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## ALL QUIET ON THE WORKPLACE FRONT? A CRITIQUE OF RECENT TRENDS IN BRITISH INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGY

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*Abstract:* Though perspectives underpinning research may have differed sharply, industrial sociology at its best has been able to uncover the variety of workplace resistance and misbehaviour that lies beneath the surface of the formal and consensual. The paper argues that this legacy is in danger of being lost as labour is taken out of the process and replaced by management as the active and successful agency. While there are a number of practical and theoretical forces shaping this trend, the paper identifies the growing influence of Foucauldian perspectives. It goes on to develop a critique of the way in which such theory and research overstates the extent and effectiveness of new management practices, while marginalising the potential for resistance.

*Key words:* industrial sociology, recalcitrant worker, misbehaviour, management, Foucault, identity.

Industrial sociology, as well as organisation theory and industrial relations, continues to see the workplace as a focus of change. Organisations are restructured, new management practices revolutionise the employment relationship, new issues such as sexuality appear on the agenda. But it is 'all quiet' in one respect – the virtual removal of labour as an active agency of resistance in a considerable portion of theory and research. The prime purpose of this article is to explore the reasons for, and challenge the consequences of, that trend. On the surface this is a strange development, because the recalcitrant worker has been one of the most persistent motifs of British, and to a lesser extent, American sociology, aided by a long and largely honourable tradition of seeing beneath the surface of formal organisation and the apparent consent of employees in the capitalist employment relationship.

### *Industrial Sociology and the Recalcitrant Worker*

When we look beneath the surface, a considerable variety of forms of resistance and misbehaviour can be seen. Recalcitrance has been most commonly associated with work limitation, or what Taylor originally called 'soldiering'. There were two important post-war strands of this work, one British (Lupton 1963; Cunnison 1963) and one American (Dalton 1948; Roy

1952, 1954). Both discovered, through very close observation of particular industrial organisations, the nature and extent of the adaptation of operatives to the methods of scientific management. The key finding of these investigations was the economic rationality of the responses of workers to industrial regimes, and the way that practical behaviour at work aimed at adjusting wage-effort exchanges in favour of the employee. 'Soldiering' is only one of the directions in which work limitation can be taken. In addition, there is the (re)appropriation of time, in which workers use time for themselves instead of for productive work. Absenteeism and time-wasting at work are typical examples of these activities. Similarly, there is the reappropriation of products, in which the employee uses materials for some other purpose than the productive process.

Elsewhere, non-compliance was increasingly linked to practices beyond the sphere of formal or informal bargaining. Sociological studies of deviancy in industrial settings from the late 1960s, and renewed efforts at industrial anthropology, produced studies of the under-life of institutions. Detailed studies (Ditton 1972, 1977; Mars 1973, 1974) of particular work situations suggested that 'fiddles' in the form of theft and pilferage are widespread. The picture drawn is of workers active and innovative in attempts to survive in employment, recurrently breaking rules and actively re-negotiating them on a continuous basis, with a management frequently tolerant of, accommodating to, or conniving in, such practices.

A number of interesting, if ultimately unsatisfactory, attempts were made to synthesise an understanding of the various strands of industrial misbehaviour, mostly using sabotage as an organising principle (Brown 1977; Dubois 1979). They argued that anything less than complete conformity sabotages the capitalist project of maximising profit. From this it is a short step to see all forms of behaviour that do not respect management interests, or conform precisely with management expectations, as forms of sabotage. Unfortunately, reasoning of this nature makes even the trivial breaking of attendance rules, the temporarily disabling of a machine to get a rest, or cutting corners to make work easier, qualify as acts of sabotage.

More focused accounts were to be found in the work of a new generation of British industrial sociologists. The classic empirical study of this period, Huw Beynon's (1975) *Working for Ford*, is often remembered for its relentless critique of work on the assembly line. But its main theme is the origins and operation of the shop steward-dominated workplace organisation. However, the two are linked: 'Trade unionism is about work and sometimes the lads just don't want to work. All talk of procedures and negotiations tend to break down here' (1975:140). The substance of this argument returned to Goodrich's 'frontier of control', locating workplace conflict in an effort bargain, transformed by new forms of control and deskilling in the labour process. Admittedly, the response was not often as rebellious as at Ford Halewood. The other notable studies, those of Chemco (Nichols and

Armstrong 1976; Nichols and Beynon 1977), found a largely non-militant workforce, whose most ideologically socialist employees were foremen from 'up North'. But the lack of a counter-ideology did not make Chemco operatives willing workers. While workers did not act as fully conscious agents engaged in class struggle, in seeking to control, management did. They and most workers in Britain may have been rebels without a cause: 'many of the activities (and deliberate inactivities) to which workers resorted took an individualistic and covert form – but these workers did have their ways of "getting back" at management and of "getting by" ' (Nichols and Armstrong 1976:211–2).

