 'seeing beneath the surface of formal organization and the apparent consent of employees in the capitalist employment relationship' (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999: 31).

Through the use of sustained and direct observation of work groups, researchers in Britain (Lupton, 1963; Cunnison, 1964) and the USA (Roy, 1952, 1953, 1954) showed that what was thought of as abnormal behaviour was actually a rational type of behaviour accommodating employees to managerial control systems. Out of such studies combined with the analytical work of Behrend (1957) and Baldamus (1963) came the idea that a contested 'effort bargain' was at the heart of the employment relationship. This idea later became important to several disciplines, notably industrial sociology and industrial relations. As Lupton (1963) observed, practical behaviour at work aimed at adjusting wage-effort exchanges was a collective and knowledgeable activity. The various forms of work limitation were described by workers as 'the fiddle', by which working effort and earnings under piecework were adjusted. By this means, there was some practical regulation of the impact of work controls.

Sufficient evidence soon accumulated to begin to see the existence of an industrial subculture connecting the range of workplaces (Turner, 1971). During the 1970s and 80s and 90s a range of research projects expanded the coverage of industrial anthropology both empirically and theoretically. To the realization that partial non-compliance was a permanent feature of informal work organization, was added the understanding that it was not restricted to soldiering or the sphere of the wage-effort bargain, but that there was a wide range of related practices. Noteworthy contributions here amongst many others were: Ditton, 1977 (who studied bakery workers and bread salesmen); Mars, 1973 (hotel workers) and 1982a (dock workers); Analoui 1992 (bar staff). Some of these studies were associated with a focus on 'deviancy' in workplace settings, which was invaluable in highlighting the extensive under-life of institutions, and in particular the discovery of the use of time indiscipline of pilferage and theft and sabotage and destructiveness. The latter had a wide appeal as it spoke to a growing 'revolt against work' or more precisely, work discipline associated with mass production that could be observed across industrial systems by the end of the 1960s. Though rising militancy manifested in wildcat strikes and other forms of unofficial action caught the headlines, others took an interest in 'sabotage' in the widest sense, linked to 'counter-planning on

the shop floor' in US car factories (Watson 1972). Such action could be linked to historic examples from labour history such as the slogan from the Wobblies (or Industrial Workers of the World) of 'good pay or bum work'. This unearthing of the past thus became linked to the discovery of contemporary recalcitrance.

By the early 1970s a new generation of radical industrial sociologists emerged in the UK whose work perceptively linked unofficial action on pay and conditions, the strengthening of the shop stewards' movement and dissatisfaction with alienating work. The classic study of this period was Huw Beynon's *Working for Ford* (1973). The vivid ethnographic account of working life and worker organization at the Ford Halewood plant provides a link between the older applied anthropology tradition and our second influence, to which we now turn.

The sort of work we have now reviewed received support from a more radical approach to industrial behaviour which emerged on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1970s and 80s in the form of Labour Process Theory (LPT). Chiming with the renewed conditions for recalcitrance, LPT also provided a set of conceptual understandings, the heart of which was a re-conceptualization of the employment relationship and effort bargain by drawing on Marxian ideas of work as a labour process in which value is extracted from work (Braverman 1974). In this approach, this is not only an unequal exchange, but one whose dynamic is rooted in the broader political economy of capital accumulation as well as the immediate work and organizational setting. This approach developed conceptual sophistication and empirical range over the following two decades. What is now described as second wave LPT (see Thompson and Newsom 2004), is associated with the development of a control and resistance model. In essence these forces are considered to be dialectic of mutual influence, driving forward workplace change at micro and macro level. This was demonstrated in different ways by two large scale historical accounts of the development of US (Edwards 1979) and UK (Friedman 1977) industry respectively.

The best known empirical illustrations of the control-resistance paradigm are provided by the works of Richard Edwards (1979) and Andrew Friedman (1977). New controls generate their own contradictions and conditions for resistance. For example, technical controls such as the assembly line tended to create a common and degraded status for a mass of semi-skilled workers. Somewhat oddly, these studies generated better accounts of managerial strategies (technical and bureaucratic controls from Edwards; direct control and responsible autonomy from Friedman) than of types of resistance. Nevertheless, worker resistance was not only put on the conceptual map, resistance was linked explicitly to informal shop floor organization and action, as well as to trade unions and strikes: 'In part those organizations were based on the shop stewards. But in part the organizations were even more informal, based on the small work groups themselves...' (Friedman 1977, 233). The third major second wave contribution, from Burawoy (1979), focused, in contrast, on consent. Though attempting to answer a different question – why don't workers resist more than they do – Burawoy's arguments kept to the theme of worker agency by focusing on consent as produced by workers' own practices in the effort bargain rather than externally-imposed ideology. It testified to the growing sophistication of LPT, which sought to integrate conflict and consent within the same typology, and always recognized the limitations to which capital could sustainably solve its control problems. (Hyman, 1989)

