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The moral work of subversion

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The moral work of subversion

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Abstract

This paper critically reconsiders dominant understandings of morality and subversion within organizations. Existing organisational literature does not adequately address the important productive role of morality for producing and justifying everyday subversive practices as well as the use of subversion to legitimate power relations and dominant values. Drawing upon interactionist insights, we develop a practice-based account of morality, highlighting the means through which subversion retroactively legitimates the diverse range of actions performed by organizational subjects. This form of retrospective reasoning, which we term 'moralization', serves as an important resource for subjects to actively negotiate the often competing moral and practical demands placed on them as organizational subjects. Consequently, we position subversion as an important means of accomplishing, legitimating and preserving a given organizational order, rather than a 'common sense' view that subversion necessarily subverts organizational values. In doing so we make explicit the 'positive' function of rule-bending for processes of organizational control.

Keywords

Introduction

Subversion is traditionally associated with the challenging of a dominant worldview; the act of trespassing against accepted social and organizational mores. Yet this established view is challenged by emerging perspectives highlighting how subversion is always incorporated within and made part of any social order (*cf.* Stallybrass and White, 1993; Linstead *et al.,* 2014). This builds on similar work, revealing the role of entrenched practices of subversion for paradoxically reinforcing prevailing organizational beliefs and norms (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Foucault, 1977, 1990).

These readings reflect how subversive practices emerge from and are inexorably linked to a location and context specific (situated) moral order. For Garfinkel (1967), the 'moral order' refers to the ways in which rules are accomplished as a practical action and in turn create the situated order from which to apprehend everyday social life. The breaching of such ordering makes visible entrenched beliefs and social logics, those very rules, which order our daily performance as social subjects. In a different vein, Foucault posits that disciplining technologies within the Victorian age regarding sexual perversity 'did not aim to suppress it, but rather to give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality' (Foucault, 1990: 44). The significance here are the ways in which technologies that aim to control subversive practices produce the very grounds for making visible and amenable such subversive practices as a possible form of organisational action.

Literature pays less attention, however, to subversion as part of a given organisational culture's broader performed and performative orderings. Following the insights of Cohen

(1985, 1987) we may imagine organizational cultures as ambiguous in their very nature. Such ambiguity for Munro (1999: 621) 'leaves spaces for the self to be created' through a multi-faceted 'exhibition' of cultural performance. Subversion therefore, can be understood as one of a myriad possible 'performances of self' (Goffman, 1959) within ambiguous and heterogeneous organizational cultures. Such organizational ambiguity and heterogeneity, which characterise the formal and informal knowledge required to negotiate organizational life, may further only become present and available for inspection when one is 'called to account' (*cf.* Garfinkel, 1967; 2001; Munro, 1996a; 2001). Therefore what is brought into question is how subversion can be located at the site of the individual if the rules of the game are not necessarily known as an *a priori* fact of organizational life.

This greater sensitivity to the social production of subversion allows for a broader reconsideration of the complex relationship of the interplay between morality and subversion, on the one hand, to performances of power and control, on the other. More than simply making visible prevailing moralities, subversions can also reinforce these abstract systems of beliefs and norms through delineating how we deal with transforming uncertainty into certainty as a specific social practice. The performance of subversion provides individuals with a means for navigating the (often) hopeless task of fulfilling the duties of a responsible organizational subject in practice. Such duties themselves can be considered 'moral' in as much as they reaffirm what may be constituted as good (appropriate) and bad (inappropriate) forms of organisational conduct (*cf.* Garfinkel, 1967).

At stake here is the regularization of rule-bending[1] and *post hoc* rationalisation of one's behaviour in circumstances where established moral standards seem unfeasible (Bittner, 1967; Garfinkel, 1967). In doing so it serves to both help accomplish and preserve a moral order. Here *habituated* (Berger & Luckman, 1966) practices of subversion work to reproduce a moral order through providing individuals with ways to regularly and legitimately manage practical organisational tensions. Such subversion also preserves a given organisational order (Goffman, 1963), where subversive practices may be deemed moral as they aim to control threats to organisational integrity (Garfinkel, 1967; *cf.* Strauss, 1982). This paper aims, therefore, to critically examine dominant understandings of subversion within organizational literature, arguing that they commonly do not address the productive role of morality, as itself a practical social accomplishment, for producing and justifying everyday practices nor the way that they may legitimate organisational conduct and enhance the perceived morality of an organization.

Drawing upon interactionist insights, we develop a practice-based[2] account of 'organizational order'. Such an approach makes explicit the significance of the 'social' in developing organisational understandings as well as the multiple ways in which organisations can be interpreted and acted upon; that is, the social is necessarily interactional as it represents both an effect of and a strategy for engagement with organisations. Here we make this interactionist[3] reading explicit through an analysis of rule-bending and subversion. In doing so we aim to highlight the ways in which a given 'organizational order' acts as a retroactive means of accounting for the legitimacy of a diverse range of actions performed by organizational subjects. This form of retrospective

reasoning, which we term 'moralization', serves as an important resource for subjects to actively negotiate the often competing moral and functional demands placed upon them within organizational contexts. Consequently, we position subversion as an important means of accomplishing, preserving and providing legitimacy to a given organizational order. Within this context, we go further to illustrate the 'positive' function of 'rule-bending' for preserving not only a moral order but also processes of organizational control. Crucial to such an analysis is a deconstruction of the traditional binary understanding of morality and subversion for one that focuses instead on their mutually constituting and reproducing relation; rule-bending as a practical accomplishment.

We open our argument with an examination of subversion as inescapably connected with the promotion of organizational mores and their unavoidable *incorporation* within prevailing forms of organization. This critical review of the literature will be followed by an analysis of how rule-bending is justified retrospectively through processes of moralization. It will then explore how such moralization serves to legitimate and preserve an organizational moral order. This will lead onto a broader examination and discussion of how practices of 'moral subversion' contribute to cultural control and the reinforcing of organizational moralities.

Creating the moral conditions for subversion

Subversion is conventionally defined as the subverting of an established rule or norm. It refers, in this respect, to practical instances where individuals go against an existent set of values or 'codes' of conduct. While this term can cover a range of actions, the focus of

this paper is on practices of rule-bending, particularly related to the perceived subverting of an established moral norm. To this end, subversion is frequently documented as being counter to a prevailing set of ideals or ethical standards (Hodgson, 2005; Robinson and Bennett, 1995). This conventional view of morality and subversion as opposing forces extends to established accounts of organizational morality. Questions of ethics and leadership within organizations primarily revolve around how to prevent the subversion of these ideals and mores through calls to a form of rational justice (Rhodes, 2012). However, questions of whose interests are being served and whether there is scope for the incorporation of what may be deemed rule-bending into an everyday reality and the spaces and conditions for subversion have been less well articulated.