These studies foreshadowed the emergence of 'labour process' perspectives that examined the emergent pattern or dialectic of control and resistance (Friedman 1977; Edwards 1979; Burawoy 1979; Thompson and Bannon 1985), locating worker action within the development of particular managerial regimes or strategies. The 'frontier of control' is thus re-instated and re-located within a more systematic political economy, with the most comprehensive account of the resistance from a labour process perspective developed by Paul Edwards in two books, an empirically-based study written with Scullion (1982) and a much broader theoretical and historically grounded contribution (1986).

Influences from a labour process perspective can also be found in the work of a new generation of feminist industrial sociologists in the early 1980s. The purpose of the trio of notable studies by Pollert (1981), Cavendish (1982) and Westwood (1984) was to examine the nature of female wage labour, but ethnographic methods allowed a close observations of informal practices. The very fact of the neglect and marginalisation of the concerns of women workers by the local and national trade union apparatus stimulated a focus which went beyond the formal to discover distinctively female modes of action based on collective shop-floor culture. Though there is concern that women workers were often colluding in rituals of romance rather than conducting the gender war, many women were also shown to be unwilling to conform to standards of appropriate behaviour set by male managers, supervisors, fellow workers or customers.

In all these strands, the description has been rich, but the conceptual structure often flawed, or marked by over-specialisation. Even the highly developed control-resistance model struggles to capture the full range of employee practices that we refer to as misbehaviour. In particular, the extent to which misbehaviour can be seen as simply a response to managerial initiatives is limited. Those misbehaving have their own agendas and priorities that lead them to select policies and programmes for action, collective and individual. Innovations in behaviour may anticipate management, and may lead rather than follow. Informal organisation in the support for innovation is as important as formal organisation in explaining the development of workplace behaviour. Whatever flaws, the main thrust of this paper is that the

gains historically made by industrial sociology are in danger of being lost. Recalcitrance, it appears, is no longer a significant presence in the workplace. Management are now seen as the active agency of change and innovation. There are clearly new theoretical perspectives underpinning these arguments, which we examine later. But it would be naïve to believe that this is a question of the production of ideas alone. Perceptions of broader social, political and industrial change are also at stake and this is where we start.

### *The Social, Political and Industrial Context*

The transformation of the labour market as well as production has been instrumental in changing perceptions of labour's role in the workplace (Fogarty and Brooks 1986; Lovering 1990). Attacks on the 'core' – symbolised by the destruction of occupational groups such as the miners – and the growth of the 'periphery' of part-time, temporary and other 'non-standard' forms of employment are particularly associated with this change. In turn, this forms part of a longer-term process of structural change – decline of plant size, growth of new and often non-union plants, location of firms away from the older urban areas, and the shift from manufacturing to services and manual to white collar – that are seen to lead to a *fracturing of collectivism* (Bacon and Storey 1994).

Political action by a succession of Conservative administrations has also clearly shaped the broader landscape. Three significant dimensions of policy can be identified: a strategy of de-regulation of labour markets and promotion of a low wage, low skill economy as a means of attracting inward investment; competitive tendering and internal markets in the public sector; and the sustained legislative assault on union organisation, employment rights and collective bargaining. The latter, in particular, aims to deny workers access to traditional sources of collective power (Smith and Morton 1993), but all three potentially undermine the means of regulating external and internal labour markets on which that power has rested.

