

bradscholars

Towards a performative theory of resistance: Senior managers and revolting subject(ivitie)s

Item Type	Article
Authors	Harding, Nancy H.;Ford, Jackie M.;Lee, Hugh
Citation	Harding NH, Ford JM and Lee H (2017) Towards a performative theory of resistance: Senior managers and revolting subject(ivitie)s. Organization Studies. 30(9): 1029-1231.
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616685360
Rights	© 2017 The Authors. Full-text reproduced in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.
Download date	2026-03-11 04:54:42
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10454/8820



The University of Bradford Institutional Repository

<http://bradscholars.brad.ac.uk>

This work is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our Policy Document available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this work please visit the publisher's website. Access to the published online version may require a subscription.

Link to publisher's version: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616685360>

Citation: Harding NH, Ford JM and Lee GH (2017) Towards a performative theory of resistance: Senior managers and revolting subject(ivity)s. *Organization Studies*. 30(9): 1209-1231.

Copyright statement: © 2017 The Authors. Full-text reproduced in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

TOWARDS A PERFORMATIVE THEORY OF RESISTANCE:

Senior managers and revolting subject(ivities)

Abstract

This paper develops a performative theory of resistance. It uses Judith Butler's and Karen Barad's theories of performativity to explore how resistance (to organisational strategies and policies) and resistants (those who resist such strategies and policies) co-emerge, within and through complex intra-actions of entangled discourses, materialities, affect and space/time. The paper uses empirical materials from a case study of the implementation of a talent management strategy. We analyse interviews with the senior managers charged with implementing the strategy, the influence of material, non-sentient actors, and the experiences of the researchers when carrying out the interviews. This leads to a theory that resistance and resistants emerge in moment-to-moment co-constitutive moves that may be invoked when identity or self is put in jeopardy. Resistance, we suggest, is the power (residing with resistants) to say 'no' to organizational requirements that would otherwise threaten to render the self abject.

Keywords: resistance; senior managers; performativity; Butler, Barad, new materialism.

Introduction

Resistance theory in management and organization studies (MOS) seeks to understand ways in which employees refuse to comply with power (Spicer & Fleming, 2003), oppression (Marti &

Fernandez, 2013), domination (Courpasson, 2000) and/or managerial strategies of control (Braverman, 1974; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Within MOS, earlier theories of resistance as the binary opposite of control have been challenged and to some extent superseded by dialectical and poststructural theories that understand control and resistance as co-productive, interdependent, multidirectional, and constitutive of identities and relationships (Ashcraft, 2005; Collinson, 2005; Mumby, 2005). That is, ‘controllers’ and ‘resistors’ exist not as separate and distinct agents within poststructural theoretical perspectives; instead they are understood to emerge within and through control/resistance practices. However, agentic ‘controllers’ and ‘resistors’ haunt empirical studies of how subjects enact resistance. Thus, for example, ‘workers’ resist panoptic technologies (Ball & Wilson, 2000); ‘trainees’ use impression management to resist being silenced (Brown & Coupland, 2005); ‘management consultants’ resist through imagining alternative future selves (Costas & Grey, 2014) and so on. There is thus contradiction between theoretical perspective and empirical studies.

Contemporary theory is haunted also by agentic managers. For example it is ‘Management (and others) [who] act, more or less strategically, to introduce, reproduce, influence and legitimize the presence/absence of particular discourses’ (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 628), while ‘senior managers’ control professional staff through constructing willing compliance (Courpasson, 2000; Kamoche, Kannan & Siebers, 2014). Agents, perhaps themselves controlled, inform Fleming’s (2005) research and, despite caveats, Fleming and Spicer (2008) understand management as the agent through which power is articulated.

Thus contemporary resistance theory rejects the notion of agents who enact control or practise resistance (Ashcraft, 2005) but agents nevertheless remain implicit. This paper addresses this theoretical slippage through proposing a performative theory of resistance in which resisters do not pre-exist but rather are constituted within and through practices of resistance. To make the case we draw on Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 2015) discourse-based theories of performativity and Karen Barad's materialities-based theories of performativity. Our aim in combining these two theories is to move beyond the tendency in discursive approaches to focus on disembodied subjectivities isolated from 'the world', to better understand the formations within and through which control and resistance are materialised.

We use empirical materials from a study of senior managers charged with implementing a talent management strategy and our analysis takes the form of a dialogue between theory and empirical data. We suggest resistance is invoked when the constitution of self or identity is jeopardised. Further, we explore how resistance is incited not only by control but by resistance itself, and how abjection beckons if resistance fails. This leads to the development of a performative theory that understands resistance and resisters (agents/subjects who resist) as constituted through moment-to-moment interactions between and within entangled discourses, materialities, identities, psyches and emotions. Thus we use the term 'resisters' to signify the co-emergence or collapsing into each other of resistance and those who resist.

The paper is structured as follows. We firstly establish its context by addressing contemporary resistance theory within MOS. We then discuss Butler's and Barad's work before outlining the study's methodology. The analysis discusses resistance against challenges to managerial identity from a super-ordinate organization, the moment-to-moment construction of resistance/resistants in a face-to-face encounter, and the experience of abjection when resistance fails. In each account the researcher and non-sentient actors are active participants. The concluding discussion develops the performative theory of resistance.

Resistance theory in management and organization studies

Resistance is a foundational concept in anti-performative (Fournier & Grey, 2000) approaches to organizations and the fault-line around which critical management studies is organized (Mumby, 2005). Traditional theories of resistance explored opposition between clearly distinguishable groups, but contemporary theoretical perspectives regard resistance as contingent upon, shaped by, and responsive towards disciplinary power (Ball & Wilson, 2000). Control is thus understood to be achieved through employees' self-discipline (Du Gay, 1996; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004), with 'parameters of resistance...set, in an important manner, by the institutions of oppression' (Marti & Fernández, 2013, p. 1214).

Dichotomous perspectives of managers and workers as oppositional agents (Sewell, 2008) have given way to dialectical theories where control and resistance become unstable categories imbricated within and through each other (Mumby, 2005, p. 21). In this 'multidimensional

dynamic' (Fleming & Spicer, 2008, p. 306) there is no agent behind control mechanisms (Putnam, Grant, Michelson & Cutcher 2005) because resistance is inherent in power's exercise (Thomas & Davies, 2005). Complex and often contradictory dynamics of control and resistance arise from intersections in the moment-to-moment (Mumby, 2005), with resistance located in an energetic interplay with control; the two being in constant tension and contradiction. Indeed, each is constitutive of the other; resistance reifies and produces control, carving it out as a terrain of social power (Thomas & Davies, 2005). Actors do not engage in *either* control *or* resistance but both (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994), sometimes simultaneously (Ashcraft, 2005). Subjects 'consent, cope and resist at different levels of consciousness at a single point in time' (Kondo, 1990, p. 224). Mutually informative acts of controlling/resisting (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), through 'a critical and ultimately generative reflexive process' (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 727) constitute identities (controller, controlled, resistant, resisted [Harding, Lee & Ford, 2014]).

Power always contains possibilities of resistance (Goss, Jones, Better & Latham, 2011). If so, what appears to be willing compliance (Kamoche, Kannan & Siebers, 2014) may itself be a form of resistance, a saying 'no' to resistance. The subject can both resist and reproduce dominant systems of control (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999) and conform even as they resist (Brown & Coupland, 2005). Resistance is thus polysemic, shifting and unstable (Ashcraft, 2005). In their 'interdependent, interstitial and multidirectional interplay' (Carroll & Nicholson, 2014, p. 2), power and resistance become 'contingent manifestations of the movement of interacting individuals across time and social space' (Goss et al. 2011, p. 226), wherein 'resistance is seldom pure or uncontaminated by its

own will-to-dominate' (Fleming, 2007, p. 240). Consequently, conduct is 'more complex and dynamic than the terminologies of compliance and resistance allow for' (Iedema, Rhodes & Scheeres, 2006, p. 1125).

