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Alessia Contu

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What is This?

Decaf Resistance

On Misbehavior, Cynicism, and Desire in Liberal Workplaces

Alessia Contu
Warwick Business School

The author reconnects resistance in production to its radical roots. Current literature suggests that resistance in the liberal workplaces of late capitalism has gone underground, becoming mostly evident in unofficial, offstage practices such as cynicism, parody, and humor. The author argues this resistance is too often a decaf resistance. This is a resistance without the cost of radically changing the economy of enjoyment, which ties us to our master. The author argues that resistance, as a real act, which suspends and changes the constellation of power relations, has a cost that cannot be accounted for in advance. To understand this cost, we need an ethics, which the author calls, following Lacan, the Ethics of the Real.

Keywords: *resistance; ethics; capitalism; power*

ONE of the main concerns in the critical studies of resistance in organization theory, specifically those born out of the tradition of labor process theory (see Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Grugulis, Knights, & Willmott, 2001; Knights & Willmott, 1990), is forms of control at a distance. This works through mechanisms of surveillance and disciplines of various types such as teamwork, human resources management, and corporate culture. These forms of control at a distance have become widespread in organizational practice of liberal workplaces. They can be found in the "workplaces of the future," which employ digital and advanced technologies and new forms of work (e.g., Kunda, 1992). Control at a distance can also be found in more traditional settings such as catering or manufacturing (e.g., Sewell, 1998). This has led some to claim that mechanisms of

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discipline and surveillance are everywhere, reducing workplaces, as some early critics have pointed out (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995), to an unrealistic quietness.

Lately, the reaction to such a consolidated story about concertive (Barker, 1999), normative (Kondo, 1990), and chimeric (Sewell, 1998) control has seen an attempt to revive the study of resistance in organizations (see, e.g., the special issues of *Organization*, 2005, and *Management Communication Quarterly*, 2005). However, many of these attempts to reconceptualize "resistance" have sidestepped the Marxist roots of the term, specifically the impression of conflict and antagonism. According to the Marxist tradition in which labor process theory is situated, resistance is the sign of a collective oppositional and antagonistic force with a transformative anticapitalist stance. According to this theory, these symptoms of class struggle were powered by the structural antagonism of the relations of production.

The recent development of the core labor process theory suggests that such a link between conflict and antagonism in production and the possibility of radical social change is an impossible burden for which we lacked evidence. Where the evidence is available, it seems to point to the opposite direction (see Thompson, 1990, p. 115). In other words, labor process and critical theorists realized that, as Zizek put it, in reality there is no such thing as class struggle. The Foucauldians seem to be able to account for such a condition. For them, the possibility of/for resistance is inscribed in the notion of power. They understand resistance and control as muddled in a contradictory and ambiguous interpenetration (Collinson, 2003; Fleming, 2005; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994; O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001), which will be different in different circumstances as documented by many detailed case studies. What these authors are pointing at is, as Zizek (1999) put it, "Power and Resistance are effectively caught in a deadly mutual embrace" (p. 252).

However, for Ackroyd and Thompson (1999), the problem is the categories used by the Foucauldians making resistance difficult to see. Misbehavior and resistance, Ackroyd and Thompson suggested, are always present; one just needs to be able to see them. They argued that the Foucauldians could not really register disturbances and unrest in the workplace. Yet some have argued that, within a Foucauldian legacy, it is possible to identify ways to escape the deadly embrace and go beyond the iron laws of disciplinary mechanisms. Desire and the care of self open up liberating ways of being (McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Starkey & Hatchuel, 2002).

This theme (which I will return to later) was not picked up by the critics of Foucauldian analysis. Instead, they painted a picture of organizations as places where people get up to all sorts of tricks; places where organizational misbehavior is inherent to organizational life (see Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999, p. 8).

