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Citation for final published version:

Sanson, David and Courpasson, David 2022. Resistance as a way of life: How a group of workers perpetuated insubordination to neoliberal management. *Organization Studies* 43 (11) , pp. 1693-1717. 10.1177/01708406221077780

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/01708406221077780>

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"Resistance as a way of life: How a group of workers perpetuated insubordination to neoliberal management"

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|------------------|---|
| Journal: | <i>Organization Studies</i> |
| Manuscript ID | OS-20-0463.R4 |
| Manuscript Type: | Article |
| Keywords: | Collective resistance, Everyday resistance, Organizational politics, Belongingness, Insubordination, Recognition politics, Post-recognition politics |
| Abstract: | This article sheds light on how a group of workers manage to create an enduring collective resistance, in an uncongenial context of neoliberal management pushing for compliant behaviors. Research on resistance has given scant attention to the concrete conditions through which collective resisting efforts can be sustained, despite adverse contexts. We highlight the process through which everyday collective resistance |

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| | <p>produces substantial effects and becomes viewed by management and workers as an integral part of an organization's power relations. We particularly illuminate how practices that mutually constitute belongingness and insubordination continuously reinforce collective resistance to make it the very texture of workers' lives. We therefore analyze everyday resistance as a way of life, through which workers aim to simultaneously contest managerial authority and protect their own social boundaries in a neoliberal context. Thereby, we offer a way to reconcile recognition and post-recognition politics in a dialogue envisaging the 'efficacy' of resistance in a new light.</p> |
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SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

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3 **Resistance as a way of life: how a group of workers perpetuated insubordination to**
4 **neoliberal management**
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10 Lyon, France
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13 David Courpasson, emlyon business school, oce research center, France, and Cardiff
14 University, UK
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21 **Abstract**
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24 This article sheds light on how a group of workers manage to create an enduring collective
25 resistance, in an uncongenial context of neoliberal management pushing for compliant
26 behaviors. Research on resistance has given scant attention to the concrete conditions through
27 which collective resisting efforts can be sustained, despite adverse contexts. We highlight the
28 process through which everyday collective resistance produces substantial effects and becomes
29 viewed by management and workers as an integral part of an organization's power relations.
30 We particularly illuminate how practices that mutually constitute *belongingness* and
31 *insubordination* continuously reinforce collective resistance to make it the very texture of
32 workers' lives. We therefore analyze everyday resistance as a *way of life*, through which
33 workers aim to simultaneously contest managerial authority and protect their own social
34 boundaries in a neoliberal context. Thereby, we offer a way to reconcile recognition and post-
35 recognition politics in a dialogue envisaging the 'efficacy' of resistance in a new light.
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48 **Key Words:** Collective resistance, everyday resistance, organizational politics, belongingness,
49 insubordination, recognition politics, post-recognition politics.
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Introduction

“This site is... rough, socially speaking. Always has been. [...] As soon as you arrive here, they go on strike or whatever. To ‘show you.’ I’ve never seen that elsewhere, ever. When I asked the director about it, he simply told me: ‘welcome to Normandy’ [laughs]. Because it really is the way things are going here.” (Laurent, PCI manager)

“Here you can see it, it’s... it’s different from other sites. [...] I had the feeling of living back in Zola’s times, of entering another world. [...]. You cannot ignore that fact. It’s a determining factor in the way we approach our policies.” (Denis, platform vice-director)

“I like it here’. You come here and first thing you learn is that you can kick the shit out of management [laughs]. Well, I’m fine with that [laughs].” (Kevin, PCI worker, fieldnotes)

These excerpts illuminate a peculiar conception of social relations in the factory that serves as the empirical terrain of this paper. They can be interpreted in two ways. At first glance, they suggest a form of fixed political antagonism setting the scene of a classical industrial relation in a big industrial factory (Burawoy, 1979; Collinson, 1992); second, they offer the expression of the permanence of a collective resistance that management would have to accept and accommodate: “*It really is the way things are going here.*” We suggest that these quotes prepare a relevant ground for the empirical examination of the conditions that permit resistance to endure to the point of being experienced as integral to the life at work of both managers and workers, in a factory where severe neoliberal managerial reforms are being implemented. This possibility is all the more important as fostering durable collective resistance in today’s organizational neoliberal contexts is extremely difficult, even counter-intuitive: the deterioration of social relationships in the sense of forced fragmentation and destruction of workers’ communities that are resulting from neoliberal measures (Courpasson, Younès & Reed, 2021) could indeed reduce resistance to subjective and politically innocuous forms of protest (Contu, 2008; Fleming, 2016). We contend that this is not necessarily the case, and strive to analyze the conditions that permit collective resistance to endure and establish itself as an integral part of the life of a group of workers and, by the same token, to be politically significant.

The issue of the very duration of resistance processes over time has been the object of scant attention in organizational research. Put differently, we do not know much about how processes of resistance are maintained and sustained in the long run. Enduring resistance is sometimes implicitly associated with organizational infrastructures that permit resistance to last because of the sustenance of resisters’ commitment. However, social movement research has also

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3 documented that retaining commitment among activists is sometimes a daunting task
4 (Klandermans, 1997; Taylor, 1989) and resisters often simply give up (Rahmouni Elidrissi &
5 Courpasson, 2019). We argue that this lack of attention to the issue of enduring resistance
6 partially derives from the subjectivisation of resistance in recent organizational research. That
7 is, the focus is most often on the individualistic treatment of petty acts and sentiments that are,
8 by definition, not supposed to endure (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Mumby, Thomas, Marti &
9 Seidl, 2017). From this perspective, few studies engage directly with long-lasting
10 organizational resistance. Instead, the research stresses individual reactions to the deleterious
11 effects of managerial domination. In a similar vein, infra-political perspectives on resistance
12 (Scott, 1990) have been extremely influential in shaping a dominant view of resistance based
13 on covert acts, without analyzing the conditions that may guarantee their *continuity* over time
14 (Collinson, 1992; Mumby et al., 2017; Scott, 1990). Endurance as an important condition for
15 effective resistance is therefore absent from organizational research - or at best, *implicit*.
16 Researchers study *episodes* of resistance as steps in a process that is not analyzed as enduring
17 (Courpasson, Dany & Clegg, 2012). The conditions and mechanisms that allow workplace
18 resistance to endure – and therefore generate substantial effects and recognition (Courpasson,
19 2016) - are considered as backward-looking, because resistance should now be studied
20 according to “*a more expansive conception of the typical sphere of struggle*” (Mumby, 2020,
21 p. 1).