Empirical research shows resistance may take active forms such as withdrawal of labour, or it may be rhetorical (Symon, 2005) or discursive (Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Brown & Coupland, 2005; Barros, 2014). It may be *organized* and include group withholding of labour, or *unorganized* and individual. Resistant tactics include, for example: dreaming about desired future selves (Costas & Grey, 2014); cynicism (Fleming & Spicer 2003); scepticism (Fleming & Sewell, 2002); humour (Collinson, 2002); and distancing the self from managerial requirements (Edwards, Collinson & Della Rocca, 1995; Fleming 2005; Thomas & Davies 2005; Helin & Sandström, 2010). Resistant acts may also include returning insults, withholding consent, questioning decisions, deliberate awkwardness and exploiting hypocrisy (Brown & Coupland, 2005). Resistance may be disruptive or 'creative' and 'diffuse rather than targeted, facilitative not oppositional, and authorized rather than beyond the normative limits set by local discursive practices' (Brown & Coupland, 2005, p. 1062). Such manifold forms of resistance leads to the concern that, being so widely drawn, the term loses its import (Contu, 2008, p. 367); becoming 'decaffeinated' and buttressing the dominant order. But note how these empirical studies presume the existence of active agents who carry out such acts of resistance. To give just a few examples, Collinson's (2005) development of a dialectical theory of leadership presumes the existence of 'leaders' and 'followers' who are engaged in 'dynamic interactions' (p. 1422), including control/resistance; Chris, Julie and Gary, managers in McCabe's

(2014) study appear as pre-existing subjects actively reflecting on the very actions that constitute them as both controlled and controllers; and Iedema, Rhodes and Scheeres (2006) feature ‘Anne’ and team members who, although ‘enact[ing] .. complex sel[ves] in the presence of complex others’ (p. 1123), somehow pre-exist those selves as ‘meeting participants’ who ‘forged new ways of positioning themselves’ (p. 1124). That these are excellent studies testifies to the difficulty of exploring resistance as agent-less activity, and thus of remaining true to the post-structural lens through which such highly informative studies are undertaken. How then can we understand resistance in the absence of agents who pre-exist acts of resistance? We explore answers to that question in this paper using a study of the performative constitution of senior managerial resistants/resistance.

Theoretical Perspective

Judith Butler’s highly influential theory of performativity ‘critically upends’ presumptions that material and immaterial entities exist as entities per se; rather they become “singular and monolithic by virtue of the convergence of certain kinds of processes and practices that produce the ‘effect’ of the knowable and unified [entity]” (Butler, 2010, p. 147). ‘Knowable effects’ such as gender, sex, work and organizations, are performatively constituted within ‘rigid regulatory frames’ governed by norms and power. ‘Performativity’ is a ‘repeated stylization’ involving a myriad of acts that ‘congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (Butler, 1990,

p. 33). Born into a world with established norms and cultures, we learn the rules of how to become ‘female’ or ‘male’ and thus how to move within them to ‘constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self’ (1990, p. 140). Butler’s later work (1997a, 2004) explores the inherently social nature of performativity, that is, one is constituted as a subject within and through processes of recognition, and without recognition from another one cannot be a subject.

Those MOS theorists who use Butler have focused both on the disciplining of performatively constituted, organizational selves through norms such as ‘ethical living’ (Kenny, 2010) and ‘the good manager’ (Harding, 2003), and on the materialization of gender in organizational power relations (Tyler & Cohen, 2010; Rumens, 2010; Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012). Butler’s work provides insights into workplace power and subjection (Hodgson, 2005), and, notably, helps challenge organizational ontologies (Ozturk & Rumens, 2014) such as leadership (Harding, Lee, Ford & Learmonth, 2011) and business schools’ construction of organizational ‘realities’ (Parker, 2001). Ontological assumptions about work and management more broadly are also exposed (Cabantous, Gond, Harding & Learmonth, 2015; 2016).

The work discussed above takes us only so far because of its focus on discourses and its exclusion of materialities. It is part of the ‘linguistic turn’ in MOS and the humanities and social sciences more generally, and as such is increasingly critiqued because of its focus on only one aspect of the social world: the discursive. ‘New materialism’ theory re-introduces materialities to social theory, but without jettisoning discursive theories. It attempts to avoid dualisms and/or the privileging of,

say, discourse over matter (Kirby, 2008), and thus interweaves materialities and discourses. Influenced by Karen Barad's (2007) theory of performativity that explicitly builds on Butler's approach, it understands matter as immanent, lively and agentive (Colebrook, 2008). Two review essays (Ashcraft, Kuhn & Cooren, 2009; Phillips & Oswick, 2012) track new materialism's emerging influence in MOS. It has been debated in an on-going but inconclusive discussion (Hardy and Thomas, 2015; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Putnam, 2015), but there is what appears to be an emerging stream of intriguing empirical studies that draw on Barad's work to explore the agency of non-sentient objects. Examples include Symon and Pritchard's (2015) analysis of how smartphones constitute staff identities; and Orlikowski and Scott's (2014; 2015) study of how virtual media constitute new hoteliers' practices. Keevers & Sykes (2016) show how food and music constitute metaphysics of individualism. Such studies follow Barad in regarding phenomena as 'entangled material agencies' (p. 56) that emerge through constitutive practices. Her thesis is of 'the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting agencies' (p 139) and determinate entities (p. 128). (E.g. the scientist is not an agent separate and distinct from a microscope – scientist becomes scientist and microscope becomes microscope through entangled intra-actions). The performative is 'intra-actions that reconstitute entanglements' (p 74). 'Entanglements' refers to the inseparability of subsystems that are mutually informative (p. 283) and engaged in 'intra-actions'. 'Intra-actions' replaces 'inter-actions' to avoid presumptions of there being separate and distinct entities. Intra-actions within and between sub-systems and sub-systems' sub-systems, all of which are entangled within and through each other, performatively constitute what appear to be 'boundaries' and

‘entities’. ‘Entities’ emerge through multitudes of ‘intra-actions’; they are not a ‘specifically differentiated phenomenon’ (e.g. a microscope), but materialize through complex intra-actions between discourses and materialities (Barad, 2007, p. 352). Barad (2007, p. 389) illustrates how ‘quantum physics’ is an entanglement of intra-acting telecommunications, microlenses, optical networks, smart houses, biomimicry, biotechnologies, genetic engineering, biochips, DNA computers, Rosalind Franklin, DNA, electron diffraction, Einstein, wave function, Alan Turing, big science, particle physics, artificial life, world wide web, Seattle, cell phones, fax machines - and many more ‘entangled genealogies’.

‘Matter’ agentially participates in Barad’s perspective on performativity (p. 136). Matter is ‘neither fixed nor given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agential, not a fixed essence or property of things’ (Barad, 2007, p. 137). Take for example the business suit: Imagine putting it on, moving one’s body within its constraints and working within the norms it signifies. The suit, the body that wears it and each micro movement of its wearing (e.g. with legs neatly crossed or splayed and taking up space) make up the performative constitution of the wearer as ‘manager’ (Butler), while its wearing by managers constitutes the clothes as ‘business suits’ that intra-act with bodies, histories, desks, discourses, etc., such that ‘manager’ and ‘suit’ are entangled together in a complex network of co-constitution (Barad). Where Butler’s theory of performativity focuses on moment-to-moment iterations, Barad’s delves into each of those moments to understand its constitutive work. Following Butler, we might explore how the crossing or splaying of legs is part of the moment-to-moment iteration of the

body's performance of gender within norms that require that women take up little space. Barad helps us understand the agency of cloth, nylon, socks, chairs, the genealogies of each and how they combine, in the movement of legs, to constitute 'male' and 'female'.

Butler's work contributes political and psychic dimensions absent from Barad's, while Barad's thesis explores material contexts absent from Butler's. A performative theory of resistance is enriched if, as here, it incorporates insights from both theorists' work.

Research Design and Data Collection

Our study is of strategy implementation in England's National Health Service (NHS). Fieldwork took place from February to May 2010, at which time England's NHS consisted of ten Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) responsible for managing 398 health trusts and organizations. Each trust had a chief executive (CE), independent chair, and a team of senior executives. CEs and Chairs shared responsibility, forming an organizational apex of two people (Exworthy & Robinson, 2001).

In 2004 the Department of Health (DoH) sent a letter to all health trusts requiring that they implement a talent management strategy. It specified an exclusive focus on the small proportion of the managerial workforce regarded as the most talented. One SHA wanted independent, academic, qualitative insights about progress and commissioned us to explore implementation. It approved use of the empirical materials for academic purposes. The research initially had two aims: assessment of the strategy's implementation (commissioner's aim); and exploration of senior managerial control processes (our aim)ⁱ. We failed in the latter aim: the senior managers were resisting rather than

controlling implementation. The new aim - made operational at the data analysis stage - was to understand the performative constitution of this senior managerial resistance. Methodologically, the research comprises a single case study containing multiple mini-cases (Yin, 2008). Its qualitative approach aims to develop theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2012; Creswell, 2008).

Thirty-four of this SHA's 37 trusts agreed that their CE, Chair and Director of Human Resource Management (HRD) would participate in the research – a purposive sample. 82 participants (27 CEs, 18 chairs and 37 HRDs or other senior HR Managers) were interviewed in 24 small group interviews (Liamputtong, 2011) and 20 one-to-one interviews. Small group interviews facilitated exploration of managerial interactions (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006); and one-to-one interviews allowed participants to speak without monitoring their speech in front of fellow senior executives. One small group interview had four participants, (two HRDs, CE and chair); 14 had three (generally CE, Chair and HRD) and eight had two. Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Permission to record one interview (three interviewees) was refused so extensive written notes were taken. The interview protocol consisted of three main topics: definition, identification and development of talent.