External changes do not necessarily have automatic effects in the workplace. For most of the 1980s, industrial relations orthodoxy was the most resistant to accepting that significant changes had taken place in the basic mechanisms of representation and bargaining. Debate was marked by the somewhat sterile and stereotyped no change – all change debate (see Kelly 1990; Thompson 1991 for descriptions). This stand has been broken by the publication of the third, 1990, Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS) (Millward *et al.* 1992) and its pessimistic reading of the often substantial decline in national, multi-employer bargaining, union recognition, industrial action, and membership density, as the end of institutional industrial relations (Purcell 1993). With a rise in policies such as individual contracts and performance-related

pay, many academic and management commentators believe that the residue of industrial relations: 'can now be subsumed under Human Resource Management' (Tuckman 1994:2). Conflict in the employment relationship around the frontier of control can now be replaced by a new metaphor of evolutionary journey and perpetual change (Dunn 1990). The clear implication is that labour as a subject of industrial and political action has been broken. With the forward march of labour in reverse, unions would, in these circumstances, be best advised to pack up their collectivist kit-bags and embrace the new agenda of individualism. Bassett and Cave (1993) argue that they can mirror the individualism at the heart of the employment relationship by improving and expanding the range of services offered to the membership.

The conventional course of action, when faced with this kind of agenda of paradigm shifts and dire consequences, is to focus on the exaggeration and hype. This is not difficult, particularly given some of the flawed theoretical packages in which the 'evidence' is wrapped. As a number of contributions to Pollert (1991) demonstrate, 'novel' forms of employment and flexibility show considerable continuity with the past or are confirmed to particular sectors, and WIRS 3 itself makes the point that the use of non-standard forms appears to have changed little. That survey also shows that no new system of representation and involvement, human relations management (HRM) or otherwise, had replaced old style institutional industrial relations. But, whatever the accuracy of claim and counter-claim, the debate also reveals the limitations of the focus of much existing research and frameworks of debate. Too often the decline of trade unions has been taken to be synonymous with disappearance of workplace resistance and recalcitrance, the decline of one form of labour equivalent to the marginalisation of all, and the challenge to one type of collectivism, the end of collectivism as such. In the case of industrial relations, this is not too surprising. Mainstream writing has tended towards a pre-occupation with order and its underpinning by procedural and institutional forms and practices. For all its valuable data: 'WIRS inherited the Donovan equation of industrial relations with management-trade union relations' (Sisson 1993:203). As Brown and Wright (1994) recently reminded us, the best traditions of industrial relations (IR) overlapped with those of industrial sociology, focusing on informal effort bargaining and the contested management of the employment relation. But in a period when workplace studies of different kinds are dependent on large data sets and increasingly available quantitative survey materials, rather than in-depth or longitudinal fieldwork, that kind of orientation is difficult. Brown and Wright also point out that: 'In the radically changed labour market context of the 1980s, the diminishing number of researchers engaged in workplace studies tended to follow earlier leads to focus on management behaviour as the prime mover in workplace bargaining' (1994:160). What is true of IR is also true, in different ways, of other analyses of changes in the workplace, and it is to these we now turn.

*New Management Practices?*

In the space of less than a decade, the employment relationship has allegedly been transformed through a series of strategies and devices – social and technological – into a qualitatively new kind of attachment in which misbehaviour of any kind is seldom seen. It is to be expected that such interpretations would be found in managerialist writing. For some writers the idea that we have moved decisively away from the direct control and direction associated with Taylorism and Fordism is to be understood in terms of an evolutionary sequence in the character of managerial regimes (Thomason 1992). The disappearance of overt conflict and forms of misbehaviour is thus to be sought in terms of the disappearance of confrontational politics within the firm.

Radical perspectives inject a welcome note of caution to ideas of the achievement of high trust relations or other features of the ‘new organisation’. However, although the mechanisms of incorporation of worker attitudes and behaviour are seen to be rather different, their general effect is very much the same. The overall theme is that the removal of misbehaviour is evidence for the success of a totalizing project of regulation which is at work in corporations and society. We can distinguish two kinds of mechanisms – social or socio-technical and technical – by which these controlling intentions are effectively realised. These must be seen as only analytically distinct, and it is, for many writers, the conjoining of social scientific and technical capacity that has led to the effective totalization of control.

The key socio-technical means for the development of control are new techniques of incorporation of personnel. Here, there is a good deal of agreement about the overall function of new policies in HRM. In the radical account of these developments, however, the policies towards labour are linked with much wider policies of cultural manipulation, of which new policies and attitudes towards the treatment of employees are just a small part. Though initially dismissive of the managerial literature on corporate culture for its inadequate conceptualisations and over-estimation of the likely effects on employees (e.g. Smircich 1983), critical social science began to turn to a rehabilitation of the concept as a powerful tool of ideological incorporation. One of the first, by Carol Ray (1985), postulates a transition from ‘bureaucratic control’ within corporations, based on the extreme division of labour and close regulation of conduct according to rules, which gives way to ‘humanistic control’, where attention is given to the intrinsic interest of tasks and supportive supervision. Finally, control crosses the last frontier to ‘cultural control’, in which the manipulation of the symbols of culture is the basis of moral discipline.