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24 We engage in these debates through an empirical study examining how a group of resisters
25 manage to maintain and reproduce collective insubordination to neoliberal management in a
26 chemical factory. In particular, we analyse the endurance of this resistance through two major
27 practices: *belongingness* and *collective insubordination*. We highlight how belongingness and
28 collective insubordination are mutually constituted and have generated an enduring resistance
29 that is experienced by workers as a *way of life* (Theodossopoulos, 2014): by this we mean that
30 workers’ life, both at home and at work, is based on the enduring belongingness to an
31 insubordinate group of people. We show that insubordination is systematically developed to
32 reinforce belongingness, and *vice versa*. In this paper, we therefore conceive enduring
33 resistance as the product of social relations that are concomitantly embedded within the shop
34 floor and outside of the factory walls. These social relations are the locus of active everyday
35 social struggles, which substantially characterize the collective life of workers/resisters. This
36 paper thus addresses Anthony’s (1989, p. 7) argument that “*the so-called subcultures (...) found*

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3 *within some organizations are stronger and more enduring than the transitory managerial*
4 *cultural espousals that would overcome them”.*
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7 Our contributions to research on resistance are twofold. First, we illuminate the conditions that
8 permit collective resistance to endure in a context of ruthless fragmentation. We highlight the
9 combined effects of belongingness and insubordination, permitting workers to resist attempts
10 of neoliberal management to appropriate and harness their identities and lives (Fleming, 2017;
11 Land & Taylor, 2011). Against all odds, we show a collective resistance that effectively
12 counters the all-encompassing forms of corporate domination highlighted by managerial
13 practices of individualization. By the same token, we highlight that the workplace remains a
14 central location of significant forms of collective resistance. Our second contribution to
15 research on resistance is introducing the notion of *resistance as a way of life* to account for the
16 organizational inscription of resistance in the long run, despite antagonistic contextual
17 constraints. We show some conditions for the resistance to be experienced by workers as the
18 central ethos of their common life. Analyzing collective resistance as a way of life does not
19 diminish its oppositional nature but helps to better illustrate the conditions needed for resistance
20 to be perpetuated. This in turn sheds new light on how recognition and post-recognition politics
21 may be combined, despite their usual opposition (Courpasson, 2016; Fleming, 2016; Mumby
22 et al., 2017). In other words, we depict the endurance of resistance as both the achievement of
23 explicit recognition at the factory *and* as a potential source of emancipation “*for its own sake*”
24 (Fleming, 2016, p. 108) that protects a certain way of life at work. Theorizing resistance as way
25 of life illustrates a novel way to account for resistance impacts.
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40 The paper is organized as follows. The next section lays out the theoretical underpinnings of
41 the study by developing our argument related to the endurance of collective resistance. We then
42 discuss our method before introducing our empirical findings. Finally, we draw out the core
43 contributions of the article in the discussion and conclusion.
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48 **The uncertain impact of resistance**

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51 Organizational research has mostly viewed resistance as both individual and mundane (Fleming
52 & Spicer, 2003) - and, when collective, often unsuccessful (Marti & Fernandez 2013).
53 Resistance is also frequently regarded as an infra-political process, meaning covert and difficult
54 to recognize (Scott, 1990). The few studies on collective resistance have examined a variety of
55 acts ranging from undercover organized secret activities (Courpasson & Younès, 2018) to
56 unofficial efforts (Marti & Fernandez, 2013) to overt insurrections (i.e. publicly declared
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3 actions that aim to directly challenge social relations) (Mumby et al., 2017), and more radical
4 efforts such as collectively organized hunger strikes (Courpasson, 2017; O’Hearn, 2009).
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6 Despite the different angles of investigation and theorization, what is relatively common to
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8 most research is that it theorizes resistance’s impact in terms of an opposition between
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10 *recognition* and *post-recognition* politics (Courpasson, 2016; Fleming, 2016). That is, the
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12 resisters’ objective would be either to have their voice heard and recognized, or to be “left
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14 alone” to seek spaces of emancipation beyond the factory walls (Mumby, 2020). At the same
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16 time, research pays scant attention to the question of whether and under what conditions
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18 resistance endures over time. This is a shame, we argue, because understanding such endurance
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20 can better illustrate the concrete effects of resistance, thereby avoiding the trap of the
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22 recognition/post-recognition binarism. Indeed, previous research often seems to imply that
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24 collective resistance at best permits the temporary suspension of rules in a given system of
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26 power - for instance, when the oppressive regime of military combat was temporarily suspended
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28 during the improvised truces during World War I (Wiedeman, Pina e Cunha & Clegg, 2021),
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30 or when the long hunger strikes of several resisters led to negotiations with management
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32 (Courpasson, 2017) before the usual status is restored. Stated simply, research has not
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34 investigated how collective resistance can become a permanent process, especially in a context
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36 hostile to collective resisting initiatives like neoliberal management (Courpasson et al., 2021).

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38 We believe this lack of attention is partly due to the way scholars engage in the political
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40 efficiency debate. A prevailing perspective argues that organizational resistance generally has
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42 no substantial political effect, simply because individuals willingly subject themselves to
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44 systems of domination (Willmott, 1993), or even contribute to their own subordination to avoid
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46 confrontation (Allen, 2008; Gaventa, 1980). Some types of workplace opposition might
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48 therefore even strengthen social subordination (Burawoy, 1979; Collinson, 1988; Fleming,
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50 2013). In neoliberal contexts, routines of non-challenge would develop, making politically
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52 effective resistance indeed an unlikely event (Courpasson & Marti, 2019). At the very least,
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54 resistance would often be confined to unobtrusive objections (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). Many
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56 silent and subjective forms of resistance have indeed developed (Fleming & Sewell, 2002;
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58 Fleming & Spicer, 2003). However, those forms are usually described as a-political (Contu,
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60 2008), and unlikely to disturb power systems (Fleming, 2016). The subjectivisation of
61
62 resistance, its “existential” nature (O’Doherty & Willmott, 2001), and the current focus on
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64 resisters as “subjects of modernity” (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995, p. 627) have obfuscated
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66 certain concrete conditions without which resistance cannot endure, and therefore be politically

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3 impactful. In particular, *post-recognition* views of politics defend the idea that a new kind of
4 resistance among 21st century workers would be defined by the “*struggle to be left*
5 *alone*” (Harney, 2011, quoted in Fleming, 2013, p. 490), characterized by disappearing from
6 the political scene and avoiding dialogue with power holders while searching for a self-
7 determination outside the corporate realm. The slogan of this kind of politics is the democratic
8 reclamation of work, whereby “*working time will cease to be the dominant social time*” (Gorz,
9 2005, p. 73). Struggles should thus be studied now in the context of organizing beyond
10 organization (Mumby 2020). Between political harmlessness and mere departure from the
11 political game, research on resistance might have therefore turned its back on forms of
12 opposition that willfully play the game of politics, even at the price of radicalisation
13 (Courpasson, 2017). Consequently, situations where collective resistance is likely to alter
14 organizational power relations are hardly recognized (Wiedeman et al., 2021), because that
15 would suppose either to romanticize stories of bravery (Mumby et al., 2017) or endlessly invoke
16 an illusion of autonomy (Contu, 2008; Thompson, 2016). Situations where collective resistance
17 can directly challenge power relations and install resistance as a permanent defiance to
18 established powers are even harder to contemplate.

31 **Argument**

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33 This latter possibility supposes to go beyond what infra-political views and research on the
34 production of “*subtle constructions of resistant meanings*” (Courpasson & Marti, 2019, p. 6)
35 are likely to accomplish. The infra-political perspective is crucial to capture the capacities that
36 certain groups of people mobilize to silently articulate their claims and generate confrontational
37 moments that can bring about political alternatives (Scott, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson,
38 2013). However, it does not consider the conditions through which a group of workers can
39 develop a politically purposive project of insubordination to management that is *designed to*
40 *endure*, despite uncongenial organizational contexts of neoliberal transformation. We suggest
41 that under certain conditions, everyday acts of insubordination can shape a practice of resistance
42 that is consubstantial to the way of life that resisters want to protect. We propose to analyze
43 resistance as a life-embedded practice that is assumed “*to become part and parcel of common*
44 *thinking*” (Krzyzanowski, 2020, p. 435) in a given organizational context.