LPT gave rise to (and provided a shelter for) an extraordinary amount of original research and scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s. Many studies continued the control and resistance theme in manufacturing settings (e.g. Thompson and Bannon, 1985). Perhaps most comprehensive and conceptually inclusive account was provided by Edwards and Scullion (1982). Through numerous detailed examples the case studies show both how workers adapt their actions such as absence, labour turnover, the use of sanctions, and sabotage to particular modes of control over work or

payment; and how management develop policies and practices on the provision of overtime or as a means of transacting with powerful shop floor controls. But the scope of issues was also widened. In the early 1980s, for example, there was a rush of studies undertaken by women looking at the gendered character of the labour process. Using LPT combined with feminist-inspired analysis of gender relations, researchers such as Cavendish ('Women on the Line',1982); Pollert ('Girls, Wives, Factory Lives', 1981); Westwood ('All Day, Every Day', 1984) and Cockburn ('Brothers', 1983) used LPT to reveal the reality of working life from the point of view of women workers. Because these were often not the conventional well-organised male workers, such studies were able to illustrate more complex issues of recalcitrance and dissent. What almost all studies had in common was a preference for ethnography or qualitative case study work that could better capture employee voice and incidentally, provide some level of continuity with the earlier traditions

Finally, it is worth noting that second wave LPT was not prescriptive about the character or direction of worker action. In other words workplace resistance was seen as a distinctive phenomenon in its own right, with any connections to wider trade union or class struggle contingent and complex. Resistance is held to have a different object – a regime of managerial controls over the labour process – which was narrower than the class relations of capitalism identified by Marxists and broader than the simple wage-effort bargain. The notion of a structured antagonism between capital and labour as workplace actors, but with a variety of outcomes from compliance, to consent and conflict, thus became part of a new 'core' LPT (Edwards 1986; Thompson 1990; Thompson and Smith 2009).

Exploring the Territory of Misbehaviour

Many research studies produced by the applied anthropologists and labour process analysts revealed widespread misbehaviour not only in industry, but in many other kinds of organizations as well. These were brought together and considered as related phenomena in a number of research studies produced in several countries, but most notably Britain and the USA (Vardi and Weiner, 1996; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Buchanan and Badham, 1999). Although in some ways notable, the developing knowledge in this new field must now be seen to be more limited than it was assumed to be.

The concept of misbehaviour was developed in a paper (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995) and later a book (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). It had a dual purpose. First, to link the two traditions discussed in the previous section, illustrating the vitality of labour recalcitrance. Second, to counter the growing pessimism associated with discourses around the 'forward march of labour halted' and the apparent success of new technical and cultural managerial controls (see next section). Summarising the Ackroyd and Thompson argument, Bélanger and Thuderoz note that, 'Besides establishing how forms of resistance have been reinvented in the current world of work, this book provides an analytical framework for studying oppositional practices, conceived as 'dimensions of misbehaviour' (2010, 137).

Fig 1 about here

Figure 1 summarises that framework, building on a great deal of the findings from post War studies of workplace (mis)behaviour). There are recognised to be three areas over which employers and employees may contend in the employment relationship – represented here in the vertical columns in the diagram. The central one of these concerns the amount of work done, the second (to the left)

concerns the amount of time spent in work performance, whilst the third (to the right) concerns the use made of the products of work, and whether employees should have any access to them. Together these map out three key areas of potential misbehaviour: work performance itself, the time spent working and access to the products of work. The classic forms of misbehaviour associated with these three are highlighted in the figure: work limitation (or soldiering as Frederick Taylor called it) and utilitarian sabotage, absenteeism and forms of time-wasting at work and systematic pilferage (and fiddling where employees handle money). The diagram recognises the possibility of different degrees of compliance with expectations and rules at work from collaboration through compliance to withdrawal or even out and out hostility at the other. What is interesting is that the classic forms of misbehaviour – absenteeism, soldiering, fiddling etc –are located between compliance and withdrawal. Thus, at the opposite end to dutiful attendance is not occasional absence from work but the permanent withdrawal of the worker from the workplace – called 'turnover' in management language or unemployment or redeployment in the vernacular. At the opposite end of the work activity scale there is the possibility of employees stopping the work process and preventing the appropriation of the products of work by temporarily disabling machinery, for example.