Data analysis

Analysis had several iterative stages (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), the first of which was a process of data reduction to identify dominant themes. 'Data reduction' is in many ways antithetical to interpretive research; it organizes 'chaotic spaces' into neat categories and embalms them in a

‘textual eternity’ (Holmes, 2014, p. 783). However, making 400,000 words manageable means that ‘coding’ is inevitable (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Exploration of interactions between participants could not be facilitated using technological forms of data analysis. We chose thematic analysis through immersion in repeated readings of the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994), dividing the transcripts among us (14 each). We piloted the process through each of us working on the 43rd transcript. We found we had somewhat different themes and theoretical notes but discussion showed the variations were productive. We eliminated ‘senior managerial control’ as a theme because of a notable lack of implementation of the strategy. After much debate we reached consensus on one over-arching theme, ‘resistance’, with overlapping sub-themes of resistant subjects, practising resistance, and the resisted. We did not have to look hard for instances of resistance: only one Trust was actively implementing the strategy, and the other 33 offered numerous examples of explicit and implicit forms of resistance to both the DoH and RHA. The study thus changed from an exploration of control to an analysis of resistance.

The second stage of analysis involved intensive analysis of short narratives that encapsulated these themes. We used personal pronoun analysis (Harding, 2008) to explore moment-to-moment movements between subject positions, so as to understand the performative constitution of the speaking senior managerial subject invested within discourses of resistance. Peer review sent us back to a more intensive analysis: we had fallen into thematic analysis’s trap of tracing the already-known (Davies, 2014).

The third stage of analysis was abductive: we re-read Butler's texts alongside the transcripts, alternating between theory and empirical data, each successive stage offering a re-interpretation of both theory and data. This 'repeated process of alternating between (empirically-laden) theory and (theory-laden) empirical "facts"' (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 5) led us from Butler's to Barad's work.

Researchers working with Barad's theory of performativity focus on data 'hot spots' (MacLure, 2013, in Ringrose & Renold, 2014) that 'glow' for the researcher, whether encountered during the fieldwork, analysis or later. The focus is on the moment of the encounter between researcher and researched (Davies, 2014) who 'intra-act' (Barad, 2007); that is, are mutually constituted entangled agencies that do not precede but emerge within and through their intra-action. In our discussions we had repeatedly returned to three transcripts: in one a CE, interviewed by a fieldworker, used unexpectedly rich language about the DoH, and in the other two the researchers had vivid memories of encounters that left each feeling that 'something was up', but we did not know what it was. Such strong resonations meant we now understood them as 'hot spots' (Mazzei, 2014) that, following Stern (2004), are micro-moments that can encapsulate the world in a grain of sand.

The fourth stage of data analysis, informed by Barad's work, required that we analyse the hot spots through a diffractive analysis that makes 'new mappings, onto-epistemological mappings' that allow 'something new to emerge' (Davies, 2014, p. 734). Diffraction, in Barad's words (2007, p. 30), 'involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they

emerge'. We interpreted this as a need to undertake multiple analyses of each theme, reading each of those analyses through each other. This required close questioning of each other about our experiences of being there (themes two and three) and engaging with the transcript (theme one). We discussed our feelings of being interrogated by our colleagues, of having one's interpretations criticized or applauded, and what those feelings told us about the encounters we were analyzing. We moved from reflexivity to being part of the abduction process – theories, data and researchers intra-acted in trying to make sense of the transcripts. The reviewers' comments and advice became agentive actors propelling us on.

The outcome is three intra-acting themes. The first, resistant subjects, explores resistance as fundamental to retaining one's sense of self if it is threatened. That which is resisted in this theme is a fantasised management that exists many miles away. The second, practising resistance, analyses moment-to-moment moves of control and resistance in the constitution of selves. That which is resisted is the other party in face-to-face encounters. The third, the resisted, analyses the abjection that follows when challenge to self-hood meets no resistance. The researchers' roles are, respectively, the granter of recognition, intra-actant, and abjected subject. The themes cumulatively point to a performative theory of resistance.

One – Resistant subject(ification)

This theme explores the role of resistance in the constitution of the senior managerial subject. It introduces understanding of how resistance is invoked when self-hood or identity is challenged or refused.

Interviewees expressed much opposition to a strategy they thought contradicted NHS culture and its 'inclusive' public service ethos. The NHS is part of '*the common good*' (CE, PCT4) whose responsibilities spread to local communities (Chair, PCT7); its '*ethos is about equity and fairness and equal access*' (Anonymised). Its staff '*live and breathe [NHS] values*' (HRD, PCT9), and '*when you cut an NHS manager in half you just don't see the same thing running through them [as runs through a private sector manager]*' (HRD of PCT2). The DoH's strategy contradicts this ethos: '*[Talent] is at every level, not just the people at the top*' (HRD, Trust 15), that is, it exists '*all the way through the organisation*' and management should make '*the most of everybody even if they are not all going to be stars*' (Chair, Trust 27), so '*you have got to find the people ... that are lower down the organization that can do more than they think they can do*' (Chair, Trust 14). In other words '*We have got a workforce here of nearly 6000 people, you know, talent management should not be about 10 or 20 of those. It is about 6000 people for me*' (CE, Trust 20)'.

To understand this disagreement as constitutive of resistant managerial subjects we focus on the first minutes of an interview with Trust 20's CE. In this excerpt materialities, including paper (the letter from the DoH requiring the strategy), technologies (the recording device), bodies (interviewer's and manager's), places and furniture, are entangled within and through discourses

and intra-act in the performative constitution of the CE 'I'. Through analysing this speaker's response to the DoH's letter we will see how this managerial subject is both an effect of power (she is subjected and subjectified, constrained within the identity of 'CE') but also a field of power that enacts agency in constituting itself as CE and in resisting challenges to that identity. That is, we follow Butler's insistence, throughout her work, that subjects are agentive, and the very conditions that form the subject also offer possibilities for agency and thus resistance. In this collapse of subject and agent into each other, acting subjects make claims to power rather than requiring power before being able to act (Butler, 2015b). What seems to constrain and restrain possibilities for agency also offers the means to resistance.

The letter from the DoH that required managers to implement the strategy had been delivered in 2004. This artefact, both material (written on paper) and discursive (it carried orders), articulated the superordinate organization's law. In so doing the letter materialised that upper organization as if it had itself arrived in the envelope: it must be obeyed.

Addressed to CEs, the letter positions them as senior managers (Dear Chief Executive) but also destabilises the discursive formation of 'senior management': they become akin to middle managers responsible for implementing superiors' orders. Discourses of management position the CE as a cultural object and public person who is both saint and hero (Fanelli & Grasselli, 2006), not someone who lacks omnipotence or is subject to control by others. This is a 'differencing' that

makes a difference (Barad, 2007:72) because it creates categories (senior and middle) and moves the CE from one (superior) to another (subordinate). She resists:

'We don't have in this organization a scheme called the talent management scheme. We don't have anything like that. And we deliberately don't have anything like that'.

The performativity of the letter's orders, on the one hand, fails: CE (or organization) are not constituted as subservient subjects who will carry out orders. But on the other hand it succeeds, albeit through constituting something not intended: the resistant CE.

The CE, in refusing to implement the strategy, defends her right as CE to autonomous action:

... I struggle with the let's have a talent management scheme. You know it is a bit like the NHS at the moment, it has never had a more insidious and bullying culture than it has at the moment. And yet it thinks by putting a talent management scheme on top of it, that that is going to produce the goods. I mean it is insane you know. We ... work on the basis ... we try and stop the worst excesses of the NHS at the front doors of this organization. And we stop it, and we say OK now it is up to us how we do it.

Civil servants in London had put in the envelope a letter representing an organization with juridical power to dictate what should be enacted throughout its dominion; what emerged from the envelope in this office in the North of England is a monster that must be kept at a distance:

Our mantra is 'we deliver the basics, we deliver on the givens, that gives us our own autonomy' and you know my constant mantra to the organization is 'if we don't deliver these buggers will be all over us, if we do deliver they will stay down in London. Let's keep them there'.

Materialities of letter and place (the DoH 'down in London' and the 'we' of this northern Trust) constitute (at least two) very different organizations: one claiming the power to impose laws; one seeking to maintain its autonomy.

Discursive theories of identity presume the subject (the interviewee) is constituted within and through discourses rendered present in the words in interview transcripts (Law, 2004). Barad (2007, p. 30) suggests this is inadequate. Expanding on 'diffraction', she writes that we should not fix 'what is the object and what is the subject in advance' and should explore 'how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter'. Her thesis insists that materialities such as the space/place of the interview, participants' bodies, furniture, dress, etc., all omitted from transcripts, intra-act in the constitution of the subject. That is, this resistant CE-self is performatively constituted within and through entangled intra-actions of paper, place, body and discourse. These are all diffracted through each other, taking on meanings and interpretations and changing their shape as they collide and merge. That is, letter, building, office, door, desk, chair, the secretary's office, the secretary, title, staff and the listening interviewer are all entangled in the constitution of the resistant CE.