Recent scholarship has rendered this relationship of ordering more complex, revealing the potentially positive function of subversion for achieving moral ends. It highlights what has been termed a 'moral subversion' (*cf.* Folger *et al.,* 2013: 912) denoting instances when employees subvert organizational ideals or expected codes of conduct in the name of upholding a broader set of moral or ethical principles. This phenomenon is captured in notions of 'constructive deviance' in which employees violate norms but '…in doing so contributes to the wellbeing of an organization, its members or both' (Galperin and Burke, 2006, 333). Such practices are particularly commonplace in studies of healthcare organisations (*cf.* Abbot & Wallace, 1990; Dopson, 1997; Strauss, 1982; Freidson; 1970) where professional conduct runs counter to a given organisational ethos (*cf.* Munro, 2010).

Emerging from these insights are new perspectives reconsidering morality and subversion as existing in a dynamic rather than strictly opposing relation. Individuals can engage, for instance, in 'constructive resistance' where they express their disagreement with organizational norms and demands in a way that encourages dialogue and relational stability rather than antagonism and organizational destruction (Greenbaum, *et al.,* 2013; Tepper, *et al.*, 2001; Tepper, *et al.,* 2006). Speaking directly to practices of subversion, critical leadership studies contend that managers need to exhibit a 'progressive pragmatism' allowing them to 'bend' the rules for emancipatory goals (Alvesson & Spicer 2012: 377). Moreover, Weiskopf and Willmott (2013) introduced a broader 'ethics of rule-bending' whereby acts of subversion are seen as a 'critical practice' for challenging dominant organizational ideals and power structures. According to this view, Daniel Ellsburg's decision to publicly release the classified Pentagon papers was a 'critical practice' for revealing how prevailing Cold War ideologies were concealing and morally justifying (unethical) conduct surrounding the manipulation of wartime casualty information (*cf.* Weber, 1978). One could go even further and suggest that such knowledge of the very rules of the game, enable a powerful manipulation what to conceal and reveal. Such concealing and revealing practices themselves provide an account of what can be taken as ethical or not (*cf.* Solomon, 1992) as itself a means of affirming the righteousness of a given action (Garfinkel, 1967; Weber, 2009). Herein, a strong interpretive element of any given rule guides the conditions for its own subversion.

This dynamic understanding of morality and subversion also points to the more fundamental role of subversion for upholding organizational moralities. In particular rule-bending helps to 'make visible' when and where an idealized more can and cannot be consistently and practically embodied. This analysis hence owes much to previous work showing the need to take seriously not only what is socially 'present' or explicitly exhibited in individual's socially derived actions but also what is 'absent' and unseen (Martin, 1990; Silverman, 1987). The presence of subversion makes 'visible' the apparent 'absence' of the conditions making *ethical* conformity a seeming practical impossibility. Similarly, instances where these ideals are followed serve to continuously reveal where such compliance is universally expected and consequently subversion cannot be justified or defended.

Thus, whereas existing research emphasizes the normative possibilities of 'moral subversion', we instead stress its always already existing presence within any existing organizational order. Indeed, analyses of *pathology* point specifically to deviations from a given path of what may be constituted as 'normal' (*cf.* Durkheim; 2006; 2001; Canguilhem, 1991), the register from which any subversion can be properly understood. Scott (1990), in this vein, shows the permanent presence of established subversive acts as a type of 'hidden transcript' within any relationship of domination. Particularly relevant to themes of subversion is the commonly experienced uncertainty that individuals within organizations confront in trying to fulfil their responsibilities as a moral social subject in a world where these normative demands in certain times, spaces and situations seem impossible to carry out (Brunsson, 1989; Jackall, 2010). As such both certainty, and

indeed uncertainty, within organizations is therefore a social practice. Such social practice is enacted as a routine accomplishment and manifest here through regularized instances of rule-bending, its presence and legitimation acting as a form of mundane reason (Pollner, 1987).

It is in this frame that subversion can be viewed as an integral and embedded component of a given organizational culture. However, it also introduces a more complex picture of the relation of morality to subversion. Rather, than seeing subversion as a countervailing force against a clear and fixed moral order, it can perhaps better be studied as a dialectical relationship in which rule-bending and dominant morals serve to mutually constitute and reproduce one another. Fleming and Spicer's (2008) theorization of 'struggle' to account for the dialectical interaction of power and resistance is instructive in this regard, as they note the ways resistance practices are an inherently present and key part of the establishment of any and all employment relations. Mumby (2005: 20), likewise maintains that:

> Rather than view power and resistance as separate better to view them as mutually constitutive – as the subject is neither completely colonized or constantly resisting but rather that control and resistance exist in a dialectical relationship as 'mutually constitutive, and as a routine social production of daily organizational life'

Similarly, we argue that organizational morality is achieved through the continuous

synthesis of subversion and obedience in which rule-bending plays a fundamental role in framing and sustaining an organizational culture as 'moral'.

More precisely, subversion stands as a means for legitimating the *ad hoc* actions of individuals caught within an organizational context marked by multiple and often competing sets of institutional dynamics. Management scholarship reaffirms the ways organizations are defined by a diverse range of goals, expectations and desires (Dooley & Van de Ven, 1999; Pache & Santos, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2009). As a consequence, those members that constitute the organization are also confronted with multiple roles that reproduce a multitude of 'moralities' with which they should conform – 'to be ethical', 'to be profitable', 'to give your time to customers/patients', 'to smile', 'to process as many customers/patients as possible' for example (*cf.* Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Charles-Jones, *et al.,* 2003). Understanding the origins of an established moral order lies at the heart of unpicking normative moral reasoning; where normative moral reasoning operates as itself a form of conduct that serves specific interests (*cf.* Nietzsche, 1996). The serving of specific interests remains as a supplement (Derrida, 2004) to the broader practice-based frame presented here. The ability to justify one's actions as moral, even if they subvert one or several existing rules, is an important resource for individuals to make sense of and actively deal with multiple and often conflicting organizational demands. Again, the contexts through which actions are instituted and justified reaffirm a given set of [organisational] values (*cf.* Boltanski & Thévenot, 2001) which in an ethnomethodological frame is necessarily *worked* to become a given organisational reality.

The ability to justify one's actions as moral reflects the ways individuals deal with feelings of 'shame' connected to organizational demands (Goffman, 1952; 1956). Organizational morality is intimately connected to the emotional desire of actors to be judged as moral by others (Scheff, 1983). Here, the attempt to maintain 'face' (Goffman, 1955) by appearing moral and avoiding shame in front of colleagues or superiors infuses and shapes social relationships and practices within these institutions (Scheff, 1988). These often underlying low level efforts to avoid being seen to be [morally] incompetent (Goffman, 1952) and hence avoid shaming effects (Goffman, 2003) are undercut by the sheer moral ambiguity and competing moral demands individuals confront daily within these organizational contexts. The ability to subvert established mores for a 'moral reason' helps them navigate this ambiguity, pointing, in turn, to the affective dimension of this mutual constitution of morality and subversion.