The thrust of this argument is that new practices such as HRM and total quality management (TQM) are the techniques by which management seeks to involve staff and to develop and manipulate an inclusive culture. Despite

earlier radical scepticism, the view that control through culture is not only feasible but actually practised, has gathered momentum. Thus, Willmott suggests that: 'Within organisations, programmes of corporate culturism, HRM and TQM have sought to promote or strengthen a corporate ethos that demands loyalty from employees as it excludes, silences and punishes those who question' (1993:520). A growing number of case studies have been written which purport to illustrate at length the effectiveness of such incorporating value systems. Amongst the most influential is that of Kunda (1992), in a study of an American information technology firm (Tech). The openness of the company allows the expression of ironic evaluations and cynical interpretations of the company's policies. According to Kunda, this promoted an almost universally cynical attitude in which employees were thereby disarmed of a critical value standpoint from which to evaluate their situation. As a consequence, employees lacked the basis on which morally to evaluate, and so reject, any role that the corporation asked them to adopt.

By contrast with this emphasis on the socio-technical aspects of new management, other writers have sought to give priority to the straightforwardly technical aspects of management systems. In this line of argument centre stage is given to information technology and somewhat different elements of technique, particularly just-in-time (JIT) and total quality control (TQC). Sewell and Wilkinson (1992a), for example, argue that JIT/TQC regimes both create and demand systems of surveillance, which improve on those of previous factory regimes by instilling new kinds of social discipline and thereby contribute to enhanced central control. Both JIT and TQC produce data that can be available to management. On the one hand, with TQC there is the extension of (apparent) autonomy to groups of workers who monitor their own activity – and those of adjacent individuals and groups. With this there is an active reporting system feeding information on performance into the information system. As a new arrangement of production, TQC both secures and monitors quality production. By contrast, JIT monitors and controls materials flows. From this emerges another data flow, which is particularly transparent. These two sources of data allegedly yield the information necessary for high levels of control in the absence of a developed bureaucracy and a numerous supervisory cadre.

For some commentators the development of superior flows of data is the key to understanding the basic dynamics of managerial innovation in the contemporary world (Zuboff 1989). Webster and Robbins (1989, 1993) connect the kinds of plant-level development envisaged by Sewell and Wilkinson with very much more general processes of structural re-organisation in corporations, for example, the disaggregation of complex productive processes and re-organisation of large-scale industrial organisation. Electronic technologies, they argue, both allow managers to individuate the organisation of production into teams and cells, thereby increasing control, whilst apparently delegating responsibilities, but this must be seen as '... part

of a more general neo-Fordist strategy which increases the flexibility of corporations in a wide range of their activities: production, design, marketing and distribution' (1993:246).

The empirical problems with this body of work are numerous. The evidence of the installation of new corporate cultures is patchy to say the least. Where it is undertaken, the evidence seems to be that trickle down techniques are used. The message becomes attenuated as it moves down the hierarchy, and there is little to support the idea that the communication of complex messages and cultural symbols will be achieved by such means. Such evidence as there is, at the moment, is from small, and usually quite specialised, companies notably those in the information technology sector. Where organisations have less uniformly middle-class, and professional employees, the effectiveness of enculturation is less assured (Grenier 1988). As to the effectiveness of surveillance based on the integration of personnel information from TQC and new HRM policies, it is also doubtful whether adequate integration of information can be easily achieved. Indeed, the organisational changes currently taking place are stripping out the very personnel whose main responsibility such monitoring would be.

It is unfortunate that radical scepticism is often confined to questioning the nature rather than effectiveness of new management practices. There are, of course, exceptions among radical industrial sociologists and organisation theorists, such as studies by Beaumont (1991) and Lucio Martinez and Weston's (1992) study of union responses to HRM and other new initiatives. But they are the exception. A central reason why the main trend has been towards the marginalisation of misbehaviour is the shift in radical theory to Foucauldian and post-structuralist perspectives. For its advocates, this framework is distinctly superior to older models: 'What has been described elsewhere as the "control-resistance paradigm" . . . within traditional labour process thought has been challenged by the importation of critical social-psychology concerned with the management of identity and security, and the subjugation and constitution of individuals through panopticism and cultural managerial discourse' (O'Doherty 1994:2). The purpose of the next section is to locate and critique that orientation theoretically.