Capturing this in linear script is impossible: we can only nod towards it. Take, for example, how the name-plate and the door act upon the visitor to change that visitor. While waiting in the secretary's office visitors may appear relaxed, perhaps chatting to 'the secretary' or checking their phones. Given permission to enter the CE's office, the name-plate on the door marks the office space as that of a senior person in front of whom the visitor should change how they act and become the person visiting a powerful or influential other. The door constitutes the difference between spaces. In the secretary's space the visitor may be casual, a person waiting, but their passage through the door to the other space changes them: they become business people meeting a powerful person. As Ingold (2013) describes it, mind and matter collapse into each other: the mind spills out into the environment and the environment into the mind so that 'material culture is consubstantial with mind' (Malafouris, 2004, quoted in Ingold, 2013, p. 97). In our example, name-plate and door *think* the visitor whose thoughts answer through a body that changes how it acts. This is why we suggest the letter from London (requiring the recipient carry out orders) and the CE's name-plate (requiring the person it names to be someone who gives orders) contradict each other. Their encounter changes the letter, so that as it penetrates past the name-plate and through the door to her office it becomes a figural representation of a monstrous organization; in crossing her desk it becomes an object of resistance and invokes the CE as resistant. This process continues, through entanglements of materialities and discourses.

Following this diffractive path through Butler's perspective takes us beyond the speaker's own account of her resistance. Butler's thesis is inspired by Hegel's master/slave dialectic. Transposed

into this CE's office we see a 'master', the super-ordinate organization, that in refusing recognition to the CE denies her the assumptions of agentive power contained in the term 'CE'. That is, the CE is not a CE if s/he does not have the power to '*do our own thing*'. There is nothing in this interview that suggests she accepts this refusal of recognition. Rather, she gave an account of her CE-self to *the researcher's* embodied presence and the machine that recorded her words, thus enacting resistance to the denial of her identity as CE and performatively constituting herself as resistant in front of the listening and watching witnesses.

Note in what follows how she affirms her identity through switching from the 'we' of the organization to the 'I' that is leader. We suggest that the frequent 'you knows' signify her search for affirmation from listeners (interviewer and recorder) that they *know* that what she is saying is true:

... So how I behave as a leader, how I react in times of crisis, how I react in the good times, how I conduct myself on the day to day basis, you know not just the what I do but how I do it, how I say it. All of those things are vitally important. You know me walking down the corridor with a smile on my face gives people confidence. If I walk down the corridor with my head in my hands you know or I start berating people you know... I go more laid back the more stress I get under ... But I think you live it and breathe it.

The CE-self constitutes itself through recounting in speech certain material activities; her body and its appearance *represent* the organization to staff. That is, she offers an account of herself to the listener/recorder as someone whose material body in organizational space (the corridor) articulates

the discourse of the organization. She and organization merge: she lives it and breathes it – as CE she is the organization incarnate. The interviewer murmured assent; the recorder listened attentively; we analysed her speech and called her ‘the CE’. Thus the researchers grant her that recognition denied by the DoH.

This first theme suggests resistance is invoked by a refusal of identity and enacted in the repair work of seeking recognition from elsewhere. The second theme explores the assertion and refusal of identity in the moment-to-moment of a face-to-face encounter.

Two: Performatively practising embodied, material resistance

Theme One introduced the thesis that resistance is invoked against challenges to self-hood or identity. Theme Two analyses the moment-to-moment struggle for recognition and resistance to its denial. The materialities not only of office space, but of bodies and dress, are entangled in this account. Our study included 24 small group interviews; in other words relational, material, discursive encounters between corporeal actors whose speaking, in emerging from embodied actors, is itself corporeal (Butler, 1997b; 2005). Many contained dynamic discussions involving battles to control ‘talent’s’ definition. We focus in depth on an intra-action that remains vivid in the memory of the researcher (JF). Her field records note she thought two male managers were ganging up against the sole female manager, and she felt the need to defend her. This introduces gender/ing into the performative materialisation of resistance. Gender, we noted above, is fundamental to identity and performatively constituted (Butler, 1990; 1993). In what follows, we share Butler’s (2015b)

understanding that (female) bodies performatively constitute women's claim of the right to occupy organizational space; resistance to that claim invokes resistance to that resistance. A performative theory of resistance thus explores resistance's articulation not against control, but against resistance to the denial of recognition.

The encounter took place around a long boardroom table in the CE's office. The sentient intra-actants are a femaleⁱⁱ HRD, female researcher, and male CE and Chair. Major non-sentient actors are the boardroom table, two male business suits seated to one side of it, two female dresses sat on the other, and the bodies clothed in the requisite gendered/gendering attire.

Participants were asked to define "talent." The HRD replied first:

I think everybody is talented ...I think everyone has got a talent. A superb talent.

The Department of Health advocated an *exclusive* TM policy focusing on a minority presumed to be highly talented (CIPD, 2008). The HRD resists this definition, preferring an *inclusive* approach, but it is intra-actions in this material space that are of interest here, rather than those with the distant, London-based organization. The Chair's immediate response was to resist the HRD's definition:

Chair *No some people just aren't talented at all. Unless...*

HRD *No I disagree with that.*

Chair *Unless ... unless you say the fact that you can walk and talk is very talented, which it is difficult to do*

The Chair challenged the HRD's professional identity. Talent management is her province and to be an HRM is to be an expert in talent management. He thus calls her into a resistant subject position ('No I disagree'). The Chair's resistance is to the HRD's resistance to the strategy, not to the strategy itself, so at this point he is resistant (to the HRD), controller (imposing his definition of talent) and controlled (speaking within and through the discourse of the strategy). The HRD responded with a long speech (severely truncated here), outlining her perspective:

HRD *I think everyone will have a talent but you might ...they might not know and you might not know what it is but I think part of the skill is identifying the individuals who have got the talents*

Her language again is emphatic. In continuing her resistance to the DoH's policy she attempts to manage the meaning of "talent", imposing control through resisting the other's definition ('you might not know'). In one statement the discourses within and through which she speaks are those of resistant (to the DoH) and controller (of meaning), wherein her discourse of control (over colleagues) requires resistance (to other's definitions).

But have we mis-applied the label of 'control' to the speech acts in this account? What is it that makes these various acts 'control'? To paraphrase Barad (2007, p. 93), designating certain actions as 'control' and others as 'resistance' is 'material-discursive boundary making'. Following Butler,

we interpret the strong assertion of the self (I think, I disagree, I resist, I refuse) as a demand for recognition, for securing one's identity as an 'I' (Butler, 1997a, 2009), in this case as an expert in HR issues. If so, then what we are calling 'control' is, rather, resistance to the other's power to deny one's status as a subject. On this organisational stage of recognition, the HRD firstly insisted on her position as expert in HR; the Chair resisted that demand through insisting on his right to define meaning, which the HRD then resisted. 'Control' collapses into resistance in that *resistance* evokes *resistance*. Thus if one's claim for recognition (here, as expert) is resisted, that resistance invokes resistance, and that in turn may invoke further resistance. There is much riding on this: when recognition fails 'you are fundamentally unintelligible ... you have not yet achieved access to the human ... [and you] find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not' (Butler, 2004, p. 30, emphasis in original). Substituting 'manager' for 'human' suggests the manager, if denied recognition, can speak only from the subject position of the not-manager – a self that is an interloper into managerial space, identity shattered.

Next the CE speaks and, as our analysis will show, gender/gendering now becomes manifest. He disagrees with the HRD's definition of talent:

CE And therefore isn't it more realistic to call that model a competency development model rather than a talent management model.

The researcher felt it necessary to intervene at this point:

Int Potential...it sounds to me like we are trying to tap potential here, isn't it strange the use of language

This is unusual behaviour for this researcher, trained to allow participants to talk without interruption. But schooled also in feminism, she brought that knowledge to her feeling that two males were colluding in attacking the female.

The HRD then re-iterated her view. But let us introduce the non-sentient material actors involved in this interaction. It is a senior manager's office that has all the accoutrements of high organizational status. Women's occupancy of such spaces is quite new and still somewhat tentative. It took equal opportunities legislation in the 1970s to remove barriers to women having careers, and they are still under-represented in senior positions. But the very fact that women are now visible occupants of dominant positions in such public spheres as this office attests to the body's performatively constituting her right to be there. That is, performativity takes both linguistic and bodily forms that overlap (Butler, 2015b, p.9), so when such female bodies as those of the HRD and researcher 'park' themselves in organizational space they articulate women's right to occupy that space. At the same time, this particular boardroom table is agentive: it divides the speakers into two 'sides', one of men, one of women, lined up at this point in opposition to each other.