The notion of 'appropriation' is, in part, a nod to the contested terrain idea prominent in LPT, given that each set of activities can be the site of negotiation and struggle. However, there is also recognition that there is usually some element of complicity, accommodation and toleration complicity over the definition and dynamic of events, leading to the conclusion that misbehaviour is a co-production between the parties to the employment relationship. The kinds of misbehaviour described here were frequently supported by a developed degree of work-group self-organization that we dubbed 'irresponsible autonomy'. It has to be said that, although this subculture was, in distinctive ways, oppositional to the values and beliefs officially sanctioned, it was not necessarily egalitarian. Thus, a clear feature of the industrial sub-culture (Turner, 1971; Collinson, 1992) was an informal hierarchy in which norms of conduct would be imposed on subordinate members and especially juniors and newcomers. (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999: 63-67).

Yet the book also sought to develop a framework that could capture the variety of motives, context and content including but not exclusive to resistance to control. For example, sabotage may be part of the struggle over the frontier of control, but equally it may be employed to relieve boredom and have fun. Clearly, managerial control or other forms of authority exist outside of those classic effort-bargain relations, and therefore so does non-compliance with them. Of course, customary forms of allowed misbehaviour in industrial sub-cultures provide group members with a location and identity. Hence, symbolic as well as material resources are a terrain of informal action and misbehaviour, though they are not specifically designated in fig 1. However, it was argued that something new and contested was also happening, so that the matter of identity at work was becoming more rather than less important. The most obvious contemporary development was the oft-observed enhanced managerial interest in changing organizational cultures and normative controls. At the same time, employees were becoming more aware of their social and workplace identities and their capacity to sustain them at work. An example is sexual misbehaviour, in which employees disrupt workplace order or appropriate time in pursuit of romance or conquest.

Taking into account new interpretations and practices, misbehaviour is considered not as an alternative to or a new generic term to *replace* resistance or recalcitrance, but as a different kind of oppositional practice. It is important primarily for what it is rather than what it isn't. And though it is interesting to consider the question of what it could be, this is not the main point. A parallel was drawn with the way in which LPT distinguished resistance as a distinctive empirical object.

Our essential purpose has been to take this kind of argument (ie LPT) and ratchet it down one notch further. In other words, whereas a second generation of labour process writers developed a concept of worker resistance that was to be treated as a phenomenon in its own right rather than a conceptual and practical derivation of class struggle, we are asking readers to accept that there is another realm of workplace behaviour that should not be understood merely as a form of or step to what has become identified with the term resistance. Therefore, rather than trying to replace existing accounts, we have been trying to fill a gap, adding a dimension and vocabulary to get people to think differently about workplace behaviour. (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999: 165)

II   Now You Don't See it (Again)

By the early 1990s, Foucauldian and post-structuralist ideas had become highly influential amongst organizational and workplace researchers. Two main themes emerged identifying convergent sources of (self) disciplinary power. For a range of commentators (e.g. Deetz 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Willmott 1993; Casey 1995) the strengthening and sometimes combination of new management practices, including electronic monitoring of work performance, delegation of responsibility to teams and pervasiveness of 'soft' cultural controls, made the old distinction between direct control and responsible autonomy largely irrelevant. Whilst reference was frequently made in passing to the death or dearth of collective action such as strikes and union organization, the main emphasis was on the marginalizing or even eliminating informal work organization and worker counter controls of the kind we discussed earlier in this chapter. The language used in such studies is telling – employees as willing, docile, individuated or self-disciplining subjects. As one otherwise sympathetic observer noted, 'In each case we find a tendential determinism in which the "self" at work appears to be subsumed under ever-increasing forms of discipline and surveillance' (May, 1999: 773). Furthermore, oppositional practices were often presented as largely futile given that power and resistance are inseparable, and 'discipline can grow stronger knowing where its next efforts must be directed' (Burrell, 1988: 228).