In practice, resistance overlaps with misbehavior, but they are conceptually separate (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999, pp. 164-165; Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005). Resistance, in other words, even without its punchy Marxist radical aspirations, resists in the discussion of organized life. It is something distinctive, if rather nebulous. It indicates something more than people behaving badly. So how is the specificity of resistance conceptualized? Even if, as we have seen earlier, Marxism was a burden, these authors indicated that "Marxist industrial sociology" is "the necessary antidote to the image of the willing and conforming employee" (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999, p. 31). However, they emasculate this approach by admitting that industrial sociology is too often "highly specialised or subsumed under over-ambition . . . social theory" (p. 31). The antidote, it seems, is both useless and necessary. It is necessary because misbehavior is, by its definition, a managerialist category pertaining to managers and their position/interpretation/decisions (Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005). In contrast, the word "resistance" is marked by something more. It can return us to organizations as places that sustain and are sustained by antagonistic, unequal, and exploitative relations. But the reference to *Marx*ist industrial sociology, which is suggestive of such antagonism and struggle, functions simply as an allusion (see Knights, 2001).

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) did not tell us how resistance qua antagonism towards exploitative and unjust relations can be understood in conditions where, in reality, there is not such a thing as class struggle. Ackroyd and Thompson did not provide a reconceptualization in this sense. What they did is revert to the concrete observations of workplaces to note that collective oppositional struggles are not as evident as in the past, and dissenting and oppositional voices are "often covert and difficult to detect and form a variety of forms of *'under-life'* [italics added] in organizations" (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999, pp. 164-165). The "under-life" seems to be where "spaces of resistance" (Gabriel, 1999) are to be found. As Prasad and Prasad (1998, 2000) also suggested, rather than seeing wide collective oppositional strategies, resistance in organization is indicated by practices that are often unplanned and spontaneous, often covert, informal, and mundane (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p. 388). Or as Fleming and Sewell (2002), for example, put it,

the criteria for the activities that count as resistance are broadened so that we may detect transgression even in the most claustrophobic cultural hegemony. . . . Rather than looking for patently grandiose and global strategies of insurrection we may instead find it in the *commonplace cracks and crevices of intersubjective relations and other quiet subterranean realms of organisational life* [italics added]. (p. 863)

What seems to be taking hold in the organization theory discourse of resistance, if articulated through different theoretical nuances (which brings together discursive analysts as well as more traditional work sociologists), is an injunction to investigate the hidden transcripts, the offstage discourse—the unofficial speeches and gestures and practices (Scott, 1990). These can tell us a different story from the whole encompassing and somewhat disappointing quietness (as seen from the position of critical researchers of the Leftist kind) of the official consent or obedience. Such a mode of resistance, in the crevices and in the underlife of capitalist organized production, has many different forms. The lists in Mumby (2005) and Collinson (2003), for example, are similar and include studies that have discussed resistance as parody, irony, satire, and cynicism.

In what sense do these practices still count as antagonistic forms that intervene in the struggle for subverting and changing power relations? My argument is that such transgressions (humor, skepticism, etc.) are inherent transgressions of the liberal capitalist relations in which they are observed. As such, they are the way the ideology sustaining such relations performs its efficacy. The mutual embrace between power and resistance is deadly. It is also deadly to propose the care of self as the path that liberates "us" from the iron laws of disciplinary mechanisms. These transgressive acts that we call "resistance" are akin to a decaf resistance, which changes very little. It is resistance without the risk of really changing our ways of life or the subjects who live it.

My conclusion is not simply that real acts of resistance are impossible. Instead, the conclusion addresses the deadlock between our studies of resistance and how a real act of resistance attains the impossible. My aim is to stimulate our thinking about the paradoxes and impossibilities of resistance and, specifically, our actions associated with understanding and organizing resistance in relation to the wider social order where we, business school academics, maintain a privileged position. The invitation is to reflect on cynicism, the cost of resistance, and death. It suggests that resistance, as a real act that suspends the constellation of power relations, has a cost that cannot be accounted for. It involves an ethics, which Zizek, following Lacan, called the "Ethics of the Real." This opens up the possibility of

tackling resistance and its relation to antagonism when "there is not such a thing as class struggle."

The Underlife as the Law's Inherent Transgression: On Farting, Piss Taking, and All That

Many studies on resistance and control give us stories of organizational humor, parody, skepticism, and piss taking. They seem to indicate carnivalesque and often obscene examples of (mis)behavior in the undergrowth of organized life. However, these carnivalesque forms of resistance often do not constitute a threat to dominant order in the workplace. They end up being, as is often noticed with surprise, the support of the very order that such actions transgress (Collinson, 1992).