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46 This view of enduring resistance does not portray a mere fantasy of autonomy (Contu, 2008) –
47 much less a romantic story of political heroism (Mumby, 2017) - because it is rooted in concrete
48 gestures and accomplishments enacted every day *in situ*, and often in the very presence of the
49 adversary. This resistance is established on the systematic capture of occasions where resisters
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3 overtly display their power, thereby constantly confirming their strength so that management
4 must recognize it. More importantly, we contend that this resistance is permitted by the intricate
5 relations existing in the group of resisters between their life at work and at home.
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9 We further argue that approaching resistance as a way of life turns the issue of political
10 efficiency upside down: from the widespread notion of the obvious subjugation of people to
11 domination, to a permanent practice of insubordination. In our study, the resistance is enduring
12 because certain activities, whilst deviant according to prevalent neoliberal principles and
13 demands, are coherent and meaningful within a specific work culture. Through this lens, we
14 study resistance as socially organized through practices of insubordination that perpetuate
15 enclaves of competing systems of meaning and relations that, while constantly in opposition,
16 permit the effects of resistance to accumulate *within* the very managerial structures of power.
17 We eventually propose that the most complete achievement of resistance occurs when it
18 becomes a *way of life*, inscribing struggle in the daily life as a customary and habitual collective
19 and individual activity.
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28 Here, we particularly examine two mutually reinforcing practices that underlie the endurance
29 of resistance. First, *Belongingness*, whereby special social modalities become embedded in
30 structures and processes and, consequently, somehow routinized. In this paper, we approach
31 belongingness as a sense of being in a social location, as a personal feeling of emotional
32 attachment and as a discursive construction of socio-spatial boundaries of inclusion and
33 exclusion (Antonsich, 2010); Yuval-Davis highlights these dimensions by defining
34 belongingness as being about "*feeling at home*" (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 19). Second, *Collective*
35 *insubordination*, whereby self-serving ideas and actions develop to valorize insubordination in
36 the eyes of workers, in turn inducing a view of resistance that management is constrained to
37 include in the factory politics.
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47 **Methods**

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50 The paper draws on a longitudinal ethnography conducted between 2011 and 2019 at a
51 petrochemical factory in Normandy (France). We build particularly on our specific position in
52 the field - as an "ethnographer at home"¹ (Ouattara, 2004) - to thoroughly analyze the social
53 repercussions, among shift workers, of the plant restructuring initiated by a merger in 2014.
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59 ¹ The first author originates from the working-class community studied and is personally
60 acquainted with several of the shift-worker participants, as either a relative or childhood friend.

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3 We draw on the first author's familiarity with the field and his personal acquaintances with
4 shift-worker participants to expand the investigation from work environments into more
5 intimate settings, observing respondents' home spheres and participating in private activities.
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7 This investigation illustrated the material, cultural and geographical requirements of the
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9 endurance of collective resistance in the neoliberal workplace. We also focus on shift workers
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11 because their work collectives, previously spared from divisive managerial policies, were
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13 disproportionately affected by the merger.
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16 Context

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19 The factory investigated is part of one of the biggest French industrial companies, called
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21 "EnergyCorp" in this paper. In 2014, as part of its strategic reorientation, the firm decided to
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23 launch the *Convergence*² project, merging the factory with another plant located nearby and, in
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25 the process, creating the biggest integrated petrochemical platform in Europe. The internal
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27 restructuring following the merger disrupted established patterns of work organization and
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29 employment relations in an industrial complex known as a national working-class bastion, with
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31 historically strong trade unions and collective protests against management.

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33 This strategic reorientation resulted in the individualization of wages and career paths, as well
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35 as the diffusion of a new organizational culture that encouraged self-entrepreneurship.
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37 Specifically, new forms of appraisal were introduced to increase transparency of shift workers'
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39 activities by assessing their skills, performance and commitment at work, thereby weakening
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41 collectives. Such individual assessment was then used by management to justify unequal wages
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43 and career opportunities. The management builds on these changes to alter the behavior of shift
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45 workers specifically, traditionally regarded as "troublemakers" in the factory. To better grasp
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47 the importance of shift workers' intricate solidarities and the resulting forms of resistance they
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49 continue to express, it is crucial to consider these organizational changes.

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51 Indeed, the longitudinal ethnography conducted among shift workers between 2014–2019 in
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53 *and* outside the factory highlights the systems of solidarity that these workers have maintained
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55 over time, as well as collective mobilizations as evidenced by several strikes and protests
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57 observed during the time of the investigation.
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60 ² All italicized words are drawn from empirical material gathered in the field.

A “familiar” field

The first author conducted a longitudinal field study in the industrial working-class background from where he originates, among childhood friends and relatives.

In this study, both proximity with informants and a careful examination of the fieldworker’s subjective appreciations enabled attention to data that otherwise would have been missed. Closeness with respondents has provided a unique position of observation and understanding, allowing us to pursue the investigation beyond the boundaries of the organization. This familiarity with informants led us to broaden the perimeter of the analysis to share various activities with participants in more intimate settings, thus capturing aspects of domestic life that illustrate the interconnection between private and work-related practices.

This “dual role” (Essers, 2009) of the fieldworker – i.e., being simultaneously a friend and a researcher – thus permitted the continuity of the investigation in various times and spaces. This in turn allowed attention to how the enduring resistance may be understood as a way of life, at the crossroad of diverse socio-spatial locations, involving both professional and private aspects of shift-workers’ interconnected lives. Also, reflecting upon our particular position in the field led us to explore respondents’ appropriation of specific places (such as control rooms or the refectory at work) that a stranger would have been unable to access. This atypical intertwining of intimacy and investigation then gradually refined our focus on the professional, social and spatial entanglements that produce workers’ practices of belongingness, subsequently sustaining subversive acts against the new managerial imperatives.

Data collection and analysis

Site access and implications

In the context studied, “shifts” are the product of an organization adapted to the modern productive constraints, as the factory runs 24 hours seven days a week. The group of shift workers alternates day and night work periods, with non-standard working-hours. Being classified “SEVESO 2” - the highest security protocol in France - entrance within the factory is strictly controlled and the management does not allow any “visitor” outside business reasons and business hours (8h-18h). Therefore, to access the factory and observe shift-workers, we needed to enter the field through unofficial means and at unconventional times.

Most observations and interviews with workers were thus made outside business hours, within the “*Plan Centrale Incendie*” [or “PCI”] unit, in the shadow of the managerial gaze. This unit

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3 is geographically the plant's most peripheral one, close to an entrance and far from the Comex
4 [main management] buildings, allowing us to more easily enter and exit the complex. The PCI
5 unit has 37 employees as of this writing, all men. Like other shift-workers in the factory, they
6 work in three eight-hour shift cycles (i.e., 6am-2pm, 2pm-10pm and 10pm-6am). Divided into
7 teams of five, the unit is always present on site.
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12 We were able to enter the factory thanks to friends and relatives who work at the site and count
13 among our interviewees. Taking advantage of these close acquaintances, we accessed the site
14 with their complicity - for instance, entering the plant after nightfall, once management had left.
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18 I arrive at 1:30 pm: I go to the reception desk, I give my ID for the access badge. The guardian
19 jokingly says: "What's up with the repeated visits here? Well, it's OK because it's you." [Later
20 same day:] I arrive again at 10.15 pm: I don't go to the security desk and sneak in directly. I call
21 Romain, the operator, who comes to open the door for me. It's night already, the whole
22 management is gone. Shift-workers own the place. (fieldnotes)
23

