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Looking for the Good Soldier, Švejk: Alternative Modalities of Resistance in the Contemporary Workplace

Peter Fleming
University of Melbourne, Australia

Graham Sewell
University of Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article continues the current trend in *Sociology* of exploring and re-evaluating concepts of workplace resistance. We agree with Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) that much of the critical literature investigating managerial controls like self-regulating teams and corporate culture management have placed far too much emphasis on ideological incorporation and 'colonization' of subjectivity and not enough on employee recalcitrance and resistance. Rather than hastily blaming the 'Foucauldian turn' for this oversight, however, we argue instead that resistance is indeed difficult to see if thought of in purely traditional terms (e.g. strikes, sabotage, picketing). In the age of team normalization and 'cultural cleansing' we must look in less obvious places to see practices of dissent. Our article introduces the concept of 'švejkism', after the character in Jaroslav Hašek's novel, *The Good Soldier, Švejk*. Švejkism is presented as an example of a modality of employee opposition that may have been missed in earlier evaluations of new work forms. We discuss the practice of švejkism and the implications it has for contemporary workplace politics.

KEY WORDS

cultural control / employment / humour / irony / labour / resistance

Introduction

After something of a hiatus worker resistance now seems to be firmly back on the research agenda of industrial sociology, especially in this journal where we have seen the concept receive renewed attention (for example, Knights and McCabe, 2000; May, 1999; Strangleman and Roberts, 1999). A major catalyst for this empirical and theoretical refocus was Thompson and Ackroyd's (1995) provocative article, 'All quiet on the workplace front?' in which they lament the striking paucity of resistance in much of the so-called 'poststructuralist' literature discussing workplace controls. With the advent of corporate cultural manipulation, electronic surveillance and self-managing teams, critical depictions of workplace behaviour hastily herald the demise of worker opposition. We are told by what Thompson and Ackroyd (1995 – see also Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) present (ironically perhaps) as members of a 'New Orthodoxy' that, because managerial technologies now target the very selves of employees through various strategies of 'cultural cleansing' (to use the vivid phrase of Strangleman and Roberts [1999]), the perennial employer/employee divide has finally been sutured. Workers can no longer resist management because ideological enculturation is now so pervasive and widespread in the world of work that even the desire to oppose capital has been subtly erased.

Ackroyd and Thompson's polemic was, and still is, plausible and must be taken seriously. In their opinion, influential examples of this New Orthodoxy (such as Barker, 1993; Casey, 1995; du Gay, 1991, 1993; Kunda, 1992; Ray, 1986; and Willmott, 1993) all offer totalizing portrayals of new managerial controls where employees are simply programmed automatons who diligently perform the logic of the dominant regime as it is engineered by senior management and consultants. We agree with Thompson and Ackroyd that, by the early 1990s at least, too much emphasis may well have been placed on manufacturing consent, ideological outflanking and 'designer employees' and not nearly enough attention had been given to the ways employees oppose new managerial regimes, invariably harbour feelings of resentment and discontent and sometimes even reverse employer initiatives. But the reasoning offered by Thompson and Ackroyd as to *why* this New Orthodoxy has failed to register the presence of resistance is less convincing. They suggest that the 'Foucauldian turn' in radical sociology has written resistance out of the story because it is too pessimistic in its appraisal of power and worker agency (see also McKinlay and Taylor, 1996 for a similar argument). Accordingly, it is suggested that disciplinary power and normalization are construed in an over-deterministic manner so that there is no possibility of resistance since '… power is everywhere and nowhere, the impression can be given that it is a force from which there can never be any escape' (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995: 625).

We maintain that Thompson and Ackroyd's argument (also see Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) is founded on a tendentious reading of Foucault's texts but we have no intention of perpetuating the 'Foucault wars' here. Instead, we

offer an alternative explanation of why resistance has failed to register in so many studies of corporations that, in Casey's (1995) phrase, attempt to 'colonize' the subjectivity of workers. We suspect that an inadequate or incomplete notion of resistance was and still is being used in much research investigating corporate controls. If one studies corporate power in contemporary organizations and thinks of resistance purely in terms of Fordist clichés (unionism, strikes, pickets, work-to-rule and the like) then one will often come to the conclusion that employee recalcitrance is indeed absent. Under the normative rhetoric of current management discourse (often using phrases like, 'We're all friends now', or 'We're all members of one big happy family') resistance may seem as outmoded a concept in the sociology of work as the ether or phlogiston are in theoretical physics. That is not to say that traditional forms of worker opposition have disappeared or ever will disappear, but that the studies recording their absence are telling of the increasing difficulty to express them in the contemporary industrial climate.