Suggested by this reading is the role of written and unwritten organizational rules as themselves producing the grounds for their own subversion, as seen from the insights derived from Durkheim and Canguilhem. Such subversion, follows in line with readings of a subject's cultural performance as always navigating the difficult tension between 'role embracing' on the one hand and the acceptance of an 'ironic distance' from these proscribed expectations on the other (Kunda, 1992). These analyses reflect how organizations create the conditions of possibility for the subversion of *their* ideals, a breaching manifested as a formally and informally accepted performance within a culturally sanctioned organizational site or circumstance. Accordingly, what is being

revealed is how such moral subversion is a key part of any cultural ordering. More precisely, the allowance and performance of subversion is central to the deeper 'order of organizational things' in not only ironically reinforcing existing institutional mores but also framing its culture as necessarily being 'moral'.

Moralization and the legitimation of subversion

The above section outlined how organizations create the 'moral' conditions for subversion. This insight helps shed light on the ways such rule-bending is morally justified. An ethnomethodologically inspired account does much to address this issue. Rather than accepting any inherent or fixed morality, this perspective emphasizes the transformation of regulative 'facts of life' of a social context into a normative assumption of 'how things ought to be' (Garfinkel, 1967). Transgression of a given moral order 'disturb' these now seen as normative 'facts of life', disrupting what we take to be the common sense of an organization, such as the oft quoted 'way we do things around here' (Deal & Kennedy, 1982 p. 4). Disruption of such facts, in kind with the challenge to 'common sense' in Durkheim (2001) lays the organizational ground open for new orderings and understandings to emerge (Garfinkel, 1967; *cf.* Gouldner, 1971). To this end, the breach of what may be a common-sense norm can be seen to be 'disturbing', dislocating an established moral order and takes as a starting point a reconsideration of the work that a given order performs. If as is suggested the moral order is constituted of shared understandings, a commonly held sense of organisations questions of good (and right), or bad (and wrong) become locally situated, contingent and amenable to change.

Yet this ethnomethodological perspective also illuminates the 'non-disturbing' effect of subversion. It posits subversion as an established and regular part of a cultural order (*cf.* Roy, 1959); considered an everyday 'fact of life'. A study of nurses, for instance, revealed the daily prevalence and acceptance of lying to a patient (Tuckett, 1998). Tellingly, this dishonesty was commonly justified as not only normal but also harmless or even 'necessary' for the effective performance of caring tasks. Indeed, *ethical* calls can be made to such an action being 'in the best interests' or 'for her own good' (*cf.* Ehnrenreich & English, 1979; Gilligan, 1982), a subversion of normative ethics for activities deemed unethical according to an alternate register (*cf.* Garfinkel, 1967; Solomon, 1992). This case speaks to the concrete ways that morality and subversion exist in a mutually constituting instead of opposing relation. Specifically, it is not so much that subversion is 'disturbing' but significantly that certain forms of rule-bending disturb a moral order, or more precisely the very ground by which we understand morality, while others may not.

A central concern of this analysis, then, is the ways morality not only creates the grounds for rule-bending but the very rationality in which such actions are understood as both necessary and morally legitimated. In particular, we contend that their positive relation constitutes what can be termed a *sociological consciousness* (Brown, 1978), by which non-moral behaviour, non-moral in the sense that it is not primarily motivated by moral or ethical concerns, is continually 'moralized' (*cf.* Weber, 1978). This resonates with similar social processes of 'rationalizing' non-rational actions (Cicourel, 1968; Garfinkel, 1967). Here, expedient and *ad hoc* practices were retrospectively justified as rational and

self evident, therefore framing the culture itself as being 'rational' and the truths themselves self evident, even when such truths are of themselves unknown and unknowable (*cf.* Latour, 1987). Indeed, the ways in which individuals rationalise the non-rational or indeed moralise the non-moral is of itself a peculiar organisational and social phenomenon, moral in the sense that it is felt to be the right thing to do when called to account.

Similarly, individuals give 'good and legitimate reasons' to *ad hoc* actions through 'moralization'. This idea of 'moralization' traditionally describes the process by which individual preferences become transformed into moral values (Rozin, 1999). Within management theory, Crane (2000) discusses *amoralization* as the strategic elimination of a policy's moral content. For our purposes, we use moralization in this instance to refer to the *post hoc* attempt by individuals to legitimize contingent and heterogeneous actions as 'moral' and 'right'. Such *post hoc* reasons and justifications of what is 'moral' and by definition 'right' exist only as a construction of *good* reasons and justifications (Garfinkel, 1967); they are what they are, untethered from any normative associations. Put differently, it exists as a framework for understanding and retrospectively justifying a range of contingent decisions made by individuals within an ambiguous organizational context; they provide certainty when perhaps certainty cannot be reasonably entertained (*cf.* Bauman, 1998). Ambiguity and uncertainty can feel uncomfortable, or in anthropological parlance could be considered polluting (Douglas, 2002), actions out of place are felt as out of place, yet as with notions of a given morality providing certainty

where certainty can or should not be enables things to be put back in place, for that which is repugnant to be cleansed as a practical social action (*cf.* Bourdieu, 2010).

This again reflects the affective aspects of this positive interaction between moral orders and subversion. Notably, decisions are often made linked to 'moral emotions' rather than simply 'moral reasoning' (Haidt, 2003). This emotionally informed decision-making is not necessarily driven by rational cognitive moral assessments of right or wrong, though they can have positive or negative consequences depending on how they are manifest (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012). Such moral determinations, instead, exist as *post-hoc* justifications (Haidt, 2001). In particular, such rationalizations of emotional responses permit actors to continue to present themselves (both internally and to others) as other-centred rather than selfish (Solomon, 1992), allowing them to consistently feel 'moral' in quite morally ambiguous organizational settings.

This insight highlights the ironic function of 'moralization' for constructing and sustaining an individual as a 'moral' subject even when their actions could be construed as subversive in the light of prevailing abstract moral ideals. Garfinkel's (1967) tutorial experiment whereby he asked graduate students to behave as though they were a boarder in the family home, presciently points to this dynamic. After observing that their family relations were characterized by trivial conversation and disagreement, the students nevertheless insisted they were part of a 'good family' in which these reported behaviours where the exception rather than the rule. Significantly, in this case the actions themselves were not moralized but instead given moral explanation as being outside the

norm. Another interpretation would be that of *role distance* (Goffman, 1961) whereby, the explanatory power of action is contextualized as something outside of normal conduct, 'this is not the normal behaviour of my family', 'I would never ordinarily do this, but…'. However, unlike the family, within organisations justifications can be placed elsewhere, such as through upholding rules, procedures, or obedience to a figure of authority. What is significant here is the ways in which moralization of itself represents a vehicle for creating distance between the individual and action, of self and organisational behaviour.