24 We thus managed to gain night and week-end access to a high-security factory to pursue
25 ethnographic observations and further develop relationships with other informants, allowing us
26 to investigate during understudied times (Menoux, 2017). Over time, however, our presence
27 became known to management, who eventually agreed to be interviewed after shift workers
28 informally introduced us. Gradually, we managed to obtain more official access to the factory
29 and perform daytime interviews while continuing to observe outside business hours. Ultimately,
30 we benefited from full access to the factory, which is unusual in high-security plants in France.
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33 Although we never intentionally hid our investigation, this circumvention of official access
34 channels was mostly due to difficulties in obtaining the informed consent of the management
35 without attracting attention and suspicion (Roulet, Gill, M., Stenger & Gill D., 2017), thus
36 (partly) losing access to the site. Also, investigating in the absence of the management was key
37 to understanding how shift-workers' social dynamics lead to enduring resisting patterns.
38 Scholars have highlighted the grey shades of interviewees' "consent" in qualitative studies,
39 especially in ethnography (Roulet et al., 2017; Simons & Usher, 2000), where for practical
40 reasons full transparency by researchers is complicated and even potentially damaging to the
41 study and informants (Beaud & Weber, 2017). Rather than apply universal principles of ethics,
42 we thus consider the need of an "ethics of situation" (Calvey, 2008; Simons & Usher, 2000),
43 allowing a more "*flexible and responsive form of ethical research*" (Ravn, Barnwell & Barbosa
44 Neves, 2020, p. 40). We took high care not to divulge any information that could compromise
45 the anonymity and integrity of our respondents. To that end, translation from French to English
46 helped to create distance while blurring identification processes. Also, since our data result from
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3 a longitudinal investigation which draws mostly on informal conversations, observation of
4 practices and anecdotal (but significant) events, they do not reveal sensitive information that
5 could be prejudicial to their authors. This situated ethics, shaped by and for the singular context
6 of the field, thus considers the singularities of our fieldwork, acknowledging the ethnographer's
7 need for partial disguise in order to access sensible data (e.g., how workers could avoid the
8 managerial gaze while maintaining a high sense of belongingness and subversive sociabilities,
9 thus ultimately producing an enduring resistance).

16 *Data collection*

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18 We conducted 18 rounds of data collection between January 2014 and February 2019. These
19 included in-depth interviews with both workers and their managers, non-participant
20 observations, and field documents. We built a relationship of trust with the respondents, while
21 maintaining a critical distance. In particular, we took advantage of living in another city to
22 preserve reflexive distance, thereby developing a staggered approach incorporating time-outs
23 and multiple focused revisits to the field (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009). This self-reflexive
24 method fostered a certain detachment, thereby allowing a more objective analysis of subjective
25 notes.

26
27 The resulting data consist of 79 interviews with a broad panel of workers; 18 months of full-
28 time observations (both on-site and outside); and numerous archived documents collected over
29 the years including official communications, informal information (e.g., email or minutes of
30 meetings), individual performance reviews of our interviewees, appraisal guides, and process
31 descriptions). The interviews were conducted in French and lasted, on average, slightly over an
32 hour and half. They cover the entire investigation period and increased in emphasis and depth
33 because of the cumulative nature of the fieldwork process. All interviews, tape-recorded and
34 transcribed for analysis, were semi-directive, aiming to gradually refine the focus while
35 concomitantly allowing the interviewees to speak in their own voice. We questioned workers
36 about their experiences, feelings and opinions regarding the post-merger configurations and -
37 more specifically - their relationships with colleagues, management and other employees. Other
38 participants than PCI shift-workers (i.e., retired shift-workers, daily employees and external
39 workers) and shift-workers from other units were also interviewed to compare perspectives
40 Similarly, to advance the understanding of workers' reactions, we also interviewed middle-
41 managers and COMEX members.

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3 Observations were key to highlight how workers could maintain collective resisting patterns in
4 the hostile neoliberal context following EnergyCorp restructuring. This revealed forms of
5 solidarity and mutual support in *and* outside the workplace. As previously mentioned, numerous
6 observations were pursued beyond work situations as we continued to visit some participants
7 at home. These excursions offered a different perspective while illustrating events that would
8 have otherwise gone unnoticed, such as the home-work continuity of their solidaristic ties. We
9 thus observed personal life and practices outside business hours, participating in the socializing
10 activities (e.g., parties, dinners, football games, barbecues, etc.) that contribute to perpetuating
11 close bonds among workers. This helped us to better understand the importance of material,
12 cultural and geographical conditions in the shaping of an enduring collective resistance in a
13 neoliberal workplace.
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23 *Data analysis*

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25 By closely examining participants' experience regarding changes at work, we were able to
26 narrow down significant factors sustaining shift-workers' collective resistance. We understand
27 the persistence of collective resistance in the factory as a result of two mutually self-fostering
28 practices - *belongingness* and *collective insubordination* - which enable the development and
29 consolidation of an enduring resistance among shift-workers.
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34 First, we looked at the signs of resistance to neoliberal fragmentizing principles. We established
35 a broad list, composed of elements including (but not limited to): covering for absent
36 coworkers; financial, material and emotional support at home or elsewhere outside of the
37 workplace; violent reactions (regarding obedience) to authority; games and jokes in the plant;
38 mockery of the administration and managers; and physical and symbolic appropriation of
39 specific workplaces such as the control room or the refectory. Then, we noticed that all elements
40 pertained to either practices of *belongingness* (e.g., feelings of uniqueness and superiority
41 regarding other categories of workers; friendships; and mutual support and solidarities at work
42 and at home) or practices of *insubordination* (e.g., subversion of managerial devices at work;
43 pride in displaying rebellious behaviors; exclusion of the hierarchy from certain workspaces;
44 and overt conflicts with management).
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54 We thus structured these two major processes as follow (see figure 1. below): *Practices of*
55 *belongingness* refer to two specific social modalities shared by shift-workers: (1) an exclusive
56 working-class subculture based on the nature of work and social separation from other workers
57 (what they call a "*shift-spirit*"); and (2) friendships and solidaristic ties fostered by social and
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3 geographical proximity (their so-called “*family spirit*”). *Practices of collective insubordination*
4 also entail two modalities: (1) appropriation of specific workplaces where shift-workers can
5 affirm their *territorial exclusiveness* and foster subversive aspirations; and (2) concrete acts of
6 *overt subversion* of neo-managerial norms of conduct (such as taking long meal breaks or
7 displaying normative public insubordination against management).
8
9

12 **Insert Figure 1 about here**

13
14
15 As illustrated in figure 1, *practices of both belongingness and collective insubordination* are
16 mutually constituted: belongingness is sustained by accumulating acts of insubordination, while
17 insubordination rests upon a strong and longstanding sense of belongingness. Their constant
18 interrelation over time generates a resistance that seems to be incorporated as both a way of life
19 by workers and a regular feature of organizational politics.
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24 **Findings**

25 Practices of belongingness

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28 In this section, we unpack how the shaping of an enduring resistance entails the continuous
29 production of practices of belongingness, based on a common (and exclusive) experience of
30 work, private space and social activities.
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33 *A masculine working-class “shift-spirit”: occupational cohesiveness and feeling of uniqueness*

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36
37 Shift-spirit refers to a working-class group that has structured itself over time in opposition to
38 other social groups. The factory is indeed marked by the existence of a strong social cleavage
39 between shift-workers and white-collar workers and those in employee positions. All the
40 factory staff is aware of this social split: “*What is important to understand is that shifts are a*
41 *working-class world*” (Jean, former PCI manager). The distinctive nature of their risky,
42 technical masculine work gives them a feeling of uniqueness and superiority fueling strong
43 solidaristic ties between them.
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52 First, the bulk of shift-work in the factory resides in team-based activities that are difficult to
53 split among individuals. This is particularly salient in the PCI unit, where the collective nature
54 of work - coupled with complex interventions – helps to maintain robust bonds among workers.
55 Christophe tells me that he likes shiftwork because he benefits from a unique configuration,
56 linked to the nature of activities:
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3 “Unlike other jobs in which you are in your bubble when you work, you think individually (...) Here,
4 the work is collective. It is a matter of doing everything together. This produces a ‘shift spirit.’ That’s
5 how the shifts work, you have to rely on others.”
6
7