But what is a 'female body' and what is a 'woman'? Males and females are remarkably similar except for their reproductive organs and some differences in size and musculature, such that gender is not determined by biology but is 'a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies'

(Butler, 1990, p. 136). Gender is thus articulated largely through a visual representation that announces 'I am a wo/man'. Occupying that office at this moment were therefore four speaking-subjects distinguished not by intelligence, ability, articulacy, and so on, but by bodies and dress. There can be no reproduction of gendered norms without the body's enactment of those norms (Butler, 2015a), so dressing and moving in appropriate, culturally-acceptable ways signifies one's identity as 'man' or 'woman'. Here, in this office, at the specific meeting we are analysing, two bodies are covered in suits that have ties and trousers, while two have dresses and jewellery. Their hair, make-up, shoes, the bags they carry, the receptacles that hold their money and the places where they are stowed (wallet or purse; pocket or handbag) all signify, and performatively constitute, two as 'men' and two as 'women'.

We explore next how these 'cultural genitals' (Hird, 2003, p. 588) become resources used against female-speaking-subjects seeking control of the organizational stage. We are thus analysing the micro-politics that are the focus of feminist theorists of resistance (Swan & Fox, 2010). Defined as resistance at the level of meaning, identity or subjectivity (Thomas, Mills & Mills, 2004), at its centre is a 'quest for the achievement of a positive sense of self' (Dick, 2015, p. 29). Resistant acts may take the form of micro-emancipation (Zanoni & Janssens, 2007), such as when individuals rewrite and re-inscribe available subject positions (Dick, 2015). These may not 'result in radical rupture or apocalyptic change, but may, nevertheless, be effective' (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 720).

A brief flurry of discussion following the researcher's intercession led to the Chair using the traditional masculine metaphor of football. The CE took this metaphoric ball and the male-speaking-subjects kicked it back and forth between them, moving the discussion to archetypal masculine territory.

Chair *My idea of talent seems to be at a much higher level than yours. That you know people are really outstanding at something, not just football but...*

CE *Rugby as well*

HRD *I think there is something that everyone will be outstanding in*

CEO *There is but it is not necessarily what we are interested in*

Chair *I am not sure about that*

HRD *But it might not be what... no, and I think that is different yes, that is different*

In transmogrifying the place of the office into masculine space, the men position the HRD in territory where she cannot speak. Notice how she changes from someone who makes very clear statements of her beliefs the first time she speaks in this short inter-action (*I think there is something*), to someone who stammers and cannot articulate her views the second time she speaks (*But it might not be what ...*). The HRD was rendered hesitant and inarticulate, silenced, voiceless, and denied recognition (Phillips, Pullen & Rhodes, 2014). Her hesitation and difficulty in

articulating her thoughts make her seemingly incapable of resistance to the refusal to recognise her definition of talent, and thus her identity as HRD. This rejection undermines her very claim to be in that space in that position of senior manager. The researcher interceded again:

Int *So it is the exceptional performers that are the talented in your definition*

Chair *Yes in my view*

Int *But were you suggesting it is the sort of the...the inter-subjective as well. It is the relationship between that can allow people to shine or not to shine. I got the sense ...*

The researcher brought the ball back into the female court (to mix the sporting metaphors). This allowed the HRD to speak. She reiterated her earlier points at length, in effect insisting on her right to define talent. The two women together refused to accede to the masculine desire for that silencing of the female that secures masculine identity (Irigaray, 1995). The CE resisted: he took the ball, reclaiming the position of the dominant male, and in his longest speech in this part of the interview used a lengthy and somewhat arcane example of a footballer known only to the most ardent football fans (and thus presumably not the women). He drew the Chair into masculine collusion:

CE *I think that is where I think football is a really good analogy to stick to in some ways because you could argue for those who [the Chair] will know ...[...]*

The gendered battle ceased when the HRD introduced a different metaphor

HRD So you could be a big fish in a small pond. But a small fish in a big pond.

This instigated a short discussion between all four about this organization being a small fish in the big pond of the SHA, ending with the three managers united in their resistance to the talent management strategy, each, it seemed, recognising the other as legitimate occupier of senior managerial space. That is, resistance to recognising the other, and their resistance to that resistance, appears not to be constantly enacted, but arises and subsides.

Here we saw female attempts to claim the organizational stage through providing a definition of talent that would govern how talent is understood (and thus managed) in the organization. This attempt at managing meaning invoked resistance in the males present. Gender itself is performatively constituted through intra-actions of sentient and non-sentient (office space, bodies, suits, hair, etc.) actors, in constantly repeated acts that constitute the appearance of gender. Gender is always unstable, always in flux, and here we saw how threats to the constitution of masculinity precipitate resistance. Women may now share organizational space with men but traditional gender norms re-appear and disappear as ammunition in struggles of resistance. They govern gender's performative constitution – men's passing as masculine appeared threatened by women's claim to organizational space, and women insisted on not ceding that space to male participants. Resistance evoked resistance.

Three: Failure of self-hood

Our third data ‘hot spot’ focuses on the failure of recognition. Although Barad’s thesis requires bringing the researcher very actively into the analysis, there is little concept of subjectivity in her approach, hence the value of drawing also on Butler. We focus on an interview that ‘bothered’ the researcher (NH) because it left her feeling depressed, uncertain and unsure of her research skills. Her field notes record her discomfort connected to the following issues: the CE arrived late and yawned throughout (without apology); the researcher felt compelled to make the interview last an hour but wanted to end it quickly; she felt as if kept on the threshold, not allowed to enter.

At first sight, the account from this Trust is similar to those in other interviews. 33 of the 34 organizations were not implementing the strategy but they gave long lists of activities that could retrospectively be classified as ‘talent management’. Trust 21 did *‘everything from classic leadership development. ... We have got lots of informal processes, and lots of formal programmes’*, while Trust 6 claimed to identify talent through *‘a development programme for first line managers, then we have senior leaders programmes, clinical leaders programmes’*. The HRD of Trust 14 stated, *‘We wouldn’t call it talent management but we have a number of things in play that in effect equate to you know managing our talents as best we can’*, while Trust 16’s HRD said, *‘All my years in HR it has been around but it has just been called a variety of different things. [Now it] is almost like we are formalizing stuff and putting it all under one [label]’*.

The CE and HRD of Trust 18 said something quite similar. Talent management strategies are unsuitable for their small and geographically-isolated organization, they said, but rather than overt

resistance they suggested compliance ('we have tried to do sort of regular staff briefings'). However, they spoke a lot of words that meant little, as seen in the CE's account:

We have tried to do sort of regular staff briefings for the 100 [managers]. So that people know where we are with different issues. And that there is the opportunity to engage and contribute. And I think it is through those kind of sort of ... actually you know so and so will be doing this piece of work in response but if ... you know just by saying it and then enacting it, I think so

And later

And then ensuring that wherever we can that we try to look to meet the development needs of the... so we are trying to sort of manage the whole resource as well as the perception that is there.

The HRD was equally tongue-tied:

And I am thinking of some in my own team just as an example. I have got ... they don't want...you know but we develop and we keep up to date and I mean for me that is part of developing the talent isn't it? Because you are keeping everybody upskilled as best you can.

Our focus here is on the effect on the researcher of their dissembling, yawning and stuttering. We therefore explore this interview as a 'complex manifold of connections ... an ever-changing multidimensional topological manifold of spacetime matter' (Barad, 2007, p. 388), to which we add

affect (Butler, 1997a), in which sentient and non-sentient actors - people, technology, physical space, discourses, materials and affect - are multiply entangled, all provoking each other into performatively constituting multiple/multiply entangled selves.

In this example the first actor to arrive on the scene was the letter the CE had received from the SHA asking her to participate in the research. We make a somewhat speculative leap and suggest the agency of that particular letter was to position the researcher as a spy who would peer inside organizations and report back on progress in strategy-implementation. Our justification is that this is how the researcher felt positioned at that time. If so, then the second actor at the scene is the audio recording instrument that colluded with the letter. The recorder is not something used often in managerial meetings so it may have appeared as somewhat strange to the managers, an interloper recording every word spoken. If so the researcher, in pressing the 'record' button, became an extension of the recorder and thus herself an interloper and spy. If so, then the placement of the machine on the desk materially effected the office – rather than office or research space it became interrogatory space. In this interrogatory space the managers faced a 'spy' rather than a researcher, and gave away as little information as possible. The researcher, trying to make sense of all this in the immediacy of the researching moment, interpreted their actions as expressions of their resentment at having to participate; she turned this interpretation back on herself and became an unwelcome intruder. Not wanted there, she desired a speedy escape.