More recently and more explicitly related to practices of rule-bending, Whittle and Mueller (2012) explore the use of moral explanations as a *discursive resource* (*cf.* Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Kornberger & Brown, 2007) for justifying non-moral action by bankers following the 2008 financial crisis. However, the *non*-moral can only ever exist as a form of accounting for a given action, when called to account for a given mode of conduct. The moral justification of subversions thereby forms an important part of how people understand and practice identity within organizations. For instance the project managers studied by Hodgson (2005: 63), were willing to directly subvert 'best standard' codes without feeling that they were in any way compromising their status as a 'professional'. Rule-bending, in this context, was simply an accepted and moral component of being a good 'professional'; as there can be 'good organizational reasons for bad clinic records' (Garfinkel, 1967; *cf.* Heath & Luff, 2000), so too we can have good practical reasons for not adhering to 'best practice' or as we noted previously, good organizational reasons for dishonesty.

Such analyses gesture toward the deeper role of moralization for producing the 'moral subject' connected to entrenched subversive practices. It reflects the attempt by subjects to negotiate different institutional dynamics producing multiple and evolving organizational demands. This continuous moralization is exemplified in the so-called 'responsible subversion' displayed by nurses within clinical situations (Hutchinson, 1990). These nurses were often confronted with a conflicting set of institutional expectations - caught between following the expert instructions of doctors and caring for their patients to the best of their ability. Indeed, Stein (1967) made explicit the lengths that nurses went to in ensuring what they considered appropriate treatment was officially sanctioned through deference (Goffman, 1957) to the position of medicine and its practitioners. Specifically, these health care professionals faced a dilemma where the orders of the doctor were not in their opinion the best course of action for treating a patient. Such a tension was explicit in Hutchinson's (1990) observation that rule-bending, in addition to being prevalent, were both formally and informally 'moralized'. Nurses incorporated within their reasoning and practice the need to 'cover' or explain these subversions in moral terms, as an instance of bending the rules for the greater interests of the patient. In doing so, they reinforced the broader view of the hospital as one characterized by its underlying, but always evolving, 'morality'.

At stake, thus, are the interrelated questions of how can subversion not only be justified as 'moral' but also uphold a socially constructed vision of an organization as 'moral'? Furthermore, how does this 'moralization' of subversion, and consequently the broader

organizational culture itself, serve to reinforce existing power relations? One way to address this issue, as alluded to above is to see morality less as a fixed rational, reasoned and abstract position, but set against competing and often ambiguous calls for appropriate conduct. 'Moralization' therefore stands as a cultural resource for 'managing this ambiguity' (Munro, 1995; 1999) as noted through recourse to Douglas and Bourdieu. In this respect, it allows social actors to account for their actions as 'moral'. However, the ultimate legitimacy of this justification, as will be explored in greater detail later in this analysis, is always determined by those in power (*cf.* Nietszche, 1996). What is crucial here, are the ways moral orders not only create the conditions for subversion, but the positive function of subversion for the continual accomplishment of a performed order as of itself 'moral'.

Accomplishing the moral order through subversion

A prevailing moral order importantly shapes not only our adherence to its promoted ideals but our subversion of them as well. This is not to say that all subversive acts are merely normalised components of a performed order. It is rather to suggest that the very organizational contexts that provides us the basis for how we 'ought' to act, also grants us the material (irrespective of intention), for engaging in a 'performance of the self' that goes against these very same normative demands. For some, this is an explicit component of getting ahead in business (Pfeffer, 2010) and one that we, as others (*cf.* Tourish, 2013) challenge. We highlight instead how rule-bending does not simply emerge out of the tensions of morality within complex and multi-faceted organizations but in fact is fundamental to the accomplishing of the organisational order itself. More precisely, it

helps to continually create and sustain an organizational culture marked by multiple sets of values and *ad-hoc* actions as 'moral'.

Significantly, individuals within organisations are paradoxically demanded to act subversively (*cf.* Bauman, 1989). This ironic form of cultural control resonates with Collinson's (1988) notion of 'engineering' behaviour such as humour. He contends that one's mannerisms within different organizational settings, such as the laughing on the shop room floor, represents the strategic manufacturing of their conduct as an organizational subject in an attempt to conform to desired identities, in this case the need to reproduce certain class based performances of masculinity. Such notions of masculinity can be seen as completely right for a place imbued with specific values, existing here as a specific performance of 'doing class and gender'. Collinson (2003) refers, in this respect, to the reproduction of a 'resistance self' within organizations, reflecting an individual's continual identification with a set of values and actions considered to be challenging to existing workplace power relations.

Similarly people can be 'engineered' as subversive subjects. However, the question remains, subversive to what? Irrespective of the context, be it risky motorcyclists (Willis, 1975) or hospital porters (Rapport, 2009) ethnographic studies highlight the ways in which values shape a given context. For Rapport (2009), the aggressive acts of hospital porters is not so much going against institutional demands, but reproducing identities of class, nation and masculinity. The 'subversive' self may in Collinson's analysis be linked to an organization's order, but what is brought to the organisation are competing logics of

what counts for a moral order. Individuals are socialised to respond in highly regulated ways to those instances where it is understood and accepted that a given moral demand is neither desirable nor sustainable. Thus in Collinson's ethnography ideas of empowerment and a U.S. ideal of management practices is constituted as feminine and accordingly, dismissed, read as so much American crap that has no place in the Northwest of England.

As such we are pointing to the role of subversion in not only making sensible but also accomplishing an organizational moral order. Drawing on Goffman's (1956) earlier account of a hospital ward, Telles (1980), for example, noted the different expectations of 'demeanour' between two hospital wards. Telles (1980) likewise observed in his own experiences at a hospital the ordering of subversion to certain sites. He was able to distinguish the 'more demeanored' Coronary Care Unit (CCU) and its less 'demeanored' Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) counterpart. He attributes this appearance or absence of 'demeanour' to a range of 'ecological supports' found in these separate environments. Noise absorbing carpeting for example, better facilitates the doctor's treatment of patients with dignity by reducing the noise, and therefore chaos, underlying this interaction (ibid: 330). This in turn set the expectations for whether or not one was 'allowed' to transgress established organizational mores within these spaces. He recalls:

> '…When I became involved in an animated discussion with an intern shortly after arriving in CCU, the nurse clinician chastised me by saying, "Shhh. You're not in MICU now, Joel...'
>
> (ibid: 330)

Nonetheless, these examples, while helpful, also problematically assume that these external factors inherently shape behaviour, that there is an essential link between certain ecological supports and the ability to conform to proscribed moral behaviour. By contrast, a practice based perspective highlights how it is exactly these actions which reinforce these linkages between environment and practices as 'facts of life' representative of how things 'ought to be'. As such the accepted moralization of certain subversions and the disallowance of others serve to continually accomplish this moral order. On the one hand, it makes sense of an ambiguous institutional order by defining what practices are moral and subversive; in this case 'animated discussion' may be considered antithetical to properly attending to patient needs. On the other, it disciplines when and where the contravening of these actions can be morally justified, that the MICU with its poor carpets and shabby surroundings made it permissible and even perhaps necessary to bend these rules for performing one's *medical* duty.