8 The very nature and requirements of the job induce *de facto* a certain cohesiveness among
9 workers because of the shared characteristics of the activities, which cannot be carried out
10 alone. Importantly however, their work consists mainly of prevention and monitoring activity:
11 their technical knowledge of the machines allows the plant to “run smoothly.” All participants
12 thus refer to their work as a “*waiting job*.” Workers paradoxically find a source of pride in doing
13 as little as possible at work, because their nonchalance shows that they are in full control of
14 their work:
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21 [2.30 am] I stay in the refectory with the guys, eating pizza. Kevin, a young new temporary
22 worker, suddenly yawns and says he’s exhausted. Everybody is telling him to go to sleep in a
23 back room. He answers that he is not comfortable with the idea of sleeping at work. Pascal then
24 looks him in the eyes, leans over the table and tells him firmly: “*If you don’t sleep in your shift,*
25 *it means that you’re not at ease with your job yet.*” (fieldnotes)
26

27 However, although the “waiting” nature of their job allows some free time, problems requiring
28 an intervention do happen. In that case, teamwork is key to protecting themselves and solving
29 the issues. Workers’ cohesiveness is thus also mediated by a feeling of physical threat inherent
30 in the dangerous chemical products being processed in the factory. Indeed, all shift-workers
31 like to repeat: “*We don’t make no chocolate here.*” If the plant is mostly running smoothly,
32 sometimes a whole unit can suddenly be “*gone to shit.*” This naturally fosters a strong unity
33 between shift-workers, fueled by the collective and risky nature of their work experiences: “*You*
34 *are forced to rely on others anyway, because sometimes you risk your neck*” (Christophe).
35 Collective social ties are thus woven by the mere need to “*stay together,*” especially after
36 accidents that regularly kill or badly injure individuals:
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45 Improvised boat trip in the afternoon just after the morning shift, during which the F2 tank
46 exploded (two subcontractors died and one was critically wounded). All the crew is here. We
47 go fishing around Honfleur, where we binge drink in the evening, before coming back drunk in
48 the middle of the night. (fieldnotes)
49

50 The occupational cohesiveness developed in this work context is rooted in workers’ mutual
51 dependency, interactions and shared experiences, through which they recognize their common
52 situation and need for reciprocal support. The resulting “*shift spirit,*” rooted in the collective,
53 technical and risky working-class nature of the work, fuels a strong feeling of uniqueness and
54 superiority over other categories of workers - that is, non-shift workers, who do not share their
55 work or social characteristics.
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3 The influence of the “*shift culture*” is indeed particularly salient through the very semantics
4 used by shift workers to distinguish themselves from non-shift workers. Shift workers
5 systematically and contemptuously refer to other occupational groups – mostly composed of
6 administrative employees - as “*day folks*.” Data indeed highlight how feelings of uniqueness
7 and patterns of solidarity emerge from the specificities of shift-work (i.e., an atypical time
8 rhythm). The schedule is the same on weekends and bank holidays. They are assigned to work
9 for five consecutive days, followed by three days off. Thereby they constantly interact,
10 including when managers are not present in the factory.

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17 Outside business hours, management is represented by only one person, the Permanent Shift
18 Foreman (“*CMQP*”). This individual oversees all the shift supervisors in the plant³. Although
19 they are the official management representatives during nights and week-ends, CMQPs are all
20 former shift supervisors who did their entire career as shift-workers: thus, they tend to turn a
21 blind eye when shift-workers violate corporate rules. Besides, they feel closer with shift-
22 workers than with other managers:

23
24
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27
28 “I converse with Gérard [CMQP]. He is proud to tell me that when he was younger, he was a
29 ‘*fucking wanker*’ who ‘*said shit*’ to his hierarchy. I learn that he comes from a working-class
30 background. He confesses that he has never felt like he ‘*belongs to the world of managers, their*
31 *ways of seeing and speaking,*’ and their particular behaviors. He insisted: ‘*I’ve never had a party*
32 *with managers here, they’re not from the same world.*’” (fieldnotes)

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When the speaker above retired several months after that interaction, Gerard interestingly
invited only shift-workers to his retirement party and none of his own colleagues. Shift cycles
constitute a way of life for shift workers, as the experience of working shifts gives them
considerable freedom compared with other workers in the factory. This confers a special
atmosphere whose inhabitants feel cut off from other employees. This is exemplified by the
excerpts below from author’s discussion with Clement in the refectory. Clement likes the vibes
of the shifts and describes how the autonomy resulting from the absence of management is
particular to shift work:

“*We live in a small family context here [...] We are cut off from the hierarchy world. [...] (There is) no such thing for other employees. When you work during the day, this hierarchy is present. Heavily.*”

The resulting demarcation contributes to delineating the social boundaries of their group. As a
result, shift-workers and day folks form “*two different worlds*” which don’t understand each
other:

³ There are a total of five of them, who, unlike the other foremen, also work in turn in shift.

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2
3 *“The most important differences among the factory staff lay not between production units or*
4 *sectors, but between a shift-worker and a day-worker.”* (Didier, unit manager)
5

6 Tacit and informal arrangements are generally made between teams of shift-workers: the teams
7 working during business hours do most of the tasks to give the current night and week-end
8 teams a margin of freedom. Indeed, while day workers emphasize the lack of back up enjoyed
9 by shift workers (if their tasks aren't completed at the end of the day, they must catch up the
10 next day as there is no one to pick up the slack), shift workers, by contrast, can count on the
11 other teams to finish any incomplete work and cover them if needed. Among the benefits of
12 such down time is the ability to forge strong collective bonds, as illustrated by Florent, who has
13 worked as both a shift worker and a daily employee. At the time of the interview, he had just
14 returned to shift after a year of working office hours. He was initially expected to do two, but
15 returned to shift a year earlier by his own request:
16
17

18 *“Moving on to a day job... it's a lot less fun to work. I had crazy hours. [...] you're monitored*
19 *everywhere. You're constantly under pressure.”* Plus, he didn't really make friends with day
20 folks during this time: *“I didn't see any of them [his office-colleagues] outside. I couldn't stand*
21 *the day job any longer.”* (fieldnotes)
22
23

24 Shift work affords workers considerably more freedom, which besides providing a pleasant
25 work atmosphere, also strengthens their feeling of uniqueness:
26
27

28 *“Right now [the interview is conducted at night], who knows, the guys in PEL [another unit] are*
29 *doing the conga, no one knows, no one cares. You can't do that by day.”* (Florent)
30
31

32 Coupled with their autonomy at work, this particularity gives shift-workers a strong sense of
33 superiority over other employees.
34
35

36 *“I know a lot of people here, shift-workers, but I know no day folks. I don't know what they do.*
37 *But they must be bored shitless compared to us [laughs].”* (Jimmy)
38
39