The misbehaviour thesis as discussed in the last section effectively countered these arguments by challenging the extent and effectiveness of the empirical claims and the removal of labour agency contained within the underpinning concepts. Of equal importance, it challenged the idea that the decline of some forms of formal, collective action meant the disappearance of all others. By focusing on and updating issues of time, work, product and identity appropriation by actors in the employment relationship, the thesis expanded the repertoire of how we discuss and understand oppositional practices. In doing so, it appears to have been reasonably successful, or at the very least reinforced doubts that were emerging within and about the Foucauldian framework. Increased attention paid in the book to conflicts and concerns around identity, particularly with reference to sexual misbehaviour, acted as a bridge to post-structuralist and feminist scholarship (for example Pringle 1988). As two leading theorists within that camp noted,

'By the mid-1990s, the concept of resistance had made a dramatic reappearance…. According to Thompson and Ackroyd, resistance was always there, be it in the form of organized action, or subtle subversion around identity and self, with humour, sexuality and scepticism being key examples. Other soon chimed in…' (Fleming and Spicer 2007: 2).

This trend was reinforced by studies informed by LPT that showed evidence of resistance and misbehaviour in the ostensibly surveillance-intensive environment of call centres (Taylor and Bain 2003; Callaghan and Thompson 2002). Nor was this merely a local dispute, as Bélanger and Thuderoz's (2010) excellent account of parallel French debates indicates. Space constraints compel

us to focus on how the main 'end of resistance' debate then unfolded. What is of interest for the purposes of this chapter and our own thinking is the subsequent turn of events amongst Foucauldian and post-structuralist commentators. There was a sharp turnaround to the extent that by the early 2000s, the dominant view had shifted towards a 'resistance is everywhere' position. Whilst this not a single trend, we can identity a number of themes. The most significant involve a reworking of the previous Foucauldian framework to largely discard the panopticon and surveillance, creating space for an emphasis on discursive struggle and a micro politics of resistance. As perhaps the most influential study put it, there is a 'constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses,' which takes place as 'individuals confront, and reflect on, their own identity performance, recognizing contradictions and tensions and, in so doing, pervert and subtly shift meanings and understandings' (Thomas and Davies 2005: 687). These competing narratives are framed in terms of manoeuvring within the contradictions and gaps in subject positions or dialogical dynamics. Such manoeuvring, however, is not necessarily confined to the discursive. Drawing broadly on Mumby's (2005) notion of dialectical relations, participants' everyday interactions can also be forms of micro organizational politics and identity work, where agents – managers, entrepreneurs, academics themselves – explore interpretive possibilities and meanings.

An examination of recent case studies and other papers[i] indicates that one consequence of the micro-resistance turn has been the mainstreaming of such themes, so employee 'resistance' to change can be productive of or an asset to organizational innovation, thus reframing conventional resistance to change discourses. (Thomas, Sargent and Hardy 2011). The other main theme to emerge was the enhanced significance attributed to the discursive tropes' (Mumby 2005: 36) of irony, ambivalence, bitching, gossip and cynicism as covert or hidden forms of resistance (see for example Sotirin and Gottfried 1999). Keeping with the discourse theme, cynicism (see Fleming and Spicer 2003) can be seen as responses to identity-based control, as distancing devices that can 'nourish communal vocabularies of critique' (Ashcraft 2007: 4). Such practices pick up on the arguments used in Organization Misbehaviour concerning humour used as a weapon against cultural interventions by management, but broaden the scope. They also tend to be more pessimistic. Gabriel argues that though cynicism and other means of contesting managerial discourses such as whistleblowing create 'unmanaged spaces', 'Unlike traditional forms of resistance they tend to be individualistic, ephemeral ' and disorganised' (2007, 11).

As indicated above, these are not homogeneous approaches and the 'everything is resistance' or micro-resistance positions came under internal attack from more radical scholars within this camp. As Newton observes, agency can get lost in discourse: 'it is 'hard to get a sense of how active agential selves "make a difference" through "playing" with discursive practices' (1998: 425-6). Others argue that resistance seems to have become mired in the micro, with relatively trivial and self-centred agential practices that threatens and hurts nobody receive prominence at the expense of broader, collective threats and struggles inside and outside the workplace. This critique has been best captured in Contu's (2008) dismissive swipe at 'de-caf resistance'. In what, then, would full strength resistance consist? The answer appears to be actions and goals that cannot be recuperated or incorporated in liberal capitalism: 'What is now being labelled resistance is advocated in the latest management rhetoric and practice… the real question is what kinds of resistance could not be incorporated…'' (Fleming and Spicer 2007: 3-4). We are now on difficult territory given that, short of revolution, any demand or recalcitrant behaviour can be absorbed or incorporated. As a result, such writers struggle to define 'real' acts of resistance, with Contu referring to 'outrageous breaks with all that seems reasonable and acceptable in our liberal postmodern world' (2007, 14). Actual examples of the outrageous and 'impossible' prove stubbornly absent.