What is important to observe is that these transgressive actions in liberal workplaces (call centers, automobile factories, insurance companies, etc.) do not seriously challenge the economic reproduction of both producers and consumers. These actions are even less of a challenge to the liberal democratic logic where the "I" is constituted as the liberal free subject who has, among other things, the right to disagree. The real trick is, of course, that "I," on the whole, still "do" whatever "it" she or he disagrees with. This is regardless of how bothered, bewitched, or bewildered he or she may be. In other words, as Zizek (1994) suggests,

> far from undermining the rule of Law its transgression in fact serves as its ultimate support. So it is not only that the transgression relies on, presupposes, the Law it transgresses; rather the reverse case is much more pertinent: *law itself relies on its inherent transgression*, so that when we suspend this transgression, the Law itself disintegrates. (p. 77)

Acts of irony, skepticism, and cynicism are not beyond the dominating logic that states/legislates, that codifies the reality at hand (the Law). Resistance qua transgression is not due to some more or less problematic human nature. For example, some would argue resistance springs from the rationality of humans (cognitive limitations, personal aberrations, and idiosyncrasies). Others would suggest that resistance arises from the immanent freedom of a recalcitrant will. Rather, such transgressions are the conditions of possibility of the Law itself (the codified, ordered reality we recognize as such). Such acts are better understood as the inherent transgression of the order that is the ultimate support of the official discourse (Zizek, 1997, p. 18).

The reason for this is that the public Law[1] itself is incomplete. It has a not-all character that needs to be supplemented by a clandestine, unwritten support. As Zizek (2005) suggested, "far from being a kind of secondary weakness, a sign of Power's imperfection, this splitting is necessary for its exercise" (p. 287). Of course, such splitting always relies also on presupposing "us" as split subjects. Proponents of "mis-behaviour" (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) see this split in the recognition that the subject is, at once, labor and an autonomous being. In the discursive, poststructuralist, feminist approach, the subject itself is already constituted as a space of multiple, inconsistent, and ambiguous "subject positions" (see, e.g., Collinson, 2003). This split is what can help us explain what organization theorists know very well—that when workers take the Law too seriously, suspending the transgression, such as in overidentification—it is effectively possible to perform a subversion of the system. Examples of open workplace antagonism show the devastating effects that working following stringently the rule can have.

One of the examples Zizek (1994) gave is based on one of Adorno's considerations in *Minima Moralia,* of a woman who is subordinated to her husband. In an unseen-by-him gesture, she shows a hitch and a transgression to that subordination. While they are leaving a party and she is dutifully helping him with his coat, she exchanges patronizing glances behind his back with fellow guests, which deliver the message, "Poor weakling, let him think he is the Master." The same gesture is what we see in much of these modes of interstitial and subterranean resistance, which Mumby (2005) captured in the Malaysian proverb, "When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts" (see also Scott, 1990). As Zizek(1994) put it, what is not to be missed is that

> this spectre of woman's power [one can add of peasants farting or workers parody, piss taking, skepticism, etc.] structurally depends on male domination [in our case on the liberal capitalist constellation]: it remains its shadowy double, its retroactive effect, and as such is its inherent moment. (p. 56)

With a slight shift of the view, skepticism, parody, and so forth appear to pose no threat to the system that supports them and makes them possible in the first instance (and most important, vice versa). Our insistence on treating them as "resistance" (as a signifier that traces an ineluctable antagonism that is more than "behaving badly") is important and symptomatic. At best, it indicates our inability or unwillingness to thematize the paradox in which our study of resistance sits. At worst, it affirms our implications in it as "jesters" (Lacan, 1992; Zizek, 1997).