Even if modalities of resistance characteristic of Fordism may have been tempered somewhat in so-called 'high commitment' organizations (like those depicted by Casey, [1995] and Barker [1999], for example), this by no means indicates that managerialism has finally succeeded in transforming the 'recalcitrant worker' into the supine, docile and biddable worker. Part of the problem is that one could get this impression if employee opposition is thought of as a set of purely overt, organized and open economic practices (Edwards et al., 1995; Kondo, 1990). It seems obvious that, in a context where workers are often given the stark option of 'loyalty or exit' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), we must look in other places to find manifestations of employee opposition. A relatively recent stream of research conducted by Kondo (1990), Jermier et al. (1994) and Edwards et al. (1995), among others, is very useful in this respect because it has extended definitions of resistance to include forms of opposition that are more inconspicuous, subjective, subtle and unorganized.

In the following article we wish to contribute to this growing body of work by developing the concept of 'švejkism' as an illustrative example of how resistance may unfold under conditions where its traditional avenues are blocked or marginalized. The term 'švejkism' is derived from the eponymous protagonist in Jaroslav Hašek's (1973) novel, *The Good Soldier, Švejk*. This follows the adventures of Josef Švejk, a character who resists the discipline of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army through subtle forms of subversion that are invariably 'invisible' to his superiors (and often to his peers too).[1] Applied to the contemporary workplace we can recognize some trademark švejkian transgressions (in the archaic vernacular, *scrimshanking* and *flannelling*) as possible ways of undermining or dissolving organizational power relationships in practical ways that also help to 'unmask' the ideological absurdities that shore them up. In this way švejkism may stop well short of overt rebellion, although its impact may be just as disruptive (perhaps even more so). Instead, we see what Scott (1985) refers to as foot dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, dissimulation and so forth that are conducted below the veneer of legitimacy;

covert and seditious acts carried out in the silent spaces of everyday life. It is our contention that an underlying tactic of švejkism is 'disengagement', whereby the self is detached from the normative prescriptions of managerialism through irony and cynicism. As we shall see later, however, disengagement of this kind is not capitulation; rather it is a re-engagement with another register of organizational life.

Our way into this discussion of švejkism is organized as follows. First we briefly summarize the managerial controls that seem to be rendering traditional forms of resistance more difficult to enact. Next we discuss the conceptual transformations that are broadening our understandings of resistance to include the more prosaic and inconspicuous enactments of workers, which may open up new ways for identifying practices of employee resistance in organizations that strongly emphasize a culture of commitment and self-managing teams. Then we introduce the tale of *The Good Soldier, Švejk*, and discuss švejkism as a potential modality of resistance in contemporary work settings. In this section we construct the concept of švejkism by treating it as a specific type of organizational *practice* that involves a degree of *ambiguity*. Our hope is that the ensuing discussion will provide others with a novel framework with which to identify and explore modalities of resistance that are not currently being observed. Our article is therefore first and foremost conceptual, but with an eye to the implications for empirical research investigating new corporate controls and worker resistances.

Control and Resistance Today

Innumerable authors have pointed to the stealthy increase in control through disembodied and unobtrusive forms such as electronic surveillance, the management of 'emotional labour', ideological incorporation and other manifestations of self-management. The familiar paradox is that an increase in more obtrusive forms of control begets increased resistance (Edwards et al., 1995) but, with the advent of unobtrusive control that incorporates the very selves of workers, this simple proportional relationship is undermined. During the heyday of industrialism traditional forms of employee resistance involved a rational dimension that both employees *and* employers recognized. Even if managers did not like acts of resistance like strikes, absenteeism and the go-slow they could still understand the rationality of what their opponents were doing. This level of mutual understanding is brought home in instances where managers have even colluded in certain forms of resistance. To paraphrase Mars (1982), 'OK, so we pay our workers a low wage but, in return, we turn a blind eye to petty pilfering and gold-bricking, up to a point'. However, under an ideological regime of commitment and unitary interests that are being increasingly forged in a whole range of contemporary organizations such an accommodation is less tenable. One may expect exclamations such as: 'Strike? Why do you want to strike? We're all in this together. We're all friends now. We're part of a

family!' Under these circumstances the nature of the effort bargain changes: traditional types of resistance no longer retain the fragile legitimacy of 'class' politics and conflicting interests; they are labelled as 'irrational' and unacceptable forms of behaviour to be eradicated completely. Of course, they may still go on but they appear to be increasingly illegitimate under the rubric of the ubiquitous commitment-based Human Resource Management model.[2]