What can we learn from this journey from resistance as zero to hero, and back to zero again? Post-structuralist scholars deserve credit for seeking new ways to locate and understand 'resistance'. The

work of Fleming and Spicer in particular, with its focus on cynicism and detachment is picking up on an important trend with links to the growth of dissent (see later). However, there are a number of significant problems and limitations, the greatest of these is why much, or indeed any, of the kinds of micro behaviour is appropriately identified as resistance is never entirely clear. The capacity of these new discursively-oriented frameworks to include almost anything is enhanced further by the view that resisting need not be conscious or active (Dick 2007: 13). Such perspectives have been rightly criticised by the likes of Fleming and Spicer, but they also share some common roots and positions. The most important of these is that resistance dynamics are explicitly counterpoised to the capital-labour 'dichotomy' (Fleming and Spicer 2007), or the 'negative paradigm' of labour process perspectives that 'conceptualises resistance as the outcome of structural relations of antagonism between capital and labour' (Thomas and Davies 2005: 685). However without some structural basis for resistance or other kinds of oppositional practices, ie opposed interests, a focus on the inter-dependence or inseparability of power and resistance obscures the character and persistence of competing groups and their practices in the employment relationship. One outcome is the virtual disappearance within this framework of any research on labour as a specific category and of the effort bargain experiences of routine workers.

This is reinforced by another argument, associated particularly with Fleming and Spicer, who try to open up the idea of 'struggle' as a 'multidimensional dynamic that animates the interface between power and resistance' of any kind, between any actors. Whilst this has the merit of being able to discuss more dimensions of conflict – for example those pursued by social movements – resistance becomes a generic category, floating free of a specific empirical context or cause such as managerial regime. As Mumby (2005: 3) observes, 'in doing so "struggle" seems without motive or direction and I am not sure where the "difference" arises that creates the struggle. It is a recurrent characteristic of papers produced in this theoretical space that they are stripped of any context. Where context does rear its head it tends to repeat the familiar but flawed contention of 'the decline of modernist forms of work resistance, notably strikes and whole area of organized and class conscious recalcitrance' (Gabriel 2007: 10). Some the necessary correctives to these approaches are definitional and conceptual. It is important first of all to dispense with resistance as a generic catch-all and to re-make the conceptual boundaries within and between 'repertoires of opposition' at work (Bélanger and Thuderoz 2010), distinguishing between resistance and misbehaviour. Resistance should be considered as an intentional, active, upwardly-directed response to threats to interests or identities (see Karlsson 2012 for more discussion of definitions and differentiation). Much of the remaining, largely informal and covert actions of work limitation, time-wasting and dissent better conceptualised as misbehaviour.

The second and more substantive corrective is to put context back in. Whatever the flaws of the control and resistance model, it had some sense of how changes in capitalist political economy and managerial regimes were being shaped by and shaping worker behaviour. In the next section, we briefly sketch some of the key contemporary changes that are making a difference (Ackroyd, 2012).

III   Rediscovering Misbehaviour

Because the context in which work behaviour (and misbehaviour) occurs has changed significantly, the traditional forms of misbehaviour that preoccupied managers in the post war period have been made more difficult. Drawing on our existing work (Thompson, 2013; Ackroyd and Murphy, 2013) we can identify a number of overlapping contextual changes.

The Re-configuration of Corporate Structures and Workplace Regimes

The general transformation of corporate structures now widely observable was itself prompted by a move to the dominance of the finance capital in the economy. Under financialized accumulation, capital markets drive both the growth regime and firm reorganization. At the level of the firm every asset tends to be evaluated in terms of the extent of the capital employed and market expectations of an acceptable return on it. Governance structures increasingly strengthen corporate powers and weaken other stakeholder claims, tying executive management into speculative short-term practices through rewards such as stock options. The source of profits is increasingly through the active management of corporate assets, for example through downsizing and divestment when returns are deemed insufficient (Blackburn 2006). The constituent elements of the corporation and of course any associated labour are disposable.

From the 1970's a long term decline in the size of organizations has been observable, denoting a paring down as far as possible of the resources devoted to activities in any one place. In the UK and the USA, ownership remains highly concentrated, but large organizations are now constituted by very large numbers of smaller constituent parts. In terms of corporate structures, very large, often conglomerate, firms concentrate ownership, but are without detailed centralized control (Harrison, 1994; Ackroyd, 2002; 2007; Prechel, 1997, 2010). Large firms dominate decentred, 'directed' networks and retain significant strategic power capacity at the centre, using sophisticated IT systems to coordinate activities with financial controls as opposed to detailed bureaucratic direction. Large firms have externalized the labour market and the resulting fragmentation in employment systems increases precarious and insecure work and employment in many sectors. Restructuring at the level of employment, transfers risk outside the workplace. Weakened employment protection and unions help to account rising subjective fears of insecurity (Burchell *et al* 2002).