Yet just as importantly, this illuminates the crucial function of such socially 'indexical' (*cf.* Benson & Hughes, 1991) forms of subversion for the construction of a 'sensible' moral order. In recent years there has been a growing literature on the existence of 'sense-making' as a process of rationalisation rather than objective rational decision-making. Here, individuals seek to 'make sense' of their environment through continually creating and adopting culturally provided narratives for giving meaning to a dynamic, ambiguous, and often unpredictable reality (*cf.* Abolafia, 2010; Isabella, 1990; Weick,

1995). Such sense making serves in turn as a foundation for identity (Isabella, 1990; Maitlis, 2005) and the social coding of one's cognitive responses (Brown, *et al.,* 2007; Salancick & Pfeffer, 1978) within an uncertain, ever changing organizational climate. To this end, the invocation of morality sheds light on what may or may not be subversive, situating individuals within a broader moral order, even if such a moral order is deemed foreign or out of place.

However, sense making problematically pre-supposes that the world is rational and there is some sense to be made of it (*cf.* Garfinkel, 1967), rather than a social world of mess and complexity (Law, 2002; 2004). That is, the social and organisational world is ordered in particular ways to render it *sensible* as we have noted above. Classical readings of making sense, notably Berger and Luckmann (1967) make explicit the significant role of habituation in driving a given social and thereby organisational reality. The tensions in trying to enact organizational mores then open the space for the rendering of subversion as 'sensible', but such sensibility is in part already figured, in so much that any 'organizational more' can, if necessary, be legitimately subverted. Thus, in Goffman's (1963) parlance an 'adaptive line of action' of itself establishes appropriate organisational conduct, subversion in turn becomes can be seen as recursive.

Subversion, hence, is embedded within any notion of propriety, giving 'sense' to a dominant culture with often competing and ambiguous demands on how individuals should act. In this regard, the moralization of subversion is fundamental to the accomplishment of a given organizational moral order through continually rendering it

sensible. The sensible here can be traced back to the common sense of Durkheim (2001) and Mills (1959), something makes sense, we feel that something is appropriate, but only given the ways we have already been sensitized (habituated) to how we should approach, experience and feel a given organisational order. Crucially, it is not simply that these subversive acts become a socialized part of a moral order but rather that their very understanding as subversive, serves to reinforce the framing of an ambiguous organizational context as 'moral'. The moralization of subversion, therefore, includes us within a wider 'moral world' for 'making sense' of our actions and selves as a culturally constructed 'moral' subject. As we will show, such moralization enables an effacement of ambiguity, renders stable unstable relations as an appropriate mode of organizational conduct.

Preserving the moral order through subversion

The deep and inescapable relationship of subversion to morality clarifies the role of the social for not only creating the conditions for subversion but how such rule-bending is fundamental to the accomplishing of a given moral order. To this end, subversion becomes a regularized, habituated and entrenched part of a given organisational culture, a 'fact of life' which forms part of how things normatively 'ought to be'. More precisely, it exists as a necessary complement to the impossibility of fulfilling proscribed moral expectations in practice. However, it also crucially accomplishes this moral order by continually rendering its practices as 'sensible' in terms of being 'moral'. This reading, in turn illuminates the fundamental role of subversion for also preserving these 'moral worlds'.

The presence of prevailing moral norms stands not only as a practical framework for action but as a broader ontology. Every culture, to this effect, constitutes its own 'cosmos' (Latour 2004) within which different subjects 'apprehend reality from a distinct point of view' (Viveiros de Castro, 1998: 469). The active and regularized subversion of mores similarly illuminates an existent moral world. The encountered and encompassing 'life world' where subversion is understood to be allowable stands in turn as 'simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring' (Weick, 1995: 50). However, it could as cogently be argued that there are no *a priori* 'sensible' moral universes, but instead an organizational order that must be continually accomplished and preserved through processes of rule-bending and moralization.

Indeed, these life worlds are by no means stagnant but rather dynamic and tension-filled as the assumption of a shared ontology does not imply clear or easy conformity to culturally proscribed mores. As such, 'intracultural relations, or internal comparisons, and intercultural relations, or external comparisons, are in strict ontological continuity' (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 4). Thus when these worlds collide it is not only a general peace that is disrupted but 'the cosmos too may be at stake' (Latour 2004: 454). Herein we highlight the power politics at the heart of this world making, as the insecurity associated with this ontological 'inbetweeness' is replaced by an attempt at conquest by one world over another. The importance of subversion is found in the labelling of cosmological differences as a matter of subversive action for the preservation of a given

order against ontological threats; the morality comes in the form of justifications for such action.

This inbetweeness, this liminality, this meeting or threatened meeting of worlds, is transformed into a social demand to defend one's 'world' against a transgressor. In this regard, perceived threats to *our* order are temporally and continually resolved through recourse to legitimated practices of subversion. This resonates with Goffman's (2003) contention that 'stigmitizing' is founded on a 'depersonalization' of the other, or in other parlance a form of status role degradation (Garfinkel, 1956), where status role is challenged in order to diminish the grounds from which alter perspectives may emerge. This transgressing other becomes a dehumanized force that must be dealt with for the sake of defending a wider morality, a wider morality that remains, as yet unspecified.

Yet it also stands as more than simply a process of protection through critical othering. Instead, subversion is crafted into a set of habituated techniques, which themselves subvert existing mores, for successfully mediating this liminality, a position of liminality which is of itself problematic (Douglas, 2002; Bourdieu, 2010) as previously noted. Latour (1994: 53) for example, characterizes cultural *mediation* as the 'socialisation of the non-human'. Hence if Viveiros de Castro (2004b) speaks of the need to 'transform objects into subjects', present in the fight against this stigmatized subversive other is the transformation, if you will, of 'subjects into objects', in the process preserving a moral order even if that means deploying methods that would otherwise be viewed as

subversive. That is, behaviour that would ordinarily be concerned inappropriate becomes transformed into appropriate behaviour, aligned as a force for 'good'.

This moralization of rule-bending as required for preserving a broader moral order is reflected in Bittner's ethnographic account of policing on 'Skid Row'. Bittner refers to aggressive police action against 'Skid Row' undesirables as an instance where traditionally appropriate methods for 'keeping the peace' are perceived to be unavailable and therefore demands a response by the police, which may not be considered acceptable outside of the life-world of Skid Row. For Bittner the police abandoned an otherwise accepted distinction as 'law officers' in the name of 'keeping the peace' due to the 'demand conditions' they confronted by citizens on Skid Row. Skid Row in this instance is seen as a space of exception to police conduct, a place where the appropriate actions of a world outside of Skid Row no longer apply:

> 'Skid-row has always occupied a special place among the various forms of urban life. While other areas are perceived as being different in many ways, Skid Row is seen as completely different. Though it is located in the heart of civilization, it is viewed as containing aspects of the primordial jungle, calling for missionary activities and offering opportunities for exotic adventure. While each inhabitant individually can be seen as tragically linked to the vicissitudes of "normal" life, allowing others to say "here but for the Grace of God go I," those who live there are believed to have repudiated the entire role-casting scheme of the majority and to live apart from normalcy'

Subversion is consequently situated within a certain socially sanctioned space, a place in this instance where there is an 'irrelevance of trust' due to the 'immorality' of its citizens. Skid Row forms a distinct area of pollution and risk within the cityscape that requires containment. One is reminded here of the famous last line from Polanski's film *Chinatown*, where the accepted breakdown of traditional ethics is explained away merely as 'Forget it Jake. It's Chinatown' (Towne, 1974). However, it is imperative to again stress that this assumption of 'Skid Row' as 'demanding subversion' is itself socially constructed, accomplished and reinforced through meaningful practices. The place of itself, both real and imagined set the context from which appropriate conduct may be judged. In the moralization of this aggressive policing, the labelling of this area as 'beyond established moralities' and its citizens as a 'threatening other' becomes strengthened as a 'fact of life' and the transgression of traditionally accepted policing methods as how things 'ought to be'.