Take, for example, the current popularity of teamwork in all its incarnations. With the normalization and ideological incorporation associated with this approach to the organization of work, any dissent which undermines the mission of the team and, by extension, the organization, is considered to be beyond the pale. Indeed, it is branded 'irrationalist'; the worst form of disobedience because, unlike disloyalty, the notion of irrationality carries connotations that reach beyond the political and question the very psychiatric stability of workers (Edwards et al., 1995; Hollway, 1991; Mayo, 1923). A similar situation can be discerned in organizations endeavouring to engineer high commitment cultures. As Kunda (1992), Barker (1993, 1999) and Casey (1995, 1999) have so explicitly reported, if workers do not subjectively buy into the discourse of 'excellence' or 'continuous improvement' and actively participate in the attendant rituals then they are pathologized by the managerial gaze and transformed into organizational outcasts by fellow team members. Dissent and resistance in these contexts are not explained as something related to the inequality of the capitalist labour process, but rather a matter of, 'Do you have problems at home?' 'Is it your husband?' 'Is it your wife?' 'Are you stressed?' 'Do you have financial problems?' 'Do you suffer from anorexia?' Thus, the question is invariably framed in the same way: 'What is wrong with *you*?'.

In light of this changing dynamic between managers and the managed it is easy to see why some analysts may prematurely herald the end of resistance. Casey (1995: 124) concluded that there were 'few visible efforts at collective counter-cultural or dissent strategies among employees' to new control regimes and in a later article, 'resistance and opposition are virtually eliminated' (Casey, 1999: 175). Similarly, Barker (1999) pointed out that in the context of normatively regulated teams, 'for the most part, the issue [of resistance] was never one the workers really considered' (Barker, 1999: 114–5). Perhaps studies like these have failed to register dissent, not because they have succumbed to a perniciously seductive Foucauldian pessimism, but because they have been looking in the 'wrong' places. Here we think it is pertinent to look at a recent body of research that has attempted to re-evaluate traditional conceptions of resistance and, in the process, de-romanticize it to include what might appear to be more mundane and quotidian aspects of everyday practice (De Certeau, 1984). Our inspiration here is drawn from Knights and Vurdubakis's (1994) observation that we need to avoid the reification of resistance by considering the way in which it is constituted in language as well as practice (i.e. what is 'allowed' and what is 'enacted'; what is rendered legitimate and illegitimate).

Recent research on worker resistance has significantly revised the concept in order to move beyond traditional approaches that privileged organized, open

and overt class agitation. One dominant traditional approach inspired by Marxist sensibilities attempted to surface the underlying dynamics of workplace conflict in capitalist organizations. Hyman (1972), Beynon (1973), Friedman (1977) and Edwards (1979), for example, give compelling explanations of worker resistance but tend to conceive of it largely in terms of class-based politics whereby opposition is openly organized and explicitly directed towards radically overturning capitalist relations of production. This resistance may manifest in a variety of forms such as sabotage, work-to-rule and union orchestrated strikes, but all emanate from the structural mechanisms of economic exploitation whereby workers openly fight it out with capital and champion their 'real' interests. The inexorable dialectics of class relations implies that workers are almost *bound* to resist: 'the workplace becomes a battleground, as employers attempt to extract the maximum effort from workers and workers *necessarily* resist their bosses' impositions' (Edwards, 1979: 13, emphasis added). This view is associated with the 'Newtonian' account of resistance as it has a logic that parallels the interactions of large moving bodies in classical physics: every motive force can be neutralized by an equal and opposite force. In terms of workplace resistance, if only workers can identify the force to be resisted then all they need do is push back equally hard.

As Kondo (1990) has rightly observed, these approaches have limited the definition of resistance to formalized, organized acts, dependent upon some transcendental principle. Whether the transcendental principle is class (a teleological proletariat project), rationalism (the calculative instrumental subject) or humanism (the Sartrian 'rebel') resistance is seen as something that automatically and openly unfolds in the capitalist workplace. Without caricaturing traditional Marxist assumptions regarding the resisting employee, Kondo claims that we must take into account practices that may not involve open class struggle if we are to develop a more nuanced understanding of transgression. A similar appeal is made by Edwards et al. (1995: 291) regarding the privileging of overt and organized resistance, which is worth quoting at length.