40 Shift-workers' activities are also highly specialized; they are practically the only staff with the
41 technical knowledge to operate the plant's delicate machinery. Their job therefore requires a
42 high level of expertise, in which they take great pride. Their atypical work schedule coupled
43 with their technical skill fuels their feeling of entitlement and contempt towards “day folks.”
44 The resulting feeling of superiority leads them to denigrate the work of other employees, who
45 do not share such dexterity. For instance, the following excerpts from Dimitri reflect the pride
46 he takes in his work and the condescension that shift-workers feel towards other staff:
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55 *“They are no technicians. Conversations stay a bit low. I prefer to talk with shift-workers, who*
56 *know stuff.”*
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3 This “shift-spirit” is both an enabler and a consequence of more private practices of
4 belongingness and solidarities that workers weave across distinct places, in-between work and
5 home.
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10 *Family spirit: solidarities at the crossroads of work and home*

11 Workers’ enduring resistance is further strengthened by practices of everyday sociability in the
12 domestic sphere. The “shift-spirit” described above is thus connected with the bonding practices
13 created outside of work in more private settings. Shift-workers are embedded in networks of
14 friendships, neighborliness, and mutual aid outside of work, which act as significant resources
15 for their intra-organizational resistance.
16
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19
20 First, the gap between shift work and the usual social rhythms tends to socially isolate them
21 from most employees. In interviews, all shift workers shared the needed adaptation of their
22 homes and rhythms of life, especially to fit with shift-works requirements, thereby creating a
23 form of home-work continuity. In describing the shift-work experience, Mickey says:
24
25
26

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28 *"When you work in shifts, the whole family does the shifts* (referring to the constraining domestic
29 arrangements required by such atypical work schedules. He recalls his son bringing a friend
30 home in the middle of the day while he was sleeping): *The kid feels like I'm asleep all the time*
31 *[laughs]"*.
32

33 From seeking arrangements with neighbors to strategically scheduling naps and non-day shifts
34 during holidays, their entire social life is impacted by the dictate of shift-work, whose particular
35 rhythms pervade private and intimate spaces. The social ties they form outside work are thus
36 facilitated by their atypical work schedules that set them apart from most of the employees who
37 work office hours.
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42 In addition, shift-workers live near one another as illustrated in the following field notes (which
43 also shed further light on the solidarity bonds that form outside of work):
44
45

46
47 Before Patrick moved into my parents’ building, he lived near Vincent’s place. When Vincent
48 separated from his wife in 2015, Patrick shared his flat with him. Vincent slept on Patrick’s
49 couch for five months.

50
51 September 2017: Gaetan moved to another house, close to where Jimmy lives. However,
52 Gaetan’s old house was sold three weeks before he was able to move into the new one. Jimmy
53 welcomed Gaetan, his wife and 2 children into his home during that interval.

54
55 This geographical proximity also explains why some colleagues were already friends *before*
56 entering the job: *"I have many colleagues who've become buddies, and sometimes we were*
57 *already friends before starting to work here"* (Vincent).
58
59
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3 Socialization during atypical work hours and nearby places of residence are thus key to
4 understanding the interconnection between work and home in shaping a collective, which is
5 often interpreted as a “*second family*.” This is exemplified by excerpts from a conversation in
6 the refectory with Gaetan. He insists, because of his atypical work schedule:
7
8

9
10 *“You spend more time with your shift than you do with your own family. Your colleagues,*
11 *they’re becoming pals. It’s like a little family here.”*
12

13 Therefore, the weaving of social ties allows workers to preserve work collectives and strengthen
14 solidarities. Belongingness is largely produced beyond the factory walls, in a home-work
15 continuity whereby work is constantly ‘muddled together’ with outside life.
16
17

18 Indeed, shift-work teams meet outside regularly, whether at home or in public places to have a
19 drink or meal, set up barbecues or parties at someone’s home, play football, or go fishing. One
20 important type of outside social activity consists of home renovation projects, which most shift
21 workers have helped the others with at some point. These private events regularly involve
22 former PCI members (moved to another plant unit), including retired workers who still “*hang*
23 *out with the guys*.” Similarly, former PCI members continue to drop by the factory, “*coming*
24 *over for coffee*” to chill with the team during night and week-end shifts as illustrated by the
25 following field note:
26
27

28 Jeannot comes by the house for lunch. As he retired two years ago, I jokingly ask him if he
29 doesn't miss the factory too much. Yet he looks at me and answers in an unexpectedly serious
30 and nostalgic tone: “*I miss the buddies* [silence]. *Actually, it’s the buddies that I miss.*” He then
31 tells me that he plans to pass by the PCI soon. Although he is no longer working, I note that he
32 still visits the PCI for coffee quite regularly. I already saw him chilling two or three times in the
33 refectory in the last 4 months.
34
35

36 Contrary to individually aimed managerial measures, shift-workers protect a daily system of
37 social and practical solidarity, both inside and outside the workplace and involving their
38 families. Professional and friendship ties are intrinsically linked: participants talk about a
39 certain “*family spirit*” that would prevail both at work and outside the factory walls:
40
41

42 I converse with Romain. He tells me that he shouldn't have been working today, but at the last
43 minute he replaced Vincent, who called and told him his car broke down. When I ask if it
44 bothered him, Romain corrects me immediately: “*We can’t think like that.*” He knows the guys
45 would have done the same thing for him, so his gesture is “*natural.*” Whether it is to “*stand up*
46 *for the service*” [PCI], to “*replace someone out of the blue,*” or to “*help out by tinkering at a*
47 *guy’s home,*” they all support each other. That’s the “*spirit.*” (fieldnotes)
48
49

50 For example, money from the illegal sale of building and car materials (usually stolen from the
51 site and resold to individuals outside of work) is poured into a common pot and saved to pay
52 for a dinner in a restaurant for the whole team. These “fundraising” events, at the intersection
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3 between work and private life, are common. Personal difficulties are generally shared and
4 resolved collectively when possible. Several examples include severe debt and alcoholism
5 among some workers, as illustrated by the following field note:
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7

8
9 Although I'm not as close to him as with some other respondents, Ruben is a great friend of my
10 father whom I've known since my childhood. We had an open-hearted conversation today,
11 during which I learned that he was trapped in debt two years ago. He is now back on his feet
12 and infinitely grateful to the guys [PCI], who have supported and helped him during this period.
13 They helped him “with this” (by giving him money) but also with “other things” – namely, his
14 drinking problem, as he regularly came to work completely “wasted” at that time and the guys
15 had to cover him.
16

17 In some cases, shift-workers truly act as family, especially for colleagues who have few or no
18 relatives:
19

20
21 Francis killed himself only one month after his retirement (the company set up “pre-retirement”
22 plans for senior shift-workers between the ages of 57 and 60 years old, depending when they
23 started working). He said, multiple times before he left, that he didn't wanted to retire, as he
24 could laugh and have fun at work. Depressed, he made no funeral plans, leaving his fragile
25 housewife, Jeanne, with nothing. Loic, Patrick, Ruben and Jeannot helped her and took full care
26 of the administrative procedures. When I attended the funeral, I was shocked and saddened by
27 the lack of people. There would have been no one there but his wife if the PCI guys hadn't come.
28 Everyone who could make themselves available did so. (fieldnotes)
29

30
31 An enduring way of life thus rests upon strong forms of belongingness, fueled by dense
32 social ties developed outside the factory. The socio-spatial connectivities across work and
33 home, through which intimacy and friendship are experienced daily, make their collective
34 extremely resilient and hard for the management to break down. Connected with a strong
35 working-class culture, these shift and family spirits contribute to the perpetuation of collective
36 insubordination, as we illustrate in the next subsection.
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41 42 Practices of collective insubordination 43

44
45 Shift-workers' practices are also based on rebellious sociabilities and exclusionary mechanisms
46 that subvert social relationships within the factory, planting the seeds of a collective and
47 continuous resistance. Specific workplaces become the locus of active everyday social struggles
48 where workers wish to concretely establish and ostensibly show their insubordination, thus
49 establishing it as normal.
50
51
52

53 54 *Territorial exclusiveness at work* 55

56
57 Shift-workers' resistance rests upon strong forms of belongingness which lead to the collective
58 appropriation of physical spaces at work, where they can overtly display their proud
59
60

1
2
3 rebelliousness and feel “*like at home.*” Their spatial appropriation of the control room and the
4
5 refectory enables the construction of their own physical, social and symbolic *exclusive* territory
6
7 where insubordination to management becomes a norm.