#### *Foucault and the disappearing resistance trick*

Descriptions of new management practices rely heavily on Foucauldian conceptual props, admittedly often without much attempt to reproduce the deeper theoretical framework. The panopticon is the favourite in this armoury – Bentham's design principle based on a circular building with central observation tower which, from prisons to the new model housing estates, facilitated a uni-directional disciplinary gaze. In other words, the observed can be seen but cannot see, while the observers see everything but cannot be seen. So effective are such practices that individuals began to discipline themselves



to be, in Foucault's words, docile and useful bodies. Panopticons are now electronic or informational, focused on technical and social supports to JIT and TQM systems (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992a, 1992b; Delbridge, Turnbull and Wilkinson 1992; Webster and Robins 1993). Most of the emphasis is on the increased and successful use of monitoring and surveillance of workers' activities, though Webster and Robins present an alternative history of the information revolution which traces a line of descent from Bentham's original conception, through Taylorism as a means of monopolising knowledge in management, to the contemporary flexible firm which uses the capacity of IT to centralise information from an increased range of geographically-dispersed units.

The panopticon is, of course, only part of Foucault's (1977) wider account of the rise of a distinctively modern form of disciplinary power. Pre-modern, sovereign power had depended on personalised bonds of obligation. In contrast, the techniques of disciplinary power were developed and refined in religious institutions, prisons, asylums, hospitals and workhouses at a local level, rather than overseen by the state. Such micro-techniques, concerned with evaluating, recording and observing individuals in an exhaustive and detailed way, spread to the factory and other institutions, but the prison remained the purest exemplar and microcosm of disciplinary techniques and knowledge: power is fundamentally *carceral* in character. In the range of modern institutions, power also becomes increasingly focused on the body as an object, distinguishing Foucault's analysis from a more conventional emphasis on ideology and moulding of the mind. Developing originally in the eighteenth century, *bio-power* was aimed at the control of wider populations, their movements, gestures and routines, such as the posture of pupils and marching steps of soldiers. These processes were also facilitated by the partitioning and regulation of time and space (Dandeker 1990:25). Penology, medicine and psychiatry become the focal points for the development of new power-knowledge discourses which punish deviation from normative standards.

The disciplinary gaze does not necessarily require an electronic eye, but it does depend on discourses controlled by management (Sakolsky 1992:235). The work of Townley (1993) and Marsden (1993) focuses on identifying the social technologies of contemporary specialists in human and organisational behaviour as 'power/knowledge' discourses. These latter day 'soft cops' in HRM, accounting and consultancy are concerned to: 'observe, examine and normalise performance and behaviour' (Marsden 1993:118-19), carrying on a tradition established by HRM and its efforts to habituate the employee to the changing conditions of work in the large corporation.

Workers, meanwhile, internalise the various forms of 'the gaze'. In Barker's study of self-managing teams, the disembodied eye of the panopticon becomes the 'omnipresent tutelary eye of the norm' (1993:432). Self-management becomes self- and harsh discipline in these studies, management

harnessing peer pressure within teams to identify and punish deviations from the norm. Thus, what is produced technically by the electronic panopticon can also be produced socially from within the team in a process which: 'operates directly on the subjectivity of individual members' (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992b:108).

In theory, such accounts should not pose a problem in relation to resistance, for in the Foucauldian framework power and resistance are inseparable. If, as Foucault says, resistance is in the same place as power, where then does it come from? Asking this question, according to Knights and Vurdubakis (1994) commits the sin of 'dualism', where resistance is seen as dichotomous to, and outside of, power (as in 'control and resistance'). Power, instead, is productive of, and generates, resistance. It is 'capillary', circulating through and down to the lowest rungs, reaches and localities. Because power can never be total, resistance may break out at different points in the chain and, while that resistance recreates power, it promotes a ceaseless process of shifting alliances and tensions. It seems that power needs something else to *be* productive: 'power has to work on recalcitrant material – otherwise as Foucault has pointed out, it would have no existence' (Knights and Vurdubakis 1994:185).