> The majority of research studies have tended to focus on the visible, explicit and collective oppositional practices such as output restriction ... and sabotage ... Most of these studies have also tended to focus primarily upon (male) manual workers in the traditional unionized manufacturing sectors ... Yet there are also many other oppositional practices that are often more subtle, covert and secretive and frequently less collective and organized ... The disruptive effects of such oppositional practices should not be under-estimated for in certain cases the 'mental strike' or indifference of one individual or the public disclosure of 'sensitive' information by a disaffected or ethically motivated employee could be more damaging to management than a strike by an entire workforce.

Edwards et al. (1995) contend that resistance as oppositional practice has two distinct functions: (1) it allows employees to voice dissatisfaction and discontent; and, (2) it enables them to create the 'space' to exercise autonomy – no matter how limited – thereby increasing their ability to accommodate and

survive regimes of control. Although this position itself appears, like Hodson's (1995), to rely on psychological notions of 'self-actualization' for its explanatory power, they wryly observe that, under conditions where consent, loyalty and commitment are desired characteristics of the workplace, understanding resistance through a pathology of dysfunctional psychology enables managers to label resistance the actions of 'troublemakers' or 'outsiders.' Thus, the recognition of the rationality of resistance, reflected in condonation and collusion (Prasad and Prasad, 1998), is replaced by the situation whereby any act deemed not to concur with the organization's goals is considered irrational and intolerable. The idealism of a discourse of unitary interests, clearly, has material effects.

The important advantage of the findings presented by Kondo (1990) and Edwards et al. (1995), as well as others like Collinson (1992, 1994), Gabriel (1999), Jermier et al. (1994) and Knights and McCabe (2000) is that the criteria for deciding what activities count as resistance are broadened so that we may detect transgression even under the most claustrophobic cultural hegemony because we no longer have to envisage it simply in traditional terms. 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 organizational life. Moreover, now that corporate power takes special care to target the informal and normative aspects of workers' lives we would expect that to be a site of resistance too. Indeed, it is salutary to remember that subjectivity is the very terrain that is being contested under more subtle forms of control where struggles over dignity cannot be unravelled from struggles over equity. In the remainder of the article we want to make our substantive contribution by introducing the notion of švejkism, after the character in Hašek's novel, as an example of a potential modality of employee opposition that may have been missed in earlier evaluations of new work forms.

Enter the Good Soldier, Švejk

In his book *The Kingdom of Individuals* (1993), the anthropologist F.G. Bailey celebrates the organizational švejks of this world. Bailey (1988, 1991) provides earlier sketches of švejk-like behaviour but it was not until *The Kingdom of Individuals* appeared that he began further to elaborate on the escapades of Josef Švejk. As a fictional character, Švejk (a Czech member of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army) spent the Great War navigating an ingeniously subversive trail within and between the interstices of his organization. In a series of comic episodes, Hašek shows how Švejk always got by, doing just enough so that he appeared to be doing his duty *and* serving his own 'interests' without drawing sufficient attention toward himself to make him subject to the worst excesses of army discipline. Indeed, when Švejk did find himself coming into contact with the forces of discipline then, more often than not, his gaolers

ended up serving more time than him as he effectively turned the tables. More importantly though, Švejk never pulled his cons, ruses and stunts at the expense of his 'comrades', his hapless fellow foot soldiers of the Imperial Army. Bailey calls this course of action undertaken by Švejk, organizational 'disengagement'. Taken in isolation, this term can be confusing as it is not the disengagement of cognitive or emotional withdrawal (Prasad and Prasad, 1998); rather, it is (excusing the apparent oxymoron) an active disengagement; the ability to comply without conforming. In this way, aspects of Švejk's behaviour resemble the cynically or ironically humorous disposition described by Collinson (1988, 1992, 1994) and, more recently, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999).