8
9 Shift-workers indeed strive to ostensibly affirm their social territory at work, where boundaries
10
11 are first physically expressed by the spatial and warlike appropriation of the refectory. Erected
12
13 as a symbolical bastion against non-shift workers, the rejection dynamic towards “intruders”
14
15 tells a lot about the material and symbolic ownership of the group, throwing a clear light
16
17 regarding who “belongs” and who does not:

18
19 I'm heading with Loic to the refectory for a coffee. I note that the porthole on the door is covered
20
21 by a sign: “*Reserved for shift personnel and affinity*”. This sign covers the view and prevents
22
23 outsiders from seeing what's going on inside the room. I ask Loic about the purpose of this sign,
24
25 and what “*affinity*” means. Loic tells me that after the building relocation following the merger,
26
27 “*Anyone entered and made themselves at home here.*” But they ended up “*kicking them out,*”
28
29 making it clear to the hierarchy that it was their restricted space. They also kicked out “*all the*
30
31 *day folks who work upstairs*” and wished to come eat here with their lunch boxes. He insists that
32
33 the refectory is their “*place of retreat ... a private, personal space to which only PCI shift-*
34
35 *workers have access. And affinity means the ones we like*” (for instance Jeannot, a former shift-
36
37 worker now working office hours upstairs for medical reasons, or Frank and Benjamin, former
38
39 temporary workers who now work as subcontractors in the plant). He adds: “*There is no*
40
41 *hierarchy in here.*” (fieldnotes)

42
43 The refectory thus acts as a symbolic barricade, a physical fortified shelter that is difficult for a
44
45 “foreigner” to cross and where shift-workers come to take refuge from “others.” Exceptions are
46
47 made for former shift-workers. Yet, as Loic said: “*there are exceptions but not too many, or*
48
49 *else we're no longer at home.*”

50
51 Shift-workers have also appropriated the control rooms as their own territory: while they cannot
52
53 prohibit other people from entering for work purposes, they are overtly unwelcoming to non-
54
55 shift workers, especially when they linger too long. Their irritation and contempt towards others
56
57 have been regularly observed:

58
59 I leave the interview with Edouard [a manager]: he wants to accompany me to the factory's gate.
60
61 We go down the stairs and enter the control room, where Patrick is talking with my father and
62
63 Romain. We talk for a few minutes before noticing that Edouard - a well-dressed and
64
65 sophisticated man - does not seem comfortable being here. He remains quiet and looks at his
66
67 shoes. I then notice that throughout the whole conversation Patrick, with a blue suit, a helmet
68
69 and many tools attached, was literally *staring* at him (he even looked at him from head to toe
70
71 multiple times), without talking. I felt Edouard's discomfort: he stayed for only a short time and
72
73 decided not to accompany me to the nearby gate. He quickly told me goodbye and left discreetly.
74
75 Once he left, Patrick asked me, nodding in his direction: “*The fuck was he doing here?*”
76
77 (fieldnotes)

78
79 Patrick's words show how unusual it is for non-shift workers to *stay* in the control room, which
80
81 shift workers have appropriated for themselves. Although this room is a crossing point –

1
2
3 meaning that everyone can enter - it is famously known as a place where non-shift-workers are
4 not welcome. Managers and administrative employees are often described as "*hugging the*
5 *walls*" when they must go through the room.
6
7

8
9 Chatting with the guys in the refectory. They're talking about Thierry: "*He's hugging the walls*
10 *right now,*" they joke. Indeed, the PCI unit manager would prefer to enter the building through
11 the small door of the infirmary rather than the main entrance, located in the control room, where
12 all the team is waiting behind the control screens. This is a significant detour, as it means
13 bypassing the whole building. (fieldnotes)
14

15 Shift-workers thus establish their uniqueness in space, giving them a high sense of
16 belongingness, which is then bolstered by subversive appropriation of exclusive working
17 spaces. Most shift-workers believe they have every right to appropriate "their" unit: day folks,
18 who are just "*paper workers... office and file clerks who don't know how to say 'no' to their*
19 *chief*" (Pedro) have no part in it:
20
21
22

23
24 "*Sometimes I have the feeling that shift-workers see their unit as their 'property'... They remake*
25 *the world together and feel entitled to do whatever they want with their unit.*" (Corinne,
26 administrative employee)
27

28 The enduring resistance in the factory is thus largely oriented towards preserving territories that
29 provide workers with a sense of superiority that is marked in each everyday encounter. In these
30 spaces, workers bond mainly through traditional working-class activities (meals and gatherings,
31 pranks, competitions, football games in the sheds, etc.) aimed at claiming their own time and
32 space at work. Shift-workers' practices of belongingness are crystallized in these specific
33 working spaces where everyday insubordination becomes an expected behavior.
34
35
36
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38

39 *Everyday overt subversions*

40
41 Enduring resistance thereby emerges from the material and symbolic ownership of concrete
42 territories where shift-workers can give free rein to their rebellious working-class sociabilities,
43 establishing everyday insubordination as a common norm.
44
45
46

47 First, shift workers regard these appropriated spaces as *places of life*, where intense subversive
48 sociability is practiced, and in which the collective rebuilds itself after the damage resulting
49 from the post-merger configuration. Indeed, they organize in their territory traditional meals
50 that play a paramount role in strengthening the work collectives. These heavy meals are often
51 served with prohibited alcoholic drinks. Lively discussions and stories help to revitalize the
52 group by sharing collective memories. These events are of great symbolic importance, as
53 evidenced by the many jokes told to the fieldworker or the simple fact that formal interviews
54 were often disturbed for "*food imperatives*" as illustrated by the following field notes:
55
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57
58
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1
2
3 Right after I was introduced to Ludovic, he told me: "*If you're looking for a job here, can you*
4 *even bake cakes?*"

5
6 At the 97th minute of my interview with Serge, Jimmy knocks on the door of the room. Without
7 waiting for our answer, he passes his head by the door, letting a strong smell of fried food into
8 the room. He literally shouts at us: "*Well, fuckers, when you're done making babies, maybe we*
9 *can fucking eat!*" I cut the interview short and head to the refectory. The whole team was waiting
10 for us: it's time to eat.