But the framework *is* problematic, at least in the sense that no actual accounts of resistance can be normally found in such studies. We know the empirical claims made to sustain these arguments – that resistance has been squeezed out by the success of new management practices. For example, Delbridge *et al.* say that, 'worker counter-control (in the sense described by Roy and many others) is effectively eliminated . . . (1992:105); while Barker's concept of concertive control means that workers, 'have harnessed themselves into a rational apparatus out of which they truly cannot squirm' (1993: 435–6). The gaze has been truly internalised.

But we also know that in social science there is a tendency for us to see what theories allow or encourage us to see. Labour disappears from the process partly because of the tendency to believe that there is a monopoly of knowledge by management and its agents, a form of discursive closure that marginalises other representations and identities (Deetz 1992). The bars of the new iron cage are so invisible, control techniques so subtle, that employee ignorance or incomprehension is counterpoised to, 'the increasing knowledgeability of organisations' (Dandeker 1990:197). Given that post-structuralists believe that language constitutes reality, perhaps it is the case that the language of the prison, of docile and obedient workers (Sakolsky 1992:239; O'Neill 1986:55), of colonisation and conquest, becomes the Foucauldian's own conceptual cage. The idea of the panopticon in which power becomes automatic and: 'The disciplined member of the corporation wants on his or her own what the corporation wants' (Deetz 1992:42), is particularly dangerous in closing the space to 'see' resistance. McKinlay and Taylor accurately identify the consequences of such arguments: 'So seductive is Foucault's

metaphor, however, that if simply transposed onto the labour process perspective it can seriously overestimate the scope and depth of management control . . . The image in these accounts is a form of self-subordination so complete, so seamless that it stifles any dissent, however innocuous' (1994: 2-3).

Most importantly, there is the problem that because power is everywhere and nowhere, the impression can be given that it is a force from which there can never be any escape. Resistance is part of the formal picture, but is under-theorised and the dice loaded against it, because: 'only power is positive and productive, while resistance is simply a reaction to its production' (Dews 1986:99). In addition, resistance does not threaten power, because 'It means that discipline can grow stronger knowing where its next efforts must be directed' (Burrell 1988:228). Clegg is similarly pessimistic in noting the organisational outflanking of resistance, due to subordinated agencies: 'Lacking the organisational resources to outmanoeuvre existing networks and alliances' (1989:19). As Collinson (1994) observes, this analysis draws on Foucault in arguing that knowledge and information structure access to power. Subordinates either have too little of both, or their knowledge of the likely outcome of action is so predictable that it is similarly inhibitive. A further problem in the neglect of resistance is that it reflects the limitation of Foucault's analysis where, in the desire to avoid explanations at the level of the subject, human agency gets lost in the constitution of the subject solely through discourse (Newton 1994). If we take all these factors into account, it is hardly surprising that, fragmented, insubstantial and counter-productive, resistance simply disappears from view.

Not only is the Foucauldian framework inherently flawed, it is not, as claimed, a better alternative to accounts of workplace social relations. First of all, because it is not actually a specific account of the workplace at all. By treating the workplace as an extension of disciplinary practices and the factory, hospital and other organisations as paler versions of carceral institutions (Burrell 1988), the specific character of employment relations in a capitalist society is lost. Sakolsky (1992:237) is clear that the labour process is not to be analysed in relation to the mode of production, but as a site of disciplinary power. His target may be what he thinks is 'orthodox Marxism', but the dismissal would equally apply to the broad mass of industrial sociology which sees something distinctive in the social relations of the wage-effort bargain. Control is treated merely as another version of discipline, and functionally oriented towards the creation of obedient bodies rather than sustaining exploitation (Clegg 1989:176). The contested rationality between capital and labour is reduced to a 'local site of struggle' and labour is not regarded as a distinctive or significant agency.

Though the case studies are a useful corrective to the managerialist treatment of developments such as HRM, disciplinary power and surveillance are less effective as alternatives to concepts of control and resistance. This is

sometimes because it is the same thing being described, only with different words. In many cases surveillance simply displaces control. New languages to describe old realities are always attractive to academics, in this case despite, or perhaps because of, the obscure terminology. So, suddenly a quality circle becomes a 'normalising device', or the work of the personnel function a power/knowledge discourse based on 'dividing practices'. Dandeker (1990) recaps the history of the growth of the modern business enterprise, rounding up all the usual suspects – Chandler, Edwards, Clawson, Williamson, Littler – without ever demonstrating that his over-arching concept of *surveillance* depicts anything new or distinctive.