For Barad (2007, p. 337), ‘embodiment is a matter not of being specifically situated in the world [as an I, specific and distinct from others], but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity’. In the ‘dynamic specificity’ of this particular office the researcher lost a sense of her academic self, in contrast with other interviews where pressing the ‘record’ button constituted offices as research space and herself as researcher. Here the dynamics of the entanglements of materialities and discourses were different, and in particular the affective responses invoked within and by these entanglements were different, such that affect itself became a non-sentient actor whose agency was to make her abject, less than a researcher. Indeed, it may be that it was affect, as an agent, that denied her that recognition of herself as an academic. In the intra-actions of place, recorder, letter, managers and affect, she became performatively constituted as an emoting subject that experienced itself as matter out of place. Not knowing who she was (and here we return to Butler), she did not know how to act, how to give an account of herself as a subject, an ‘I’.

This interpretation points to the effect of being refused recognition under conditions where resistance against that refusal fails or is not possible. Such denial renders the person abject, identity-less, voiceless – and not a self (Butler, 2005). She is not a subject but an object that ‘knows’ this failure of recognition through her feelings of devastation. Confused, alienated and uncertain, the subject refused recognition finds agency only in fleeing. Such feelings of desolation are encapsulated in the feminist micro-politics of resistance discussed above. This denial of recognition was experienced as micro-violence.

In this reading, the managers' resistance took the form of (what was experienced as) denying recognition to an other who challenges one's own identity. But there is an alternative reading. Butler (2005, p. 26) emphasises that recognition cannot be unilaterally given, that is, 'In the moment that I give it, I am potentially given it, and the form in which I give it is potentially given to me', although sometimes the self is so abject that it cannot give recognition (Benjamin, 1988). The researcher, constituting herself as abject object, without identity, could not accord recognition to the managers. This scene of encounter can thus be read differently, as one in which the failure of recognition is mutual. That is, the managers' confused talk can be interpreted not as dissimulation or resistance, as a strategy of keeping the monster of the SHA from their door, but as an appeal for recognition as managers who are implementing the strategy even though they do not know how to describe or discuss it:

HRD *So it is about making sure there is ...that is why ours is quite ...our talent plan isn't very detailed down to the nth degree because we want to enable ...*

CE *Flexible...*

HRD *Yes without a doubt it has got to be organic*

If so, managers too may have felt silenced, robbed of their powers to speak as managers. They had been asked to give an account of themselves by someone (the SHA) with power of punishment, and perhaps that power crept into every moment of this interview, constituting participants not as agents with powers of resistance but as a mess of affect, of trembling inarticulacy, bereft of the linguistic

requirements for entering sociality (Butler, 1997b). The ability to give an account of the self to another that, in being given, constitutes the self, was lost.

This third theme therefore describes a multiply entangled scene of mis-recognition where the 'I' was put under pressure, if not erased, albeit temporarily. In the material-discursive practices of this meeting the intra-actions of sentient and non-sentient agents produced confusion, a failure of understanding, multiple possible interpretations and overwhelmingly negative emotional experiences. Barad (2007, p. 383) writes that the 'entanglements we are a part of reconfigure our beings, our psyches, our imaginations, our institutions, our societies; "we" [scientists] are an inextricable part of what gets reworked in our R&D projects'. The researcher in this particular account became reworked as someone who did not know herself as a researcher, and who did not know how to speak or how to act from a subject position in which she had no subjectivity. The confusion continues still: were the managers resisting the SHA as it spread its tentacles, via the researcher and her equipment, into their offices, or were they pleading for recognition as competent managers who were doing what they had been required to do? Or both? As Kondo (1990) suggests, these two seemingly opposed positions may have been co-emergent, neither one nor the other but both inter-twined and inter-weaving, leaving a researcher hastening from the scene to search for her lost identity.

Discussion and Conclusion: A performative theory of resistance

Contemporary organizational resistance theory is located within poststructural and dialectical theories that presume there is no subject behind acts of resistance, but in many empirical studies the subject is smuggled back in. This paper develops a performative theory of resistance in which there is no agent prior to the act of resistance but rather the resistant emerges within and through material/discursive enactments of resistance.

Our analysis suggests resistance is inherent in the constitution of identities or self-hood, and is invoked when or if a demand for recognition is resisted. Without such recognition, the 'I' cannot exist except in a place outside the human (Butler, 1997a). This is not to locate our arguments in an 'ontology of the ego' (Butler, 2015b, p. 110), where the self, or the 'I', is a separate and distinct entity that looks out at the world from its embodied location. A performative theory of identity emerging from Butler's and Barad's theories argues that one cannot be(come) outside norms, discourses, materialities, spaces, places, culture, history, time, and so on. Primo Levi (1958, cited in Marti & Fernández [2013]), writing of the Holocaust and concentration camps, observed that those reduced almost to nothing but who still possessed some spark of their human identity held on to that last spark through their remaining single power: the power to refuse consent, to say 'no'. That is, one's claim to be human resides, ultimately, in the power to refuse consent to power, to insist on one's right to be an 'I'. If Levi's observation is correct, then this *will to persistence of the 'I'* circulates within the discourses and norms within and through which the self is performatively constituted. Butler (2015a; 2015b) indeed explores the vulnerability of being both a distinct,

bounded being that I know as 'I' that seeks its own self-preservation, and an 'I' that is always fundamentally dependent on others.

Our performative theory of resistance argues that in the mundane world of work, resistance may take the form of a refusal to accept challenges to one's identity or sense of self that threaten to reduce one to abjection, to not knowing who or what one is, and to being unable to speak from such a position. This is a position of suffering, of pain and trauma, as our third theme explored. The pain of being undone by such a violent wrenching out of identity when recognition fails and resistance seems impossible may be fleeting and repaired in a moment, but it is something to be avoided.

We are not suggesting that subjection to the world of work will always reduce the self in such ways, only that organizations offer sites where this can easily happen. It may arise in response to specific requirements from superordinates, or almost spontaneously in the to-and-fro of the organizational quotidian. At its simplest, resistance/resistants do not pre-exist the rejection of the challenge to self-hood, but emerge within and through acts of saying 'no' to such challenges. Resistance thus includes not only saying 'no' to power, but also the agentive act of turning for recognition to another, such as colleagues or workplace friends. Seen in this light, the shop floor workers studied by Collinson (1988, p. 185) were not so much protecting their 'sense of dignity' when they denigrated managers through joking about them, but their sense of self. The degrading conditions within which they worked constituted them as dross or rubbish, but their fellow workers, their 'us',

recognised each other's masculinity and self-hood, human actors separate and distinct from the despised 'them' of the management.

Butler's statement that 'One ... becomes a subject through performativity, which is not an act, nor a performance, but constantly repeated 'acts' that reiterate norms' (1993, p. 240 ff.), requires that a performative theory of resistance focuses both on norms (e.g. of gender) and acts. The 'acts', here, involve a turning away from the denial of recognition towards another who may acknowledge one's identity or claim to self-hood. Barad's thesis on performativity requires that we peer closely into each of these performative acts. We saw in the first theme that if A demands recognition from B but B resists giving recognition, then A may resist that resistance (I will not accept your rejection) and turn to C. But the second theme showed that A may continue seeking recognition from a resistant B even as she turns to C, and may continue looking away and looking towards, perhaps until B gives in. The resistant subject is thus constituted through performative acts of looking away and looking towards, constantly reiterated in those moments when recognition is denied, with resistance invoking resistance, in reiterating the norm of the will to persistence of the speaking subject - the 'I'. This study suggests that the insult from, say, management, and the restoration of the self as one turns to another, may happen in a micro-moment, perhaps so fleeting that one is hardly aware of it save perhaps for a memory of hurt. The act of turning away is a micro-act of resistance, in which one refuses to allow one's sense of self, the very 'I' one claims to be, to be put in jeopardy. Then the turning towards another who will acknowledge the self repairs the tear in the fabric of the self. Much happens in these micro-moments of turning away and turning towards, as we explored above:

a resistant emerges within and through them, and in so emerging constitutes those acts as ‘resistance’.

But Barad’s thesis, in introducing materialities, space and time into the analysis, complicates each of these repeated acts of looking away and looking towards. In each reiterated act, doing and being collapse into each other in entangled intra-actions of spacetime-matter, and we require a ‘rich genealogical account of the entangled apparatuses or practices’ (Barad, 2007, p. 390) that constitute resistance/resistants. In the above examples we noted the particular agency of a letter, and of materialities such as clothes, bodies, furniture, recording devices, bodies, ‘visitor’ badges, and so on, that intra-acted within and through discourses of gender, hierarchy, organizations, property, academia, management and others we have not named, and where time was not linear but bent as discourses from another era re-appeared, and where space shape-shifted such that different parties sharing the same space may have felt themselves to be occupying different places. Non-sentient actors intra-acted with sentient, albeit without the sentient actors’ conscious awareness. Barad (2007, p. 389) admits that it is difficult to capture the complexities of such entangled intra-actions two-dimensionally. Perhaps we need multi-dimensional models made possible by computer software. Future research should therefore include exploration of how to capture the complexities of resistance in its performative constitution. For now we can only hint at the possibilities.