At this stage, however, we need to make some brief observations on Ackroyd and Thompson's account of workplace humour in order to distinguish our position from theirs. In our view they take rather too literally the statement that joking '… reflects the essential nature of the person' (Collinson, 1992, quoted in Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999: 100). Whilst we, of course, agree with them that humour is an important feature of resistance, the three types they identify – clowning, teasing and satire – all require, a priori, a high degree of conscious comic intent. To put it another way, for Ackroyd and Thompson humour is a serious business: employees and researchers alike should see jokes and levity as a form of oppositional resistance in much the same way as other more recognizable forms of intentional disobedience. This leaves their approach to humour open to the criticisms Kondo (1990) has levelled at the assumption of instrumental rationalism in many accounts of resistance. Moreover, in a practical sense it is also less easy to decompose humour into an 'official' or managerial discourse (the target) and its unofficial and subversive other (the weapon), as Ackroyd and Thompson claim we should (see Mulkay, 1988). An example of the intractable nature of this dualism, as we shall see, is given by Švejk himself through his fulsome enunciation of official organizational discourse. Thus, to characterize Švejk's approach to organizational resistance we use neither disengagement nor humour but Bailey's own term: švejkism.

Švejkism as practice

Bailey identifies the main characteristics of organizational švejks. Most importantly, švejkism always involves a conflict of moralities, an ambiguity of interests, a potential argument about where duty lies. This is, however, rarely presented as a direct conflict between obvious rival obligations – for example, time with my family versus time at work or my commitment to my colleagues versus my commitment to the organization. Rather, it should be couched in terms of an individual's needs, desires and rights that may, from time to time, coincide or conflict with those of others as well as with those duties owed to the organization; a set of relations that are constantly shifting. This is not to say that, despite these shifts, these relations will tend towards balance and compromise in a pluralistic political sense. Nor will the organization totally dominate, as in the case of slavery. Rather, we must acknowledge that švejks are

always involved in a complex and dynamically asymmetrical power relationship where they can neither use overt oppositional force to protect themselves nor make recourse to the moral 'high ground', not least because the organization seeks to monopolize both. In this sense, švejkism is not open protest or stubborn disobedience. It is covert, its weapons guile and cunning, its style irony. Importantly švejks are never 'reformers' in the liberal democratic sense, acting upon some enlightened principle of justice that informs conscious political intent. Indeed, they do not necessarily wish to change the *status quo* for, at one level (in the short term, at least), they depend on its very preservation in order to conduct their activities. In this way švejkism requires that the švejk exercises a level of cognition that operates beyond the limits imposed by the organization. To put it another way, they are not bound by what the organization or its agents deem to be legitimate knowledge. Ultimately, however, the švejk has a realistic sense of what is possible and understands that the organization is not only more powerful but also intent on subjugation. This is why we are unlikely to find a švejk indulging in a heroically futile act of self-sacrifice.

In surveying the specific tactics of švejkism, Bailey assembles a fascinating array of archaic language that will be familiar to anyone who has experienced the apparently mindless obedience demanded by the British Army. A švejk's principal weapons – those of irony and cynicism – extend beyond the normal irreverent humour and mockery to include what Bailey calls *carnival* – the fantasy of a hierarchy turned upside-down. It is difficult for this to be construed as being 'against' the organization as it is frequently (although, according to Bailey, inadvertently) sanctioned by officers who fail to see that '… the ironic performance in particular is offered as a joke, something that need not be taken seriously; which is, of course, a neat piece of mystification. Do not take seriously the fact that we behave as if we do not take the organization seriously!' (Bailey, 1993: 77). In an organization like the military where the rhetoric of unitary interests may well be at its strongest, a performance of this kind celebrates individualism rather than the herd. This is not to say that Bailey sees the organizational carnival as being terminally subversive; although it draws attention to the pretence that the organization genuinely tolerates difference he warns that anyone who indiscriminately indulges the urge to behave in a carnivalesque manner will soon find themselves in trouble. More sustained švejkism requires a subtler approach. This appears in the form of scrimshanking or, in an even more elaborate way, flannelling.

Scrimshanking is to shirk one's duty – a heinous crime, of course, when 'unitary' interests are apparently being subverted. In common usage shirking has obviously negative connotations and it should come as no surprise that the discipline of economics (especially transaction costs economics and principal/agent theory) considers this form of behaviour to be the most insidious means of subverting its utilitarian version of the 'common good'. But it depends, of course – to use Bailey's graphic phrase – on whose ox is being gored. In Bailey's eyes, scrimshanking is a complex performance; a spectacle or 'theatre' that speaks to a number of potential audiences. First, there is the

scrimshanker personified, whose subjectivity and position in the world the act itself helps to define. Secondly, there are the scrimshanker's peers who are invited to share in the theatrical performance; looking on admiringly, but who are also likely to become alienated if the scrimshanker ostentatiously flaunts his or her prowess to the extent that this section of the audience feels that it, too, is being played for a sucker. Finally, there are the 'authorities' – those not permitted entry into the theatre of scrimshanking. None of these categories are stable and, as Švejk demonstrates through his treatment of Lieutenant Lukáš, tickets to the performance can be rescinded at any time. But what of a situation where the house is open and everyone is invited to participate? This calls forth the most consummate of scrimshankers – the flanneller.