Market and Moral Discipline

Key changes in management regimes affecting employees follow from the above structural changes. Rather than normative controls and self-policing (emphasized in post-structuralist accounts) being fundamental, managerial controls usually concentrate on performance management and rest firmly on the increased effectiveness of market discipline arising from employment insecurity. The characteristic mechanism features general corporate wide policies of cost limitation and then cascading down of profit and other targets set from the center. Performance metrics, ie KPIs, are set at every level, and facilitated in many cases by electronic monitoring (Taylor 2013). These are the bedrock, and the effects of the new financially-driven priorities are felt at every level. At the corporate periphery, amongst the ordinary employees, output targets are often combined with continuous monitoring of performance. In professional work settings, particularly in the public sector, enhanced audit and accountability practices perform parallel functions (McGovern et al 2007). In such regimes, with their emphasis on direction of work and monitoring of performance, as opposed to reliance on discretionary effort and responsible autonomy, nominal compliance is more likely as a basic response than commitment. Nevertheless, and partly in recognition of this likely response, employers are also placing increasing emphasis on the desirability of overt employee commitment and utilizing combinations of performance demands together with attempts to engender employee commitment. This is, as is easy to see, a potentially contradictory combination (See also Thompson, 2003, 2013).

Though often framed in the language of values, managerial attention is usually focused on conduct and behavioural descriptors manifested in performance (Taylor 2013: 46-7). Thus we have the near universal use of quasi-bureaucratic behavioural metrics used in performance review often combined

with more qualitative requirements such as the use of emotional and aesthetic labour scripts in locations involving interactive services. There is also what is called 'employee branding' and values-led normative interventions. Thus it is common to find the extension of the regulation of employee conduct into areas that were previously regarded as private or partly protected. This extension includes codes of conduct concerning dress and appearance, harassment, health and the use of social media.

New Spaces for Misbehaviour

Performance cultures, with enhanced surveillance and monitoring, do generally lead to greater work intensity and provide less opportunity for self-regulated work effort and so for time 'wasting' and work limitation in many, though not all, workplaces. However, reconfigured workplace controls are being contested in new ways even in in new and intensely monitored service settings. Sustained qualitative – and especially ethnographic – research has invariably found that there are spaces for the evasion of control even in the most strongly monitored, high-surveillance work systems. In such spaces it is possible to modify the impact of (or even to evade) work norms.

Research suggests that the spread of leaner working practices and the widespread use of performance metrics have undoubtedly reduced the scope for traditional forms of misbehaviour, including especially short-term unexcused absences from work; on the other hand, the revision of payment systems and legislative reforms, have allowed the growth of new forms of longer-term absenteeism, usually legitimated by sickness. Attempts to crackdown on sickness absences are indicative of a new 'big area of contestation' (UK Civil Service union rep quoted in Carter et al 2011: 17). Indeed, sickness absences and time indiscipline are the focal point for increased cases of formal discipline by employers (not to mention commensurate rises in the numbers of formal employee grievances) arising at work. The 'war on sickies', as named by Main and Taylor (2011), may also create forms of dysfunctional behavior involving employees coming into work when sick, a phenomenon known by personnel managers as "presenteeism".

Similarly, employees subjected to controls of their emotional labour are found to use the multi-faceted nature of emotional work to deflect or depart from employer demands (Bolton 2005). Baines (2011) uses the example of employees in social services in Canada and Australia who utilize the gap between espoused, professional or peer values and financialized managerial policies to bend rules and offer emotions as gifts as a form of struggle and social connectedness. Finally, although employers are using ICT such as smartphones and email as means of extending work demands and monitoring; this is also happening in reverse. Use of workplace computers or personal devices for 'cyberloafing' or social media in work time (Paulsen 2014) is leading employers to complain of theft, misconduct, or an abuse of resources (McDonald and Thompson, 2014).

Traditional industrial sub-cultures that have underpinned workplace recalcitrance have been in long-term decline, but there reasons for thinking – not to mention much evidence – that new forms of web-mediated on-line communities are emerging that are an important new space for developing critical ideas and providing a forum to those disposed towards misbehaviour. Here, for example employees can and do give voice to dissent and foster occupational or other solidarities (Richards and Kosmala 2013; Schoneboom 2011). But before considering this further, it is necessary to look at developments in general outlook which can be considered the bedrock on which new forms of misbehaviour are based.