This established performance of a 'subversive self' in turn shapes how we enter into and conceive of ourselves as being part of a given workplace and in turn how we organize who constitutes part of an organization's complex 'moral world'. Again, it is not just that subversion is 'morally' situated to a specific socialized time and place, but rather that these contexts, and their associated practices, are incorporated into a larger vision of the world as 'moral'. This dovetails with recent theoretical ideas of 'extension' representing 'a never-ending process of incorporation where people "figure" and "refigure"

themselves across the spectrum of social relations' (Latimer and Munro, 2006: 40). In inhabiting a life-world individuals are not 'attaching themselves directly to each other' but interacting with another as part of the general, though forever changing and 'messy', moral 'order of things' via the moment to moment incorporation of the 'materials of our culture' (ibid: 40). Justifications for specific forms of conduct in this instance are not located within an individual as such, rather the individual extends the frame of justifications to the contingencies 'out there', a theoretical move away from the self as consumed and consuming (Munro, 1996b).

The construction of certain spaces and circumstances as requiring subversion, therefore, provides the context and resources for individuals to figure and reconfigure themselves as morally subversive selves. It is moral, in the respect, that their actions are retrospectively justified as being necessary for preserving a given moral order and subversive in the fact that this rule-bending becomes an institutionalized and accepted moral ordering of organisational practice. It is the continual rendering of actions as at once 'moral' and as necessary for preserving this 'morality'. As such they are tasked with preserving a 'moral order' through defending it against those who threaten its perceived 'rightness', and in doing so, at a deeper level, systematically preserving the ontological understanding of the world as 'moral'.

The moral control of subversion

This analysis has sought to highlight the function of subversion for accomplishing and preserving a moral order. We can now therefore return to our original question, how is it

that subversion reflects and reinforces organizational power relations? More precisely, how does the rendering of certain instances of rule-bending as 'moral' whilst others as not 'moral' contribute to broader strategies of control? The *ad hoc* and situated actions undertaken by individuals to navigate an ambiguous organizational context with seemingly conflicting institutional demands must be retrospectively justified as moral. That is, to be considered legitimate such action requires the provision of good reasons and justifications, for a particular form of conduct (Garfinkel, 1967). Hence, control lies, in the ability to moralize rule-bending, found in the authority granted to make determinations as to which forms of subversion are allowable, for whom and under what conditions (Douglas, 2002; Nietzsche, 1996). In this regard, moralization not only accomplishes and preserves a moral order, but the power and forms of control implicit to and arising from this order.

A practice-based account of subversion allows for a reconsideration of the relationship between morality and control. Munro (1999: 634) suggests that the 'show of control is pivotal to cultural performance'. Crucial here is the understanding that control need not exist in any normative sense, but is wholly a performance that is predicated upon display rather than any link to direct positive action (*cf.* Kornberger and Brown, 2007). Rule-bending, in this vein, represents an attempt by subjects to exhibit control in those cultural spaces of 'in-betweeness' where they are forced to face the tension of embodying abstract and commonly competing organizational expectations. Control, in turn, is derived from the formal and informal capacity to 'moralize' non-moral behaviour as legitimate (*cf.* Blau, 1964; Weber, 1978). Specifically, power is associated not with a fixed assumption

of what is moral but in the dynamic authority granted to certain actors to authoritatively make such determinations. The performance of a manager in taking a hard line against certain 'infractions' or turning a blind eye to others, signifies and reproduces their position of power as a moral arbitrator, thus placing others within his or her institutionally legitimated position of control.

The phenomenon of workplace humour illustrates this relationship. Organisational scholars note that humour can either be a force for employees to subvert managerial authority (Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Rhodes and Westwood, 2007) or a strategy by managers to strengthen the conformity of their workforce (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Greatbatch and Clark, 2003; Taylor and Bain, 2003). However, control was also found in the decision-making power granted to managers for determining what was and was not a moral form of subversive humour. Drawing on the example of a call centre, Taylor and Bain (2003) observed that employee telephone agents often made fun of the personal behaviour of team leaders in their daily banter, joking about their tendency to get drunk during the weekend for instance. This form of subversion was tacitly encouraged by senior management in their call for team leaders to retain their 'informal contact' with the agents they supervise, which in practice meant being 'just part of the gang'. Yet, this subtle deployment of bottom up humour to critique authority was mediated by the ability of managers to set the limits on its propriety. Thus, a joke questionnaire made by staff, and at first approved by team leaders, was soon repressed when employees asked 'who is going to get the sack before Christmas?', a question which directly touched upon the

pressures managers faced around having to 'lay off' temporary staff right before the Christmas holiday.

We would not argue here whether the inclusion of such a question concerning redundancy may or may not be of itself problematic, nor that there were hard and fast rules of appropriateness for place. Crucially we locate this as a site where control was maintained and the power relations of the organizations reproduced, in manager's performance of the role as moral arbitrators of acceptable subversion. Indeed, redundancy is transformed here from being a practical demand to one whereby a recognition of such practical demands are transformed into moral means of regulating the proper affective display of the workforce. Kenny and Euchler's (2012) study of parodying humour within an advertising firm illustrates this point. In this context, the use of humour was always 'ambiguous', subverting established identity norms and managerial authority while also having the potential to be used for deepening worker's commitment to the company and its values. Thus, both managers and employees sent out 'smutty emails' creating an organisational order where 'being funny appeared more important than showing respect or sensitivity for your co-workers and peers, even in accordance with traditional social norms' (Kenny and Euchler, 2012: 317). Nevertheless, this form of moral subversion reached its limit when a manager stopped jokes directed at the imagined sexual proclivities of his wife.