Flannelling can be said to occur when the authorities are part of the audience but cannot acknowledge the fact without confounding their own beliefs or principles. Unlike the 'arse-kisser', 'creep', or 'company suck' who displays a conspicuously devotional adherence to the organization's norms in the hope of gaining preferment, the flanneller does not wish to climb the greasy pole. On the contrary, through an elaborate, even exaggerated, display of deference, enthusiasm, or conformity, the flanneller signals the exact opposite, displaying contempt for those very norms. It is this sense of exaggeration that distinguishes flannelling from what we know as the work-to-rule, itself a very disruptive form of traditional resistance. By virtue of this exaggerated performance the flanneller

> … uses forms of respect to show disrespect and in such a way that the target [in the case of Švejk, Imperial Army officers and their lackeys] will be contradicting himself if he takes offence and so will be made to look foolish … That is the quintessence of flannelling and other forms of scrimshanking: using the proclaimed values of the organization to defeat those values. (Bailey, 1993: 93)

A number of features make flannelling effective but risky in contemporary organizations, with their flimsy rhetoric of unitary values and mutual dependency forming the main focus for the attention of a švejk. We have organized these into four dimensions.

Equivocal affirmation. This allows employees to affirm (or appear to affirm) their commitment to the organization or to a particular part of it (for example, a team) in a manner that preserves a sense of difference, either real or imagined. Flannellers can, however, often overstep the mark (as Švejk frequently did) and find themselves subject to summary justice from at least two sources – their superiors and their peers. To us this suggests two things: (1) that flannelling has limits that are contingent both on the skill of the flanneller and the organizational setting; and, (2) flannelling does not have to be understood in terms of the švejk's interests, 'real' or otherwise. Often a švejk cannot help himself or herself, unwittingly flannelling through one last performance on the way to certain doom. Nevertheless, those in the audience can, like some Greek tragedy, impute a moral to this spectacle and, in this sense, the švejk is influencing others.

Practice as performance. The surfeit of organizational ritual and theatre associated with culture management, much of it bogus and patently risible to an outsider, renders it a prime target for a flannelling švejk. Bailey calls this 'routinized enchantment' (i.e. as much to do with definitions of identity and selfhood as with efficiency and rationalization) and it is the presence of this form of theatre that makes flannelling both all the more possible and eminently more effective. Examples of routinized enchantment abound. Take the common practice of regular team meetings, often called when there is little of substance to discuss, or the use of the hollow sloganeering of exhortations to 'quality', 'excellence', or 'service'. Rather than rejecting them outright, the švejk would embrace them with such startling alacrity that the organization could but wonder if it was a miscalculation to enact such measures in the first place – for example, stuffing the suggestion box with trivial (but not completely worthless) offerings. Locating resistance almost entirely in the realm of organizational enchantment in this way sets it aside from recalcitrance or blatant defiance in two important ways:

1. choosing defiance as a strategy may shift resistance from the ambiguous realm of the theatrical firmly back into the rationalized world of calculable effects where disciplinary measures are harder to evade; and
2. outright defiance also runs the risk of being attributed, in the organization's eyes at least, to the pursuit of other less noble or legitimate ends and might eventually even lead to the replacement of one tyrannical false god (the organization's ideals) by another (the pursuit of resistance merely for its own sake – Bailey, 1993).

An ironical disposition. Under the influence of routinized enchantment, irony takes on a heightened significance that might go unrecognized in other organizational settings. Bailey examines the etymology of the word, pointing to its Greek origins in the term *eiron* or 'dissembling trickster'. In Socratic dialectics to be ironic is to feign ignorance with the intention of luring your antagonist into revealing the basis of their argument, thereby subtly holding it up to ridicule. Thus, the effectiveness of the ironical basis of flannelling must be understood, not only by examining the intersubjective relations of the protagonists, but also by exploring the organizational context. Here švejks are ad libbing around a script largely authored by other organizational playwrights. In this sense, irony becomes an even sharper instrument when outright dissent can be labelled disobedient or irrational because it provides a means of challenging sacred norms inherent in that script in a manner that would be considered illegitimate if expressed in any other way.