The Rise of Employee Disengagement

Not unsurprisingly given the character of contemporary workplace regimes, along with a low level of compliance, there is accumulating evidence of widespread employee disengagement from the

employing organization and its concerns and priorities. Disengagement feeds on disconnects between employer demands for high performance and commitment in the work sphere and the frequent absence of supports for such practices in the employment and corporate domains. Sources as varied as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD 2007, 2013) and many academic papers chart a downward spiral of commitment and trust, or crisis of attachment. McCann's (2013) account of disconnections that are leading to a growing 'crisis of attachment' amongst IT workers affected by outsourcing is indicative. The CIPD recently reported a survey which found that nearly 50% of employees would sell their work IT password for £5. More generally, Harvard Business Review reports survey results in which 'a mere 13% of employees worldwide are engaged with their work, with twice as many disengaged or hostile'. (Caulkin 2014)

One interesting example of how disengagement may develop is indicated by some ethnographic research in a large IT firm in Ireland (Cushen and Thompson 2013; Cushen and Cullinane 2014). This shows how top management and HR managers at the company (given the name Avatar by the researchers) expressed the strategic importance of having a normatively aligned workforce that was 'committed' to the organization and happily 'engaged' in their work. The company had been named as a 'great place to work', but was experiencing low and declining employee engagement as measured by the Company's own surveys. Employees explicitly and extensively picked up on the contradiction between values espoused in the 'Employment Deal' and actual employment practices:

> It's very hard to swallow, extremely hard, they're telling you one day how important you are to them and the next day they're making more redundant...[...]...It's just hypocrisy after hypocrisy; they don't eat their own dog food basically. (Employee quoted in Cushen and Thompson 2013: 88)

Employees also engaged in more overt forms of work-related misbehaviour. Employee performance was measured against service level agreements and employees' knowledge of how such workflow systems operated meant they could manipulate the reports in their favour. One employee described how the manner in which their team reported performance against the service level agreement was...

> 'The statistics are taken from the trouble ticketing system. But you can put in any criteria you like, it's the same technology. You can put in a certain list of rules. "This is what I want from these statistics and all I want is such and such, say only priority A faults". You'd pick out the best ones and they're the ones you use. We would clear high priority faults within a couple of hours whereas all the normal ones would takes weeks and weeks and they wouldn't show up on any end of year results anyway. It's all a game, seriously. (Employee quoted in Cushen and Cullinane 2014)

From this and other studies it is the case that there are different varieties of disengagement. Disengagement does not have to be purely latent or passive, as the term can be taken to imply. There are, on the contrary, different forms of disengagement which involve different levels of participation, some entail both intellectual and practical action.

Passive and Active Forms of Disengagement

For management theorists and human resource analysts disengagement as a condition is not very deeply considered. It is usually assumed to be merely the opposite of engagement, the absence of the condition of engagement, which is the response to work they seek and wish to foster. But simple passive disengagement – also presumably accompanied by receptivity to re-engagement – is only one possibility. Disengagement may also be deep and implacable as a result of past experiences and so be rather unlikely to lead directly back to engagement with only quite little encouragement. Interestingly Greenburg and associates (2010) suggest that some discretionary

behavior in the contemporary workplace such, as incivility and unhelpfulness may be seen as insidious, by which they mean, amongst other things, destructive, recurrent and organizationally targeted. It is interesting that, rather than propose new forms of misbehavior, these writers suggest that behavior which has been previously been if not common then largely unremarkable in organizations, has been transformed by active use into something qualitatively different. Whereas such things as incivility, misrepresentation and honesty about company policies have all occurred in the past, they should now be considered as having taken persistent, motivated (in a word, insidious) forms. Although admittedly of low severity, that this behavior should have become virulent suggests that disengagement can lead to discretionary actions which indicate an active lack of support for – or identification with – their employers' interests. In their introduction to this collection of research reports, little in the way of convincing explanation for the rise of insidious workplace behavior at present is put forward. However, clearly, these changes do make sense in the context of widespread employee disengagement, and may indicate the development of what can be called active disengagement.