It is not enough to state that there is a dualistic, ambiguous, and contradictory dynamic between resistance and control, so that sometimes certain acts are emblematic of a transgression to the order and sometimes they are not. These acts we specifically study (in rich Western business organizations) are always inscribed in today's socioeconomic constellation and inherently guarantee, rather than disturb or disrupt, such a way of life. But what exactly does that mean? It means that it does not disturb but rather supports the fantasy of ourselves as liberal, free, and self-relating human beings to whom multiple choices are open and all can be accommodated. This amounts to what, in the vernacular, could be expressed as "having our cake and eating it too." By maintaining that these are acts of resistance (marked by something more, as we have seen, than misbehavior) is giving us a decaf resistance. Decaf, because it threatens and hurts nobody. It is resistance without a cost. A Real[2] act of resistance is exactly an act of the impossible. This is because it cannot be accounted for and presupposed in and by the Law and its obscene undergrowth; as such, it is an impossible act. This impossibility is what is foreclosed from our own very discourse on resistance in organization theory.

We, of course, consume a lot of this decaf resistance. It maintains our (as in our academic personae) subtle illusion, that yes, the "workplace"[3] (including our own) is not a silent place. I shall return to the decaf resistance and silence in the conclusions. For the moment, I turn more closely to an aspect that has enjoyed much attention lately in the organization theory discourse on resistance—cynicism. This enables me to expand on the discussion of the split introduced earlier.

Cynicism as a Dominant Mode of Postmodern Subjectivity

What the discourse of resistance in organization theory is effectively engaged in is the construction of examples of subjects who are not in the grip of ideology. I am using the word "ideology" here because, as Fleming and Spicer (2003) recognized, ideology

> is not conceived in the vulgar sense whereby an all-knowing master intentionally dupes the unthinking masses but in a more post-structuralist vein that points to the way everyday discourses, symbols and signs frame our subjectivity in ways favourable to dominant power relations. (p. 160)

I would like to stress (following Zizek) that ideology always works by means of a reference to an extra-ideological realm. This is a space that is effectively given as beyond the grip of ideology:

> Close analysis of even the most totalitarian ideological edifice inevitably reveals that not everything in it is ideology (in the popular sense of the "politically instrumentalised legitimization of power relations"): in every ideological edifice, there is a kind of "trans-ideological kernel", since, if ideology is to become operative and effectively seize individuals it has to batten on and manipulate some kind of trans-ideological vision which cannot be reduced to a simple instrument of legitimizing pretensions to power. Is not a kind of authentic vision discernable even in Nazism (the notion of the deep solidarity which keeps the community of people together), not to mention Stalinism? The point thus is not that there is no ideology without a trans-ideological authentic kernel but rather that it is only the reference to such a trans-ideological kernel which makes an ideology workable. (Zizek, 1997, p. 21)

The specific examples of resistance in the workplace such as mockery, irony, humor, impression management, and cynicism we find in our empirical studies often maintain or refer to such an extra-ideological kernel. They do this by responding to what is taken as the official ideological message. To illustrate this point, let us take the example of cynicism. Cynicism is usually conceived as a space guaranteed by a given human autonomy. It involves an open acknowledgment that if we give workers and managers the chance, some of them will tell us that they are not really buying into the dominant ideology. If we observe them closely, we can see that they are up to all sorts of tricks. Further interventions (see Fleming, 2005; Fleming & Spicer, 2003) have added that even if workers know and profess not to be in the gaze of power, even if they can see very well what is happening and are not duped by corporate visions, mission statements, and rituals and instead actively rearticulate their own sense of self, they nevertheless still submit to it in practice—*je sais bien, mais quand meme. . . .* This has implications for an understanding of belief and subjectivity. The dynamics of cynicism suggest that we should see belief and subjectivity not simply as something internal but as something thoroughly external (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). What is important for our discussion is that "cynicism," rather than a space of resistance and freedom, is the "inadvertent success of corporate power relations rather than their failure" (Fleming & Spicer, 2003, p. 160).

What Zizek's discussion is suggesting is that there is nothing inadvertent or spontaneous in the occurrence of resistance. The very gesture of referring

to "something in me more than" (like belief in the corporate or loyalty to the team) is the way in which the efficacy of ideology is performed. This, one can say following the earlier discussion, is exactly how ideology works. What is interesting to observe is that this "x" (this "something in me more than") is, in our capitalist societies and their workplaces, always already caught and domesticated in the liberal humanist fantasy. This supports the very official ideology in which "we all come together for a common purpose" (the unitary view); or that in which "even if interests are plural and diverse, we can all benefit from collaboration and alignment of interests" (pluralist view); or that in which even if relations are exploitative and unjust we ought to resist and engage in "strategies of survival at work" (decaf critical view).