Scepticism and cynicism. The concept of flannelling invariably points to workers who exercise a degree of scepticism often bordering on outright cynicism with regard to their organization's justifications of what they do for, ultimately, all organizations must be considered to be coercive to some extent,

either directly or through acculturation or ideological incorporation. Švejks do not bow to the specious rhetoric of 'real' (i.e. class) or 'unitary' (i.e. organizational) interests. Nevertheless, švejkism is not libertarianism and individual utility maximization run wild. Švejks are not irredeemably self-interested. On the contrary, they cynically see through the rhetoric to a deeper meaning where the language of mutual interests reveals the very opposite of what it professes. In this way, švejkism is about the ebb and flow of outsmarting the more powerful, not a hand-to-hand fight for territory at the frontier of control. Moreover, švejkism is not an expression of resistance conducted in the light of an a priori knowledge of real interests, but is a pragmatic assessment of which way the wind is blowing. Švejks may choose to fight or sit out particular battles. Again, they may not necessarily do this in isolation. Švejks understand that coalitions can be important in this process but they are also wary of them, realizing that they are always provisional and to be treated with caution, especially when they begin to manufacture an agenda of self-perpetuation rather than dissent from the mainstream.

Švejkism and Ambiguity

A crucial step towards extending the analytical usefulness of švejkian resistance is recognizing the ambiguous character of the four dimensions identified in the previous section. Following Kondo (1990) and Collinson (1994) we do not want to place organizational švejks in a pristine and romantic space of 'authentic resistance' untainted by conformity or consent. The traditional dualism separating consent and conflict often misses the ambiguity and complex interplay that resistance usually entails. David Collinson's (1992, 1994) research is particularly useful for highlighting the fuzziness that regularly surrounds acts of opposition and control, dissolving the simple polarizations that underlie many readings of workplace behaviour. Some forms of resistance may include elements of collusion and consent. Moreover, various attempts at establishing consent within a power relationship could very well have consequences that corrupt its own governing power/knowledge formations. As we mentioned in the previous section, švejkian resistance should not be approached as a set of activities exuding purity in its expression. It emerges as part of the power relationships it challenges and may involve behaviour that at times ostensibly appears fully collaborative without necessarily compromising its status as resistance.

Sometimes the issue of ambiguity falls into a discussion regarding the *effectiveness* of particular forms of employee resistance – do some forms of resistance simply end up reinforcing domination rather than challenging it, thus obscuring the distinction between resistance and consent? We can approach this aspect of švejkian ambiguity in a number of ways. Following earlier studies that show how resistance may in fact be an act of collusion (e.g. Burawoy, 1979; Collinson, 1992; Willis, 1977), Du Gay and Salaman (1992), Willmott (1993)

and Casey (1995) suggest that irony and cynicism in the face of corporate culture management and team normalization can inadvertently operate as an innocuous 'safety valve' (our term, not theirs) which gives employees an almost false sense of autonomy and thus accommodates them even more profoundly to asymmetrical relations of power. For example, in their examination of 'cultures of enterprise', Du Gay and Salaman (1992: 630) epitomize this view when they argue,

> Certainly the discourse of enterprise appears to have no serious rivals today … even if people do not take enterprise seriously, even if they keep a certain cynical distance from its claims, they are still reproducing it through their involvement in everyday practices within which enterprise is inscribed.

At first glance there does seem to be something convincing about this interpretation of detachment. We mentally dis-identify with our prescribed social role yet still perform it and are thus blind to the material nature of power. But such a wholesale rejection of the subversive logic of irony and cynicism is problematic because it gives the impression that if workers are not overthrowing the 'system' then they are automatically supporting it. From this point of view švejkism would be rejected as simple conformity because it does not radically transform the material structures of capitalism in the favour of the worker – an evidently simplistic reading of workplace resistance that ignores the innumerable examples where its enactment in traditional forms ends up being counterproductive. The safety valve approach is also too reminiscent of the 'false consciousness' argument that separates specious ideas from truthful practices because employee disengagement is taken as a false attitude that masks the truth of material controls. The taken for granted dualism of ideas/practice is extremely prominent and one is reminded of the comments made by the philosopher of language John Searle when he claimed the dictum 'practice what you preach' does not necessarily mean that preaching is not itself a practice (Searle, 1968). We hope we have shown the concept of švejkism points to a set of practices that are animated by cynicism, irony and guile – an *embodied ethic* rather than simply a disembodied attitude.