Fig 2 Modalities of Disengagement about here

Probably most disengagement has a developed intellectual component. People become disengaged for a reason, a point indicating it may not be easy to find a way back from disengagement. One form of intellectually active disengagement which has been widely noticed is cynicism. Cynicism, is a form of disengagement from employment that has been found to be widespread, but which is sometimes criticized because it being largely ineffective in motivating action. The point to note here is that cynicism allows a person to occupy the moral high ground of critical detachment, whilst at the same time, doing nothing about it. Indeed, cynicism may be, and often is, combined with relatively high levels of work-performance. Cynicism does suggest a lack of accord with the objectives and policies of an employing organization but, clearly, may arise from a high level of commitment to other values (such as vocation or community welfare), which are seen to be compromised by corporate actions.

At the other end of the scale from cynicism, there is another type of disengaged behavior (also having an intellectual component), but which is both more active and more implacable. This we identify there as dissent. Dissent suggests a more active form of disengagement in which the reasons for detachment are given some explicit articulation involving expressions of disagreement. Dissent is, by contrast with cynicism a more self-conscious and oppositional voice that can underpin active resistance. Both cynicism and dissent are forms of misbehavior defined by employees distancing themselves from commitment to the organization and its policies. Both are difficult to sanction as they involve reasoned responses to company actions and policies

Finally, however, it is not necessary to think of disengagement being fixed in one form or another, either consistently passive or taking more articulate shape. It is perfectly possible that passive employee disengagement may modulate into cynicism or dissent and for dissent, as seen in the above example, to motivate subversive action. Studies of employees using social media, on-line forums and especially blogging, to comment on and challenge corporate discourses nicely indicate the possibilities here. As Richards and Kosmala argue, blogging etc can go beyond the kind of passive and unplanned cynicism referred to by Fleming and Spicer (2003). Based on their study of forums and blogs, they say that, 'What emerges is a rich picture of how cynicism can lead to the employee developing a deeply held sense of detachment from corporate culture initiatives and a closer connection within their own occupational or professional community' (2013, 75). In response, employers suggest there is a threat to their interests and take disciplinary action for employees 'bringing the organization into disrepute; attacking the integrity of management; or challenging

management prerogative' (MacDonald and Thompson 2014). It is important to grasp that on-line forums and blogs go beyond individual commentary to potentially act as a focal point for collective discussion and dissent with respect to work, organizations and careers. Amongst the many examples that illustrate the potential links between such discussions, collective action and union organization are the blogs and forums developed by groups of workers. For, for example those forums organized by airline stewards and stewardesses during their dispute with BA in 2013 (see Taylor and Moore 2015) clearly supported collective action. Blogs by the spouses of workers in the games industry have also acted as a form of whistleblowing and critique of extreme working conditions in circumstances where employee resistance is problematic (Granter and McCann, 2015).

Conclusion

The conditions for the creation of the classic forms of misbehaviour analysed in the initial sections of this chapter largely no longer apply, and so it is not a surprise that, except in some residual enclaves, these distinctive forms can no longer be found. In the explanation of the classic forms, both the actions of employees and the management practices deployed to control them, which includes the organisation itself and the business context were invoked. These were seen to be necessary to the creation of distinctive forms of misbehaviour. As we have now argued, the tendency to misbehave has not changed, but there have been radical shifts in managerial regimes and organizational structures. These changes explain why it is that observable misbehaviour has changed. We have shown that attention to the recent research record shows both the growth in the diversity of observed misbehaving acts, and probably an increase in their scale as well. Except for the various forms of disengagement discussed, however, the employee's response has not crystallised out into a distinctive, semi-institutionalised forms, as was the case before.

It is a key point for us that there is much experimentation on both sides of industry in the current context, and there are widespread mismatches between managerial priorities and perceived opportunities and employee innovations. New kinds of misbehaviour are being innovated, but are often not recognised and or not effectively managed. Remapping the shifting political economy and understanding the changing shape of managerial regimes are necessary before the different registers of opposition to them are necessary analytical steps. Our tentative conclusion must involve the proposition that we are unlikely to be the end of misbehaviour any time soon. What we must envisage, indeed, are many opportunities for collective organization and action. As the boundaries within and between life and work change, so we can expect a diversity of new forms of misbehaviour, some of which are already discernible and many more of which remain just below the current horizon of our perception. For the social scientist the task in hand is to remake conceptual boundaries so that the new 'repertoires of opposition' at work (Bélanger and Thuderoz, 2010) can be more clearly seen for what they are.

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Endnotes-

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[i] In assessing the trends discussed in this section we have reviewed 116 abstracts for papers delivered at 9th Organization Studies Workshop, 'Resistance, Resisting, and Resisters and Around organizations, May 2014, Corfu, Greece.