Significantly, this reproduction of power relations and control through the moralization of subversion is often played out through institutions ostensibly existing to protect

employees against the arbitrary judgements of those in authority. Returning to the health care context, it has been reported that both doctors and nurses strategically use institutionally provided accountability systems to 'scapegoat' individuals they personally disapprove of as subversive (Cooke, 2006; Hutchinson and Collins, 2004; Pugh, 2011). Analogously, Krueger (1971) documented in her study of a mid-1960s nursing college, that administrators would punish those students considered to be 'wild' in their personal behaviour outside the course by evaluating them as merely 'competent' clinical nurses compared to their more well behaved 'good girl' counterparts, despite the fact that it was generally agreed that the former were superior clinical practitioners (as borne out in their subsequent career). Through this action, the administrators also showed their tacit support of the good girl's subversion of the ideal of the fully committed nurse in their prioritization of finding a good husband and being a model student over improving their clinical proficiency. Here the supposedly objective evaluation, one that supposedly neutralized the arbitrary prejudices of those in charge due to its focus on clinical ability rather than personal character, was in actuality a device to reinforce the power and values of the school authority and by extension particular values of patriarchy; the moral order takes primacy over clinical commitment.

Crucially this casts somewhat new light on the relation of control, morality and emotions. As Fineman (2001) makes explicit, organizations assert control over their members through regulating the 'right' emotional responses (*cf.* Hochschild, 2003), where the scope of affective display is limited to loyalty, both to the firm and to colleagues (Bauman, 1994). Emotional display can serve to stabilize or destabilize an organizational

order. Subversive practices, in this regard, can as mentioned be similarly disturbing or non-disturbing. Indeed, to take up Bauman's (1994) point here the moral sentiment of challenging forms of control, whether through touching upon Christmas redundancies, or the legitimacy of a putative authority figure is to engage individual conscience in a way that does not ultimately benefit the organisation. What this analysis highlights, though, is the role of authority figures such as managers for strategically determining which of these instances of rule-bending, often connected to emotional displays like indignation or humour, for instance, are considered to be threatening and therefore require sanction. However, from a position of authority emotions such as anger or indignation can be used strategically in order to reinforce these arbitrary judgements attached to a mangers role as 'moral arbitrator'.

Just as importantly, while practices of subversion may be necessarily subject to different determinations of their legitimacy, perhaps according to the whims of those in a position of authority, the basis on which they are judged can serve to consistently reinforce deeper managerial ideologies. Returning to Kenny and Euchler's (2012) case of the advertising firm, subversive humour was promoted to enhance a profitable organizational culture where 'newness' and innovation were prioritized. As long as these seemingly tasteless emails were not old, they were permissible. A rare conflict emerged when a director not so subtly implied that the emails of more lowly employed planners were as funny as 'spam' due to their being often old and redundant. A junior planner, 'JP', expressing offense at this characterisation was marginalized until he sent around a new joke that others found humourous. Kenny and Euchler link this emphasis on newness to Butler's

reading of the Lacanian real for showing the 'groundlessness of the ground' for morality in this context. However, such an account read through interactionist reveals how it is exactly the groundlessness that plays into managerial strategies of control (*cf.* Munro, 1999), where it is specifically through transformation of uncertainty into certainty that the rendering of any action as subversive occurs as a practical accomplishment. In acting as moral arbitrators of acceptable subversion the right to judgement, and thus authority, was reinforced, serving to at once accomplish and preserve an organizational order and the deeper ideologies underpinning it even as the practices within it were 'ambiguous' and always in the making.

What we make explicit here is the deep and often ironic interaction between morality, subversion and control. Power is derived from and reproduced by the consistent authority granted to determine what is and is not a form of subversion. It follows that the achievement of control associated with this right to moral judgment extends to, as well as shapes the formal and informal ways an organization holds its members to be morally accountable. Subversive cultures premised on humour and parody become modes of work centring on the ability of managers to ensure that employees remain innovative and productive. Seemingly neutral authority structure and evaluations shift into strategic mechanism for those in power to reassert their personal control in the name of upholding a given morality. Hence, subversion can play an important role in reproducing and reaffirming organizational power relations and ideologies. In this regard, the accomplishing and preserving of an organization as 'moral' is in fact the reinforcing and reproduction of an existing managerial order. The grounds for subversive conduct shift

according to whose interests such modes of conduct serve and so long as the legitimacy of authority is not challenged or tarnished as a consequence (*cf.* Bittner, 1967).

Discussion: The moral work of subversion

This paper has sought to introduce rule-bending as a practice that is retroactively justified as moral and can reinforce organizational power relationships. Specifically, the ubiquitous tension of realizing organizational ideals creates the conditions of possibility for shaping the ways we subvert such values and expectations in the pursuit of an ideal. Subversion may be viewed here as an artefact of the widespread effort of organizations to impose control, to dictate morality whether intentionally or otherwise. More precisely, it represents the function of rule-bending for reinforcing a view of an organizational context as 'moral'. In this regard, subversion, and its retrospective moralization, is fundamental to the accomplishing and preserving of a 'moral order' as well as its underlying power configurations and dominant ideologies. Highlighted, in this sense, is the continual 'moral work' of subversion.

Key, in this respect, is the construction of a social self through the dialectical relation of morality and subversion. The presence of a rule creates the conditions of possibility for not only moral conformity but also its subversion. Paradoxically, it is exactly this rule-bending that sustains a contingent and *ad hoc* organizational context as 'moral'. All such contexts will be defined by multiple conceptions of the *good* and impose on its members a range of competing and often contradictory institutional demands for guiding their actions. This normative and operational heterogeneity, then, provides the cultural grounds

for not only subverting these rules but in doing so reaffirming one's own along with institutionalising a given morality

A crucial tension, here, emerges around the classically moral issue of 'how can I be a good organizational subject? Notably, it is found in the fact that in the name of morality managers can arbitrarily exercise control, often in contravention of other established indices of what it means to be a 'moral' institutional subject. The reliance on moralization then is a response to this tension – to at once justify oneself as a 'good person' in relation to existing rules while negotiating with the arbitrary nature of the implementation of these modes of conduct. This retroactive process of moral justification serves to both legitimize often quite *ad hoc* actions in relation to an ambiguous workplace reality and as a means for defending oneself against the arbitrary use of power. Importantly, this reconfiguration of the moral concern over whether one is or is not a 'good person' to processes of moralization reflects the fact that while rules may be more or less accepted and entrenched, their implementation is always subject to questions of power and domination.

This analysis reveals, in turn, the achievement of control through the practice of moral judgement. The accomplishment and reproduction of power is associated with the position from which it is possible to morally arbitrate whether a subversive act is morally acceptable. Hence, whereas moralization is available and potentially used by all organizational subjects, control rests in the authority to grant such justifications legitimacy. The ability of management to continually, and quite arbitrarily, determine

what was and was not subversive on any given day, reinforced their power. This paper, likewise, emphasizes how the act of judging what constitutes a moral subversion reinforces power relations. A manager asserts control, and their authority, in the ability to swoop in at any time to pass judgement on which instance of rule-bending is morally permissible, at a given point in time.