In other words, beyond, and even prior to, the different ways in which I am subjectified—before I am a teamworker (or not), a mother (or not), a manager (or not), a seller of labor (or not)—I am an autonomous human being with a pulsating heart and mind with wishes, desires, and aspirations that are proper, specific to me (Zizek, 1989). What has been called the residual "bourgeois humanism" is not (only) an abstract theoretical apparatus that underpins the analytics of contemporary labor process (O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001, p. 116). Nor is it the ideological basis of neoclassical economics (Willmott, 1993) that "we"—radical critical subjects—are supposed to avoid in our analytics. Rather it is the very fantasy sustaining and reproducing our way of life in liberal capitalist cynical workplaces. As Jason Glynos (2001) suggested, developing one of Zizek's themes,

> contingency[4] is bearable only because it is sustained by the potential for full control, the reassertion with ever greater urgency of the subject as fully conscious and rational ego able to master the ever expanding realm of new choices opened up by the dissolution of sedimented social relations of traditional and modern society. (p. 93)

The fantasy of a subject who is decentered, fragmented, and open is underscored by its opposite—a whole powerful ego that enables us to follow wishes and desires in choosing and deciding what one has to do with oneself. This is what we are caught in every day. The breathing space in which we are not-all, with the various subject positions we play every day, actually supports a self-relating subject. By following this line of thinking, we begin to understand how appeals to desire and the care of self show their limits as potential bases of resistance.

Desire and the Care of Self

The work of McKinlay and Starkey (1998) and Starkey and Hatchuel (2002) refers to the "later Foucault" to establish an understanding of organized life that is not caught but can also escape "the iron law of organisation theory"—with its alienating discipline or self-destructive autonomy (Starkey & Hatchuel, 2002, p. 651).

McKinlay and Starkey (1998) and Starkey and Hatchuel (2002) argue that communities of practice founded on technologies of self create the context for filling "the lack of being." This institutes a form of desire. With the creation of possibilities offered by these communities, new versions of the self are experienced and practiced (McKinlay & Starkey, 1998, p. 238):

> A critical ontology of ourselves should be a major focus of organisational analysis aiming to examine both the limits of organisation but also organisations' potentially liberating qualities. Organisations bring individual selves into contact with others and allow, if we are willing, new definitions of the self and therefore, of organisation itself. (Starkey & McKinlay, 1998, p. 239)

The emphasis posed on human creativity, the ongoing re-creation of self in a quest for knowledge as a form of self-care (Starkey & McKinlay, 1998, p. 233), the space and time for self-development, and the understanding of work as the space for the satisfaction of social need (p. 232) is, arguably, exactly what any career prospectus of any knowledge-intensive multinational offers us, and we freely and willingly accept. Moreover, creativity, self-development, and the like are all important features of the latest managerial discourse.

The image of the care of the self is reflected in other more mainstream sources. Life as a project of self-development and fulfillment is the message of management gurus and liberal academics in most business schools. Rather than missing or lacking, the subject promoted here is very much present in the ego-centered continuous construction and fashioning of its being, enjoying his or her way of life by tapping into these new spaces of desire, as if these were beyond—or better, in between—the exploitative logics of the capitalist organization. It could be argued, following Glynos and Zizek's suggestions, that this logic of desire is the very form of capitalist ideology.

This empty self that can be filled by participating in different communities does not have a radical or liberating potential. It is exactly this vision of the subjectivity that corresponds to the ideological fantasy of postmodern liberal capitalist society. In fact, the fundamental logic of capitalism is

exactly that of keeping desire going, of constantly tantalizing our desire and thirst for new things, new products, new emblems of what we really are. All these products, gains, and so forth do not at all satisfy our desires. Rather, they keep these desires going. We want to experience and play with new selves, new desires, new ways of living. We want more and more and more. The point to be considered then is not that the logic of capitalism subsumes everything by means of natural, ineluctable laws of expansion one cannot do anything about. Rather, the point is that capitalism's impossible, empty logic is supported by a specific subjective desire that is ethically implicated in its very reproduction (see Glynos, 2001, p. 79; Zizek, 1997).