But when the terms are applied more seriously, a narrower conceptual basis for understanding is delivered. When work reorganisation and teamwork are defined and described through the idea of surveillance (e.g. Sewell and Wilkinson 1992b:109) the complexity of various types and dimensions of control gives way to measurement, information gathering, supervision, and electronic tagging. Even if one were to make the highly dubious assumption that surveillance mechanisms were effective in suppressing or incorporating dissent and informal practices, the problem is that everything is subsumed under Foucault's notion of discipline as a type of power with instruments, techniques, procedures and targets. In contrast, the apparatus of discipline is only one of the three components of a system of control in Richard Edwards's (1979:18) influential framework.

As for dualism, is it such a sin? Of course, in practice, power or control and resistance interpenetrate rather than mechanically produce one another. But separating them, as in labour process theory, is a necessary heuristic device that enables us to 'see' the reciprocal action and actors. Without such a separation one merely collapses into the other and we are left with the confusing and opaque results observed in the work of Foucault and followers. In addition, a conceptual distinction is necessary for us to understand the real difference in power resources available to the actors. Power may not always be zero-sum, but a conception of it as 'productive' in the Foucauldian sense often fails to distinguish the actors at all: 'It is not a matter of some people having power and others lacking it but the ways in which acts of resistance are also exercises of power and how the same set of agents can be involved in both exercising power and resisting its effects at the same time' (Knights and Vurdubakis 1994:191–2). This kind of framework marginalises resistance, a post-structuralist equivalent of the argument in mainstream organisation theory that corporate innovation may benefit from some healthy conflict and learn from a little resistance to change.

### *The Struggle for Identity*

Not all theorists working in this tradition are quite so concerned with

panopticons and new management practices. The construction of identity is a major theme of contemporary research (Kerfoot and Knights 1993; Grey 1994; O'Doherty 1994) and is part of attempts to theorise subjectivity, though the influences, such as Giddens, are wider than Foucault (Knights and Willmott 1985, 1989; Knights 1990; Willmott 1994). Nevertheless, identity is seen as a site of resistance allowed for in the Foucauldian framework.

At first the prospects do not look promising. Disciplinary power constrains individuals through their self-knowledge, their belief in their own sovereignty as consumer or employee: 'the modern subject willingly reproduces prevalent relations of domination and exploitation' (Willmott 1993:20). The current most likely vehicle for this is the corporate culture programmes discussed earlier; 'individual insecurity, corporate culture and organisational order are mutually constitutive' (Grey 1994:4). Willmott supports Deetz's (1992) critique of the colonising tendencies of the modern corporation, arguing that the creation of monocultures displays nascent totalitarianism, and finds little sign of employee questioning or resistance. But, despite these self-disciplinary tendencies, there is a permanent tension between the search for secure identity and the capacity and nature of corporate attempts to deliver. Self-identity can therefore, 'be realised only as a constant struggle against the experience of tension, fragmentation and discord' (Knights and Vurdubakis 1994:184). In addition, identity and the processes that shape it are not static or one-dimensional. This helps to focus on the capacity for human action, given that in a world of competing discourses and multiple identities, individuals can position themselves and find their own location, rather than be simply positioned by them (Brewis and Kerfoot 1994).

But there are conceptual and practical limitations. First, this is not a struggle *as employees*, but as *subjects of modernity* fighting on a universal terrain deriving from the indeterminacy and finitude of human existence (Willmott 1994). The existential nature of this process of managing threatened identities is spelled out by O'Doherty: 'Increasing ontological insecurity arises as individuals fail to sustain a continuous narrative of self identity, as they become pre-occupied with possible dangers and risks, and as they struggle to maintain trust in their relations with others and in their own self integrity' (1994:18). This interpretation of the life and trying times of bank workers is, admittedly, wholly at odds with the case study descriptions of work intensification, redundancies, staff shortages, job monotony and other responses which sound conventionally materialist and non-discursive. In these studies workers are not disciplined by the market, or sanctions actually or potentially invoked by capital, but by their own identity and subjectivity (Smith and Thompson 1992:15). It emphasises the point that the labour process is just part of the scenery, a backdrop against which a universal struggle takes place, one involving the indeterminacy of identity rather than the indeterminacy of labour that has been central to industrial sociology. At best, the workplace is a source of illustrative examples of the processes whereby individuals are

subjected to increased anxiety and seduced by the security offered by powerful corporate authority (Willmott 1994:36).