In the second theme we saw how in a single moment the CE and Chair resisted the HRD’s attempt at definition, with the intra-actions of clothes, bodies, discourses and sentient actors constituting two participants as dominant males, and two others as subordinated females. Each male turned

away from the female and towards each other for recognition of the self as masculine and senior; it seemed to require only the mention of football to do this. In that micro-moment the HRD could not speak, she became abject – a not-manager. In the next micro-moment the researcher intervened, with clothes, bodies, discourses, hair, nails and so on constituting both HRD and researcher as ‘female’, as resistants to the subordinated female position, and each affording recognition to the other that the female is the equal of the male. In the next micro-moment the two together resist male attempts at dominance, and in this moment a subtle and complex drama is enacted. An entire paper could be written exploring an action that lasted only moments.

This study also emphasises that researchers are actively involved in the giving of recognition. This requires a form of reflexivity that analyses situated meanings as they emerge in the research encounter (Finlay, 2002), including an understanding of non-sentient actors’ participation in the flux of identity-formation. Given our Butlerian perspective, in which each and every encounter is a ‘scene of address’ located within this desire ‘for life itself’ (Butler, 2005, p. 44), we have analysed research encounters as scenes of recognition. Our examples show the researcher can be a resource for recognition, or an active agent in a struggle for recognition, or herself denied recognition. This leads to the question of the researcher’s role in other studies of resistance. The graduate trainees interviewed by Brown and Coupland (2005) were silenced by the organization they worked for: did the research interviews offer a space where they could be recognised as speaking subjects? Fleming’s (2007) ‘homophobic cohort’ may not only have been ‘cynically distancing themselves’ from an organization that used sex as a form of control, but may also have been seeking Fleming’s

recognition of the sexual identities they were performatively constituting. The focus groups of middle managers freed by jokes to briefly speak ill of their senior managers in Harding, Ford & Lee's (2014) study may have temporarily absented themselves from the research encounter and the presence of the researcher to seek recognition from their fellow managers of the shared identity of resistant. Admittedly this is speculation, and these are just a few examples, but they point to the value of exploring the work we do, as researchers, when we ask people to discuss their organizational resistance practices with us as their witnesses. This takes us into ethical, methodological and theoretical issues that are beyond the scope of this current paper to address, but they do merit further exploration and discussion.

We have argued that resistance/resistants are *materialised* within and through others' resistance to one's desire to persist in that identity I recognise as 'me', with non-sentient as well as sentient actors participating, in complex, multi-layered, entangled ways, in the flux of becoming of the self. More than an act or series of acts that takes place elsewhere, by fully-constituted subjects, resistance and resistant co-emerge: to reiterate, there is no resistant who precedes acts of resistance. Rather than being decaffeinated (Contu, 2008) because such forms of resistance do not seek to overthrow prevailing normative regimes, this performative approach understands resistance/resistants as constituted at the micro-political level of organizations (Thomas & Davies, 2005; Dick, 2015), and thus inhibiting neoliberalism's potential to reduce the human to nothing but cogs in organizational machines.

In this study we explored how resistance/resistants are performatively constituted and co-emergent in a saying 'no' to a power that would deny identity and self-hood within the context of research interviews. We need next to peer more closely into these micro-practices of resistance that occur in what Stern (2004, p. 8), calls 'present moments', or 'small but meaningful affective happenings that unfold in the seconds that make up now'. In Barad's/Butler's terms, these are the constitutive movements of the performative. Such moments can be studied, Stern suggests, using micro-analytic interviews, a methodology that opens possibilities of understanding the performative constitution of resistance/resistants in day-to-day organizational life. Our aim, in future studies that build on this one, would be to provide insights into how and why resistance arises in the moment and then subsides. In other words, how are *quiescence* and *control* performatively constituted? Further, it may be that some insults to identity are felt so profoundly that they inspire a collective response, but what tips individual into collective responses?

We need also to understand affect and its intra-actions with materialities and discourses in the performative constitution of resistance/resistants. Affect informed our account above – anger at the silencing of the woman, despair at loss of identity. We suggested affect is itself a non-sentient agent. Its appearance points to the potential value of tracking affect's movements in, between and through the intra-actions of the moments in which resistance/resistants co-emerge. This takes us into new ways of carrying out research. Studies of instances that last no more than moments but are complex and multi-layered, inhabited by intra-acting sentient and non-sentient actors, influenced by affect, materialities and discourses, perhaps arising and subsiding or repeated from moment-to-moment,

point to the need for new research methods that, as noted above, understand the researcher in new ways.

The performative theory of resistance/resistants developed in this study offers insights into ‘the prosaic spaces of organizational life’ (Fleming & Spicer, 2003, p. 175) and the nascent ‘abiding politics of social justice’ (ibid). We suggest these spaces are not so much prosaic as rich in micro-dramas in which, from moment-to-moment, the work of constituting the self occurs. When the ‘I’ is jeopardised, a resistant that resists may take its place.

References

- Alvesson, M. & Sköldbberg, K. (2009) Reflexive methodology. London, UK: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (2002) Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39:5, 619-644.
- Ashcraft, K.L. (2005) Resistance through consent?: Occupational identity, organizational form, and the maintenance of masculinity among commercial airline pilots. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19:1, 67-90.
- Ashcraft KL, Kuhn TR & Cooren F (2009) Constitutional amendments: materializing organizational communication. *The Academy of Management Annals* 3:1, 1–64.
- Ball, K. & Wilson, D.C. (2000) Power, control and computer-based performance monitoring: repertoires, resistance and subjectivities. *Organization Studies* 21:3, 539-565.
- Barad K. (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Barros, M. (2014) Tools of legitimacy: the case of the Petrobras Corporate Blog. *Organization Studies* 35:8, 1211-1230.

Benjamin, J. (1988) *The bonds of love. Psychoanalysis feminism, and the problem of domination*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Braverman, H. (1974) *Labor and monopoly capital*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Brown, A. & Coupland, C. (2005) Sounds of silence: graduate trainees, hegemony and resistance. *Organization Studies* 26:7, 1049-1069

Butler, J. (1990/1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. (1997a) *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Butler, J. (1997b) *Excitable Speech*. London, UK: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2005) *Giving an account of oneself*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Butler, J. (2009) *Frames of War*. London, UK: Verso.

Butler, J. (2010). Performative agency. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3:2, 147-161.

Butler, J. (2015a) *Senses of the subject*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Butler, J. (2015b) *Notes towards a performative theory of assembly*. London, UK: Harvard University Press.

Cabantous, L., Gond, J-P, Harding, N. & Learmonth, M. (2015) What do we mean by performativity in organization and management studies? The uses and abuses of performativity. In: *International Journal of Management Reviews*. Retrieved from: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.brad.ac.uk/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1468-2370/earlyview](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.brad.ac.uk/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-2370/earlyview)

Cabantous, L., Gond, J-P, Harding, N. & Learmonth, M. (2016). Reconsidering critical performativity. *Human Relations*, 69:2, 197-213.

Carroll, B. & Nicholson, H. (2014) Resistance and struggle in leadership development. *Human Relations*, at <http://hum.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/>

CIPD (2008) 'Talent management: design, implementation and evaluation' *CIPD online practical tool*. London, UK: CIPD.

Colebrook, C. (2008) On not becoming man: the materialist political of unactualized potential. In Alamo, S. and Hekman, S. (Eds) *Material feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press. 52-84.

Collinson, D.L. (1988) 'Engineering humour': Masculinity, joking and conflict in shop-floor relations. *Organization Studies*, 9:2, 181-199.

Collinson, D.L. (2002) Managing humour. *Journal of Management Studies* 39:3, 269–288.

Collinson, D. L. (2005) Dialectics of leadership. *Human Relations*, 58:11, 1419-1442.

Contu, A. (2008) Decaf resistance. On misbehaviour, cynicism, and desire in liberal workplaces. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21:3, 364-379.

Costas, J. & Grey, C. (2014) The temporality of power and the power of temporalit: imaginary future selves in professional service firms. *Organization Studies*, 35:6, 909-937.

Courpasson, D. (2000) Managerial strategies of domination. *Organization Studies*, 21:1, 141-161.

Creswell, J.W. (2008) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods*. London, UK: Sage.

Davies, B. (2014) Reading Anger in Early Childhood Intra-Actions: A Diffractive Analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 20:6, 734–741.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2005) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dick, P. (2015) To see ourselves as others see us? Incorporating the constraining role of socio-cultural practices in the theorization of micropolitical resistance. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22:1, 17-35.

Du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and identity at work*. London, UK: Sage.