Another way to approach the ambiguity of švejkism is to evaluate exactly what we mean by 'effective resistance'. In one sense, švejkist tropes like disengagement, cynicism and irony are hardly going to stop a proverbial bullet in the workplace. On the other hand, švejkism may still represent a significant reconstitution of subjectivity in organizations, acting as an alternative to the supine or credulous acceptance of the rhetoric and practice of contemporary management. That is to say, even though švejkism may not overthrow capitalism or even yield higher wages it still does not disqualify it as a form of opposition to one of the most fervently sustained edicts of contemporary managerialism: to identify subjectively with the corporation and its products or services. The criteria by which we judge 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' workplace resistances

thus needs more reflection because it would seem that *different* forms of resistance might be effective in challenging *different* forms of power. If this is so, then a heterogeneity of standards is required, for thinking not only about alternative modalities of resistance but also alternative modalities of power. How švejkism interacts with and influences other forms of resistance is, of course, an empirical question. At a conceptual level we could speculate that švejkism may succeed as a form of opposition in its own terms but undermine alternative strategies like collective action or unionism. But we could also envisage švejkism harmoniously co-existing with or actually supporting different types of employee resistance. Such conceptual ambivalence is inevitable in theory building and we hope that future empirical research may clarify some of the muddiness this ambiguity invariably entails.

Conclusion

This article has developed the concept of švejkism as a way of identifying a modality of resistance that was perhaps not so evident in many examinations of contemporary managerial control systems. We have made the argument that the reason why researchers have difficulty observing resistance like švejkism is probably because traditional conceptions of resistance that emphasize open and organized dissent were and still are being used. If we investigate organizations like 'Tech' (Kunda, 1992), 'Hephaetus' (Casey, 1995) and 'ISE' (Barker, 1993, 1999) and think of employee transgression as those practices typical under Fordist social structures of accumulation (e.g. organized strikes, picketing, work-to-rule etc.) then we will often conclude that worker opposition is indeed absent. But following Edwards et al. (1995) and Kondo (1990), among others, we can expand our notions of worker opposition to include intersubjective tactics, covert strategies and subtle identity politics. It is within this research framework that we have introduced the good soldier, Švejk, as a synecdoche to represent a set of practices that may be recognized as resistance in the context of 'high commitment' organizations.

Švejkism has been historically located in the article insofar as we have considered it a way workers may resist contemporary managerial controls that now target the very subjectivities and normative sentiments of workers. In this context, we have maintained that traditional avenues of resistance have become disconcertingly difficult to perform and different forms of opposition may be observed if we know what we are looking for. But this does not necessarily imply švejkism is new or original. Indeed, Hašek's novel was written nearly one hundred years ago and we have no reason to believe that organizational Švejks were not around long before the fad of corporate culture management. What is probably new, however, is the pressing need for concepts like švejkism, in light of the continuing difficulty in identifying resistance in workplaces where systems of control and surveillance now explicitly target the 'hearts and minds' of employees.

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Notes

1. To the best of our knowledge, four authors have noted the relationship between resistance and *The Good Soldier, Švejk*: Bailey (1993), Gordon (1980), Scott (1985) and Žižek (1997). All of these authors, with the exception of Bailey, mention the connection only in passing, without any extensive analysis or comment.
2. We recognize that our observations concerning the emergence of culture management cannot be divorced from a changing industrial relations context where neo-liberal economic ideology has been especially influential. However, given the scope of this paper we have reluctantly restricted our focus to the area of managerial practice and worker resistance.

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Peter Fleming

Researches organizations, work and society in the Department of Management at the University of Melbourne. Among his research interests are workplace resistance, changing configurations of power in organizations and the politics of language in industrial settings.
Address: Department of Management, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia.
E-mail: p.fleming1@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

Graham Sewell

Teaches organizational theory and research methods in the Department of Management at the University of Melbourne. In addition to workplace resistance, his research interests include workplace surveillance, the genealogy of management theory and practice and critiques of evolutionary psychology.
Address: Department of Management, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia.
E-mail: gsewell@unimelb.edu.au