Secondly, it is also ultimately a futile struggle. Even when employees are not entirely subjugated, seduced or self-disciplined, they are prisoners of their own identity projects. For not only is the search for particular secure identities constantly undermined, the search for security *per se* is a self-defeating trap. Knights argues that for collective solidarity to have anything more than a remote chance of effectiveness: 'It would require that the target of resistance become the very pre-occupation with stable meaning' (1990:329). The futility also arises from the nature of the process. It is difficult to see how anything more than individual consciousness raising, rather than collective action, could be on the agenda. Even if it were, there is a final drawback. Opposition is largely self-defeating since those who play the game become addicts to the rules, and the pursuit of sovereign rights through bodies such as trade unions hides the disciplinary processes which produce the struggle in the first place (Deetz 1992:42).

None of our arguments is intended to deny that issues of subjectivity are entirely legitimate and central for anyone interested in how social relations in the contemporary workplace are constituted and reproduced. Indeed, the processes of 'identity work' are of central importance (Thompson and McHugh 1995) and studies of subjectivity as a control device, such as Hochschild's (1983) account of emotional labour among flight attendants, among the most valuable. Our objections are to the denial of the specificities of the employment relationship, the subjectivising of social relations and the erosion of the space for resistance and misbehaviour.

### *Conclusion*

It is ironic that we have now come full circle to the post-Braverman cry of whatever happened to worker resistance? Must we be condemned to repeating the same cycle of denial and rediscovery? Foucauldian theory and research, as we have shown in this paper, is not the only mechanism for taking labour out of the process. Nor is it a homogeneous body of work. Some of the writing on sexuality discussed earlier shows more complexity in the range of employee responses and some case studies using elements of a Foucauldian framework do succeed in identifying resistance. For example, Collinson (1994) demonstrates that specific forms of knowledge based on restricting information from management are a key resource through which oppositional practices arise and that such action was linked to shop floor workers' concern to keep an identity distance from management.

But locating resistance and misbehaviour is against the grain of the conceptual structure and also, to some extent, the epistemology. What is problematic about many current accounts of corporate culture, teamworking or TQM is not the argument concerning what those who design the systems

want, but the bizarre belief that they have anything but the most immense difficulty getting it. As Anthony observes, 'The so-called sub cultures . . . found within some organisations are stronger and more enduring than the transitory managerial cultural espousals that would overcome them' (1989:7). However, the shift towards the primacy of discourse and the text encourages the removal of workers from the academic gaze and the distinction between the intent and outcome of managerial strategies and practices is lost. In this respect, current discussion often repeats the errors in understanding the earlier development of management, labour discipline and 'scientific' systems. Whether it be the establishment of Taylorism, bureaucracy, human relations, or new technology, extravagant claims as to the rationality and effectiveness were made by managerial advocates and too often believed by academics. We now know that workers learned to bend the bars in these particular iron cages. Why should the current crop of new management practices be any different?

We are not saying that resistance and misbehaviour is always present in the same force or form. But it is there if workplace researchers have the time or inclination to look. Examining WIRS 3, Sisson (1993:206) observes that forms of 'unorganised conflict' were much in evidence even in union-free firms. But the best chance of picking up on what is happening is the kind of longitudinal, observational study undertaken of Phoneco by McKinlay and Taylor (1994). Despite a non-union environment, and the extraordinary lengths gone to by the company to make teams discipline themselves and to disbar any alternative sources of cultural influence, there was considerable evidence of resistance and counter planning. For example, workers tacitly traded monthly scores in the peer review process, engaged in silent strikes and a three-week go-slow. It is not often possible to have that kind of access, time or resources. Sometimes, interviewing managers, a tour round the factory and a chat with the union convenor is all that is possible. But neither the blinkers of specific theories or the limitations of particular methodologies should be used to close down the potential for digging deeper or seeing differently.

The essential conditions for resistance and misbehaviour are still present. Chill winds of competition in an increasingly globalised production system are compelling capital to focus on more extensive ways of 'taking labour out', and the squeeze on labour is an increasingly defining feature of the public sector. It is not a case of 'waiting for the fightback', romanticising the informal, or disregarding the capacity of unions to renew their own organisation and strategy. Rather, as industrial sociologists, we have to put labour back in, by doing theory and research in such a way that it is possible to 'see' resistance and misbehaviour, and recognise that innovatory employee practices and informal organisation will continue to subvert managerial regimes.

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