Proponents of "the care of the self" appear to praise the "ethical acts" of a subject that involves attempts to satisfy some "deeper" form of desire instead of some other more "superficial" desires (see Zizek, 1993/1997, p. 236). But for Lacan, the ethical act is nonpathological—it is not at the service of goods (Lacan, 1992). By assuming this space of desire is also a space of real freedom from the iron law of disciplinary power, we fall back into a logic and the ethics that support and maintain the unending desire for choice that underpins our liberal capitalist democracies.

From Decaf Resistance to Real Act

Decaf resistance, just as decaf coffee, makes it possible for us to enjoy without the costs and risks involved. We can have the thing (coffee) without actually having it.

I am suggesting that what are construed as new forms of resistance—the unofficial transgressions in the underground of neoliberal working life (i.e., skepticism, humor, cynicism, etc.)—consist of an edulcorated resistance. This is a softer resistance, a resistance without the acid that can destroy the machine of power. It is a sweetened resistance that we can still practice without too much damage, without paying the price of what destroying the machine of power may bring. So what is the economy at stake here? In this decaf resistance, we receive a payment in the form of the illusion that we are still having the thing (resistance). However, we do not have to bear the cost that is associated with having the thing itself, which is the danger of radically changing things as we know them.

A Real act of resistance would be one for which we would have to bear the costs. It would be an act that changes the sociosymbolic network in which we and our way of life make sense. It would be costly because we depend on these sociosymbolic networks. To lose them would be like losing the world. In this sense, a Real act of resistance is an impossible act. This is because it is an act that cannot be predicted, and controlled. It is an act

without a guarantor, an act of madness, which in a Derridean sense would be an act of decision proper. For Lacan, this real act is an ethical act. As Zizek (1999) suggested,

> for Lacan there is no ethical act proper without taking the risk of a momentary suspension of the Big Other, of the socio-symbolic network that guarantee the subject identity: an authentic act occurs only when the subject risks a gesture that is no longer covered up by the Big Other. (Zizek, 1999, p. 264)

The ethical act par excellence in Lacan is to go beyond self-interest, utility, and the pursuit of pleasure. It is to risk the constantly sliding objects of desire that we hold so dear—such as career, health, family, properties, and so on. In what Zizek called an "act proper," then, one "cannot but" take on the cost fully, including the ultimate one of subjective destitution. This is a risk of dying symbolically and perhaps also physically. Antigone is, in this sense, the figure emblematic of such a real act. When engaged in the act proper, there is no "reasoning" and persuasion that others can offer to dissuade one from one's duty. This "duty" should not be understood in a pathological sense—one does not follow a duty because of some call to do good (a religious or ethical injunction) or because of promised compensation (money or reputation) but because one must. In other words, the act is the moment of radical freedom from, and suspension of, the pleasure principle and its utilitarian logic (see Zizek, 2001, p. 169).

According to Lacan, the "payment" that is received from such an act is jouissance, a paradoxical enjoyment. Jouissance is paradoxical because it is too much pleasure and not enough pleasure; it is at once lacking and excessive. Fantasy is the way in which such lack and excess are regulated. So, for example, in the case of the cynical workplaces of late capitalism, the fantasy at work poses enjoyment. This enjoyment comes in the sense of a loss—we assume that that if managers, shareholders, governors were different, then we would be "really" free and able to do what we want. The enjoyment also presents itself as something that we possess—we assume that we can actually do what we want, as long as we hide the excess, from the gaze of power. Jodi Dean (2005) called these "nuggets of enjoyment." They are the small pieces of enjoyment that we snatch from "under their noses." And in fact, these acts are, we are told in the literature, in the underground, hidden and offstage. As Zizek (1997) put it, this enjoyment (in whatever way it is regulated) is

> a payment the exploited, the servant, receives for serving the Master. This jouissance, of course always already emerges within a certain phantasmatic

> field; the crucial precondition for breaking the chains of servitude is thus to "traverse the fantasy" which structures our jouissance in a way which keeps us attached to the Master—makes us accept the framework of social relationships of domination. (p. 48)

The suggestion here is that an ideological matrix, as a system of power relations, then, is not only discursive. It also pertains to a certain libidinal economy, an economy of enjoyment. This is regulated and governed by a certain phantasmatic formation that domesticates enjoyment by commanding, directing, forbidding it. This, of course, enables us to explain what, in many discursive studies, is simply seen as a paradox. The puzzling question is that of why the identity politics more times than not (at least in the studies of liberal workplaces) ends up in reproducing the existing power relations regardless of the nonessential character of these identities (that could have always been different). This is a paradox only because what is missed here is the dimension of jouissance and the economy therein involved.