- Edwards, P, Collinson, D.L. & Della Rocca, G. (1995) Workplace resistance in Western Europe. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1:3, 283-316.
- Exworthy, M. & Robinson, R. (2001) Two at the top: relations between Chairs and Chief Executives in the NHS. *Health Services Management Research*, 14, 82-91.
- Fanelli, A. & Grasselli, N.I. (2006) Defeating the Minotaur: The construction of CEO charisma on the US Stock Market. *Organization Studies*, 27:6, 811-832.
- Finlay, L. (2002) Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2:2, 209-230.
- Fleming, P. & Sewell, G. (2002) Looking for the good soldier, Svejik: Alternative modalities of resistance in the contemporary workplace. *Sociology* 36:4, 857-872.
- Fleming, P. (2005) Metaphors of resistance. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19:1, 45-66.
- Fleming, P. (2007) Sexuality, power and resistance in the workplace. *Organization Studies* 28:2, 239-256.
- Fleming, P. and Spicer, A. (2003) Working at a cynical distance: Implications for power, subjectivity and resistance. *Organization*, 10:1, 157-179.
- Fleming, P. & Spicer, A. (2008) Beyond power and resistance. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21:3, 301-309.
- Fournier V & Grey C (2000) At the critical moment: Conditions and prospects for critical management studies. *Human Relations* 53:1, 7-32.
- Goss, D., Jones, R., Better, M. & Latham, J. (2011) Power as practice: A micro-sociological analysis of the dynamics of emancipatory entrepreneurship. *Organization Studies*, 32:2, 211-229.
- Harding, N. 2003. *The Social Construction of Management*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Harding, N. (2008) The 'I', the 'me' and the 'you know': identifying identities in organisations. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*. 3:1: 42-58.

- Harding, N., Lee, H., Ford, J., & Learmonth, M. (2011). Leadership and charisma: A desire that cannot speak its name? *Human Relations*, 64(7): 927-949.
- Harding, N., Lee, H. & Ford, J. (2014) Who is the middle manager? On constituting an organizational self. *Human Relations*, 67:10, 1213-1237.
- Hardy, C. & Thomas, R. (2015) Discourse in a material world. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52:5, 680-96.
- Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. (1999). No joking matter: Discursive struggle in the Canadian refugee system. *Organization Studies*, 20, 1–24.
- Helin, S. & Sandström, J. (2010) Resisting a corporate code of ethics and the reinforcement of management control. *Organization Studies*, 31 (5): 583-604.
- Hird, M. (2003). Considerations for a psychoanalytical theory of gender identity and sexual desire: The case of intersex. *Signs*, 28, 1068-1092.
- Hodgson, D. 2005. 'Putting on a professional performance': Performativity, subversion and project management. *Organization*, 12(1): 51-68.
- Holmes, R. (2014) Fresh Kills: The Spectacle of (De)Composing Data. *Qualitative Inquiry* 20:6, 781–789.
- Iedema, R., Rhodes, C., & Scheeres, H. (2006) Surveillance, resistance, observance: exploring the teleo-affective volatility of workplace interaction. *Organization Studies*, 27:8, 1111-1130.
- Ingold, T. (2013) *Making*. London: Routledge.
- Irigaray L (1995) The question of the other. *Yale French Studies* 87, 7-19.
- Ivanoff, S.D. & Hultberg, J. (2006) Understanding the multiple realities of everyday life: basic assumptions in focus group methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 13, 125-132.
- Kamoche, K., Kannan, S. & Siebers, L.Q. (2014) Knowledge-sharing, control, compliance and symbolic violence. *Organization Studies*, 35:7, 989-1012.
- Kärreman, D. & Alvesson, M. (2004) Cages in tandem: Management control, social identity, and identification in a knowledge-intensive firm. *Organization*, 11:1, 149-175.

Keevers, L. and Sykes, C. (2016) Food and music matters: Affective relations and practices in social justice organizations. *Human Relations*, On-line early. <http://hum.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/05/13/0018726715621368.full.pdf+html>

Kenny, K. 2010. Beyond ourselves: Passion and the dark side of identification in an ethical organization. *Human Relations*, 63(6): 857-873.

Kirby, V. (2008) Natural convers(at)ions: or what if culture was really nature all along? In Alamo, S. and Hekman, S. (Eds) *Material feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press. 214-236.

Knights, D. & Vurdubakis, T (1994) Foucault, Power, Resistance and All That, pp167-98 in J. Jermier et al. (eds), *Power and resistance in Organizations*. London, UK. Routledge.

Knox, H., O'Doherty, D.P., Vurdubakis, T. & Westrup, C. (2015) Something happened: Spectres of organization/disorganization at the airport. *Human Relations*, 68:6, 1001-1026.

Kondo, D. K. (1990) *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* London, UK: University of Chicago Press.

Law, J. (2004) *After method. Mess in social science research*. London, UK: Routledge.

Liamputtong, P. (2011) *Focus Group methodology*. London, UK: Sage.

Marti, I. & Fernández. P. (2013). The institutional work of oppression and resistance: Learning from the Holocaust. *Organization Studies* 34:8, 1195-1223.

Mazzei, L.A. (2014) Beyond an Easy Sense: A Diffractive Analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20:6, 742-746.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.

Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing resistance in organization studies: A dialectical approach. *Management Communication Quarterly* 19:1, 19-44.

Orlikowski, W.J. & Scott, S.V. (2015) Exploring Material-Discursive Practices. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52: 5, 697-705.

- Ozturk, M. B., & Rumens, N. 2014. Gay male academics in UK business and management schools: Negotiating heteronormativities in everyday work life. *British Journal of Management*, 25(3): 503-517.
- Parker, M. 2001. Fucking management: queer, theory and reflexivity. *Ephemera* 1(1): 36-53.
- Phillips N & Oswick C (2012) Organizational discourse: domains, debates, and directions. *Academy of Management Annals* 6:1, 435-481.
- Phillips, M, Pullen, A. & Rhodes, C. (2014) Writing organization as gendered practice: Interrupting the libidinal economy. *Organization Studies*, 35:3, 313-333.
- Putnam, L. (2005) Unpacking the dialectic: alternative views on the discourse-materiality relationship. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52:5, 706-16.
- Putnam, L., Grant, D., Michelson, G. & Cutcher, L. (2005) Discourse and resistance: targets, practices, and consequences. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19:1, 5-18.
- Ringrose, J. & Renold, E. (2014) "F**k Rape!": Exploring Affective Intensities in a Feminist Research Assemblage. *Qualitative Inquiry* 20:6, 772-80.
- Rittenhofer, I., & Gattrell, C. 2012. Gender mainstreaming and employment in the European Union: A review and analysis of theoretical and policy literatures. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(2): 201-216.
- Rumens, N. 2010. Workplace friendships between men: Gay men's perspectives and experience. *Human Relations*, 63(10): 1541-1152.
- Silverman, D. (2012) *Interpreting qualitative data*. London, UK:Sage.
- Sotirin, P. & Gottfried, H. (1999) The ambivalent dynamics of secretarial bitching: control, resistance and the construction of identity. *Organization*, 6(1): 57-80.
- Spicer, A. & Fleming, P. (2003) Working at a cynical distance: implications for power, control and subjectivity. *Organization*, 10:1, 157-179.
- St. Pierre, E.A.S. & Jackson, A.Y. (2014) Qualitative data analysis after coding. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20, 715-719.

- Stern, D. (2004) *The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life*. London: Norton.
- Swan, E. & Fox, S. (2010). Playing the game: strategies of resistance and co-optation in diversity work. *Gender, Work and Organization*. 17:5, 567- 586.
- Symon, G. (2005) Exploring resistance from a rhetorical perspective. *Organization Studies* 26:11, 1641-1663.
- Symon, G. & Pritchard, K. (2015) Performing the responsive and committed employee through the sociomaterial mangle of connection. *Organization Studies*, 36:2, 241-263.
- Thomas, R., Mills, A. & Mills, J.H. (2004) *Identity Politics at Work: Resisting Gender, Gendering Resistance*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Thomas, R & Davies, A. (2005) ‘Theorising the Micro-politics of Resistance: New Public Management and Managerial Identities in the UK Public Services’, *Organization Studies*, 26:5, 683-706.
- Tyler, M., & Cohen, L. 2010. Spaces that matter: Gender performativity and organizational space. *Organization Studies*, 31(2): 175-198.
- Yin, R.K. (2008) *Case study research: design and methods*. London, UK: Sage.
- Zanoni, P. & Janssens, M. (2007) Minority employees engaging with (diversity) management: An analysis of control, agency and micro-emancipation. *Journal of Management Studies*, 44,8, 1371–97.

ⁱ The SHA funded the costs of hiring a research assistant for a short period, and travel costs. We were acting as academics, not consultants, and so did not ourselves receive any fees.

ⁱⁱ Using the terms ‘female’ and ‘male’ essentializes gender but is necessary to the discussion.