This practice-based account also aims to shed light upon the mutually supporting function of morality and subversion for strengthening dominant power relations and ideologies. The habituation of subversion though processes of retrospective 'moralization' provides the co-ordinates for how one should appropriately, or at the very least how one regularly, deals with the unrealistic moral demands associated with a prevailing organizational discourse. Rather than these instances of moral breakdown serving as a catalyst for questioning the very basis of an existent belief system, and more fundamentally the problematic of having to be a conforming 'moral' subject, individuals are instead provided a set of behaviours to navigate this complex, difficult, and impractical moral terrain; a set of co-ordinates that may be divorced from deeper ethical challenges or the fear of losing an individual moral identity. As Hutchinson and Collins point out:

> The problem with rule-bending is that solving the problem for just one patient doesn't solve a system problem. It's hard to address a system problem if problem if people are subversively – although responsibly – finding a way around the problem

<div align="right">(Hutchinson and Collins, 2004: 5).</div>

This practice based analysis of rule-bending reveals then the deeper and often ironic relation of subversion to an organizational moral order. Here the dislocation to a status quo is relegated and contained to single instances which can be concealed, overlooked and ignored through an act of moral subversion and justified retrospectively through processes of moralization. Further, it reaffirms the power of elites as the ultimate arbitrators of the moral legitimacy and acceptability of these ongoing subversive actions. In this regard, relations of power are seemingly at their most stable and ideologies their most secure when they are allowed to be morally subverted.

Conclusion

This essay focuses on the social production of subversion as part of a performed moral order. The subversion of organizational ideals in practice exists as a culturally entrenched display of a given self. Specifically, the extension into this subversive 'life world' is inexorably linked to the broader reproduction of the organizational subject as a 'moral' individual who is part of a 'moral' world. To this end, subversion works to accomplish and preserve the 'morality' of a social order. Consequently, it plays a central, though paradoxical, role for maintaining existent power structures and underlying ideologies in the name of 'morality'.

Yet this discussion should not suggest that this habituated 'performance of the subversive self' leaves no room for resisting moral orders. It is necessary, in this regard, to critically investigate why and when certain acts of subversion are allowable and others are not.

Rather than treat these moments as simply 'exceptions to the rule' we suggest that it is in these moments that established subject positions and moral orders can be put into question. In doing so, the power relations and underlying ideologies underpinned by these acts of 'moral subversion' can themselves be subverted and transformed. Significantly, in recognizing that this ambiguity is not a temporary phenomenon, and that as such it cannot be so easily covered over through acts of legitimated rule-bending, it becomes possible to not just engage in subversion but re-order and create new worlds. What we figure the ambiguity of the organisation, subversion and appropriate conduct as a space from which a given organisational practice can be re-figured, rather than simply being an element of pollution that needs to be 'put in its place' for the effective functioning of the firm.

This reconsideration of morality, subversion and control opens the space, we hope, for a new and more expansive research agenda around these themes. Indeed, then the paper as a whole is concerned with the micropolitics of mundane interactional order, yet we envisage this as a microcosm of far broader assemblages of meaning and action situated through particular forms of contemporary capitalism. One avenue that would be worth exploring in greater depth is the role of subversion for affectively disciplining actors as part of an organizational moral order. As Zajonc (1980; 1984) presciently notes, emotional reactions commonly supersede and exist on a different register than their cognitive counterparts. In this light, how then are these affective feelings shaped by the regulation of subversion? Moreover, how can they be tactically regulated in line with the dynamic control granted to power holders as 'moral arbitrators' of subversion? To what extent, for example, are the emotional reactions of individuals disciplined so as to 'feel' a

fealty to the power of managers to determine the morality of their rule-bending? Is it simply a case of consent for domination, or is there something more closely aligned with how organisational behaviour is necessarily framed by a gamut of social, material, situated and contextual cues, which gesture to rather than determine by force (*cf.* Blau, 1964) appropriate conduct?

Historically, it is also worth investigating the emergence of subversion as a means for 'morally' ordering our world. This could potentially be linked with the rise of 'market rationalities' and their attendant moral justifications beginning in the 19th century as well as the evolving notion of sovereignty premised on, as Agamben (1998) in particular points out, the ability to personify a 'state of exception'. Philosophically, it may also be fruitful to study how subversion exists as a 'spectre', to use Derrida's (2006) terminology, potentially both challenging and supporting the invocation and establishment of moral orders. Indeed, whilst thinking through our ethnographic work, this paper traces the ethnographic work of others and methodologically represents a call for framing empirical work according to the worlds that human and non-human actors body forth in the shaping organisation. Within the contemporary context, it would be potentially valuable to trace out with greater precision and depth, the ways such 'moral subversion' aids in the reproduction of managerialism both practically and ideologically, a question only briefly touched on in this analysis. Broadly speaking, to what extent is this phenomenon connected to 'neoliberalism' and what affinity does it have to present-day control strategies that no longer rely, at least rhetorically, on methods of physical coercion or normative investment.

What this analysis has sought to highlight is how this habituation of subversion emerges out of and stands as a necessary part of a prevailing organizational morality. Far from being separate or distinct from these over-arching values they exist within them, reflecting an attempt to deal with the tensions between their abstracted ideals and their impossibility as organizational practices. Individuals thus come to embody entrenched forms of subversive behaviour in repeatedly navigating the gap between morality and actuality, between stated ideals of appropriate action and their frequent practical unfeasibility in trying to make sense of contradictory and often competing organizational demands. Subversion thus occurs as a culturally delineated and gestured performance justified as moral and made permissible by those in authority. Just as importantly, the preservation of a moral world, and as such its deeper power relations and ideologies, demands a socially astute subversive subject for its very survival.

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Notes

[1] We refer here to rule-bending rather than rule-breaking to reflect the interpretive power of social actors in accomplishing a rule and justifying any subversion of a given rule rather than normatively determine that a rule holds a singular interpretation.

[2] By practice-based, we draw upon ethnographic accounts of mundane life as a situated practice of itself. Here organisation can be witnessed as a form of social practice, what Gherardi (2000; 2001) termed systems of practices, from which understandings of a given social reality can be made explicit beyond any management intention. Indeed, a gamut of social and organisational cues such as that of strategy, or formalised rules are interpreted and acted upon in order to create and reaffirm organisation as a specific form of social practice. Herein, the heterogeneity and undecided nature of organisation (Clegg *et al.,* 2007) is stabilised as a distinct form of 'accepted and acceptable' practice.

[3] Whilst we examine the production, maintenance and preservation of a given organisational reality as a form of interactionist thought, there is an irony inasmuch as those authors we draw upon would not consider their work to be works of interactionism in general or symbolic interactionism in particular (*cf.* Atkinson & Housley, 2003; Denzin, 1969; Denzin & Keller, 1981; Goffman, 1981). Ultimately we contend that it is

through interaction that given meanings are constituted and reaffirmed, where actions can be legitimated and rendered rational; it is within this frame that we show how organisations make a particular situated and contingent sense as individual accounts are mediated through engagement with organisations and their members. It is in this sense that we draw upon alignments of theoretical perspectives such as that derived from Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel (Manning, 1992) in order to explore the contingent and situated nature of organisational life.

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