Concluding Remarks . . . So "What Is To Be Done?"

Decaf resistance is a resistance without the cost of radically changing the economy of enjoyment that ties us to our master. It should be clear that I am not inviting a skepticism or cynicism toward (the study of) resistance and political engagement. Quite the opposite—I am giving that up. This amounts to saying that the workplaces of late capitalism may well be full of background and underground noises, but what we are confronted with is their, and our, terrifying silence.

The real act of resistance, the act proper, is an act where one assumes fully the responsibility for the act itself, without "if" and without "but," risking all and effectively choosing the impossible, in this sense, "traversing the fantasy," as Zizek put it. It means giving up the belief that there is a Big Other that can justify, support, and sustain the beliefs that animate our acts. The act of resistance, qua act of terrifying and unadulterated freedom, is exactly giving the guarantor up and assuming full responsibility for the act itself. These "impossible" acts, Zizek suggested following Lacan, do happen:

> When you do something crazy, like an heroic act, which goes against all your interests [for example, whistleblowers in neoliberal sites of production], there the Real happens—you cannot justify or explain it. The Lacanian Real is not Real as impossible in the sense that it cannot happen or that we can never encounter it. . . . No it happens, but it is too traumatic to assume. . . . Usually we think it is horrible if we are reduced to biologically/genetically [one could

add historically] conditioned objects, but I think the true anxiety is caused by the awareness that we did a free act—that's the most difficult thing to accept. (Zizek & Daly, 2004, p. 165)

This view has two main aspects that are important for our work and our position in the world. The first one is that of unsettling our silence and complacency and indicating what the task of the Left must be. The other is, of course, the insight that Real acts, in and of production, present themselves as outrageous breaks with all that seem reasonable and acceptable in our liberal postmodern world. To distance ourselves from this trauma, we may too easily participate in their symbolic rationalization rather than bearing witness to the limit they signify, the violence they unmask, and the economy of enjoyment they break with.

This revisitation of the ethicopolitical as Real act opens up many questions for those who, as in the trajectory and legacy of Marxist thinking, see capitalism and its relations as problems. Yet it is not clear what the attention and thematization of impossibility and impossible act open up for our praxis, particularly in the situation where our privileged point of observation is that of the relations of employment and organizing processes of work. This is the challenge Zizek gives us, with its radical political incorrectness that is as much directed toward postmodernist, discursive identity politics as the nostalgic attachment to Leftist slogans. These often simply bear witness to the anxiety that capitalism is here to stay and falsely transform revolutionary change into the form of "ought to" (Zizek, 2006).

Nonetheless, one thing is clear—the Real and its other face, jouissance, are political factors, and their bearings for our studies and our politics have always already begun. We are already seeing a wealth of work develop in our field that takes these seriously (see, e.g., Böhm, 2006; Contu & Willmott, 2005, 2006; De Cock & Böhm, 2007; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Jones & Spicer, 2005). This piece is part of that body of work. My hope is that this contribution, by intervening in our discussion of what counts as resistance, has indicated some thought-provoking ways for understanding ideology, fantasy, subjectivity, and relations of subordination. And perhaps, it has disturbed our comfortable place in the world a little.

Notes

1. The Public Law is the sociosymbolic order we constantly presuppose and in which we make sense as it governs social exchanges (Evans, 1996).
2. Real, with the capital "R" here, is to retain the reference to the Lacanian Real.
3. The imaginary contours of such a "workplace" here should not be missed.
4. Another way of saying this is the so-called postmodern times.

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Alessia Contu is an associate professor of organization studies at Warwick Business School. She is interested in political philosophy and psychoanalysis. Her current empirical research examines issues of goodness in the discourse of sustainable development.