11
12 Through these transgressive behaviors, shift-workers "*make themselves at home*" by
13 reproducing their out-of-work sociabilities. Such practices indeed are directed at remaining in
14 control of their working place and time, as the following fieldnotes illustrate:

15
16
17 10.pm. Start of the shift, everyone is in blue overalls. We gather around the control screen table
18 and talk, waiting for Lucas, who is late. He finally arrives at 10.30pm: everyone claps when he
19 enters the room. Lucas doesn't go directly to change his clothes: he joins us at the table, and
20 everyone chats a little. It was only after 40 minutes that he debriefed with Maxime to officially
21 replace him.
22

23
24 These territories are also suited to other socializing collective activities, such as football games
25 in the sheds or movie parties behind the control room screens. The absence of managers affords
26 the place an aspect of uncontrollable playground:
27

28
29 Thibaud goes to the switchboard. Two minutes later, loud popular music blares
30 everywhere, through all the intercoms. [...] Jimmy takes the wheel of the truck and
31 drives toward the lobby. He messes around with it, driving in jerking motions and
32 honking the horn regularly to piss everyone off (it is quite loud). He triggers the sirens,
33 laughing behind the wheel. (fieldnotes)
34

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36 In their appropriation of working spaces, shift-workers highly value traditional shop floor
37 humor, based on swearing and pranks as well as physical strength, frankness, and slang
38 (Collinson, 1988). They develop a strong feeling of social recognition by collectively
39 reproducing numerous transgressive practices traditionally associated with the masculine
40 working-class culture, starting with raw self-affirmative language and relaxed postures, which
41 strongly contrast with corporate behaviors:
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46 Loic leaves the room but comes back 5 minutes later to insult the guys: someone messed
47 up his radio to piss him off. He leaves again yelling "*fuck you suckers*" across the room,
48 while everyone's laughing. Talking about radio, Gaetan pursues by saying that he
49 prefers to fix it between his pants and his butt, so that he can better "*scratch his big*
50 *balls*". Loic turns to me and says: "*See, welcome to the poets house!*" (fieldnotes)
51

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53 Also revealing are the numerous "dirty" pranks that workers play on each other: putting plastic
54 film on the toilet bowl, replacing toilet paper with sandpaper, and putting dead fish in the work
55 shoes of victims on their days off, for example. These pranks, in sharp contrast with the policed
56 language and attitudes expected by the management, also appear collectively as a distorted
57 reflection of the inter-individual competition advocated by the managerial evaluation. Indeed,
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3 while workers are expected to compete based on performance, the pranks that workers play
4 appear as a reverse process of these professional rivalries. When asked by the fieldworker about
5 the level of competition among shift-workers, Kevin's response was typical: "*Of course I*
6 *compete with the others, but mostly in bullshit.*" These practical jokes play an important role in
7
8 tightening the social ties within shift teams:
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12 We take coffee and laugh from 2.15am to 3.40am. I note that on several occasions Ruben, on
13 my right, repeats "*I fucking knew I was gonna have a good time tonight! Guys, I knew I was*
14 *going to have fun tonight.*" (fieldnotes)
15

16 This appropriation of working spaces leads to systemic patterns of practical solidarity,
17 contradicting the principles of competition between workers. For example, it is common to send
18 the "pools" (the workers who are only here to support the activity) back home when managers
19 are not around:
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24 Thibaud enters the refectory with a pink sheet of paper [...]. It is a "release form," releasing him
25 from duty. Thibaud then leaves the plant to go back home, and 45 minutes later calls Loic to tell
26 him he got home safe. Loic then tears up the paper form. When I asked Loic why he threw this
27 paper away, he responded: "*so he'll get paid for the eight hours anyway, as if he stayed on post.*"
28 (fieldnotes)
29

30 Similarly, managerial devices resulting from the post-merger configuration are subjected to
31 transgressive reappropriation. This is particularly salient with the observation of radio use by
32 shift workers according to the time of their shift. Radios are used by shift workers in the plant
33 as a crucial tool to coordinate their teamwork. During business hours, the management also use
34 the radios to track workers' progress and evaluate their dedication at work. Because shift
35 workers never know when they are listened to, they tend to use the tool according to managerial
36 expectations:
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43 "*People try too hard to put themselves in the spotlight. [...] With radio talks you can see that,*
44 *because all the time you have to show that you are here. You end up talking about everything*
45 *you do. It's ME I go, ME I do, ME I set up this. ME ME ME.*" (Pierrick)
46

47 But radio has another use and meaning once shift-workers are on their own:
48

49 Fieldworker: Radio discussions are always the same? During night you talk...
50 P: *It's totally different. There's no radio commentaries, or rather... it's just like jokes, insults,*
51 *y'know. Oh yes, if there is REALLY something going on, but... no, it's really different [...] At*
52 *night it will more be like, "Where are you, fucker?" Or, "Is the pizza ready yet?". Whereas*
53 *during day times, it's not like that at all. It's over-faking work, like ME I go to the pipeline, ME*
54 *I go to the lab, ...".* (Pierrick)
55

56 The boundaries drawn around their working spaces are also fueled by the strong sense of
57 antagonism they experience vis-à-vis "day folks", who don't share the same social
58 characteristics or struggles. Shift workers indeed do not understand the so-called "docility" of
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3 these administrative employees, sometimes also scornfully called “yes sir” people (i.e., workers
4 who cannot say “no” to their manager). Connected with a strong local working-class culture,
5 their “shift-spirit” therefore contributes to the internalization of a dissident pattern. This is
6 salient through shift-workers’ pride in displaying raw behaviors and language contrasting with
7 the “politeness” of “day-folks”:
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12 Saïd proudly describes being part of a group that has a “strong character”: “*We are lions.*” [...].
13 He describes a shift worker’s temperament as being “blunt” ... *the one who has his tongue in*
14 *his pocket, he gets eaten.*” However, he insists: “*Once you have shown that you fit in, it's pretty*
15 *tight... It's raw, but you won't see anything fishy here.*” (fieldnotes)
16

17 These subversive sociabilities lead to a strong rejection of the docile behaviors allegedly
18 displayed by “day folks”:
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20
21 “*I would never want to work among day folks. Never. We haven't the same DNA. They're*
22 *all panicking in front of their superiors. Us, we don't give a fuck.*” (Saïd)
23

24 This working-class sociability and pride also maintains strong boundaries and overtly
25 insubordinate behaviors by shift-workers toward management. Indeed, despite the post-merger
26 configuration, shift-workers do not lose their “pride to fight” (Saïd) the hierarchy. On the
27 contrary, such pride is an integral part of the collective values shared by shift workers, according
28 to whom the symbolical traditional distinction between “them” and “us” remains a fundamental
29 social geography of factory life. This *ethos of resistance* (Courpasson & Marti, 2019) is
30 particularly manifested through their speeches and behaviors towards managers. Many brag
31 about some “fights” they had with the management, and even greet each other with anecdotes
32 of their defiant attitudes towards managers:
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40 I enter the shed, where Loic is talking to Denis [shift-worker in another unit]. Patrick comes in
41 and without saying “hi”, immediately greets Denis with: “*Ah bah! I pissed off your boss the last*
42 *day!*” to which Denis immediately replies: “*Ah bah you did well, you should've sprayed that*
43 *prick!*” (fieldnotes)
44

45 We noted recurrent similar everyday narratives about conflicts with the hierarchy, which are
46 highly expected among shift-workers and form an integral part of their practices of
47 belongingness. This defying and provocative attitude towards the hierarchy) is enacted *in situ*
48 and often in the very presence of managers, as regularly observed during fieldwork:
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52 Escorted by Thierry, with whom I have an appointment for an interview, I pass by the control
53 room where the current PCI team is working. I stop for a minute to greet them, and join Thierry
54 who was waiting for me on the doorstep of the room. Just before we left, one of guys said, loud
55 enough to be heard, “*the bastard of a boss*”. I noticed by his face that Thierry has heard it too,
56 but didn’t react. (fieldnotes)
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3 The management has tried to break this dynamic by implementing numerous inter-unit job
4 transfers, thought to break these “territories” through the introduction of “*new kids on the*
5 *block*”:
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9 *"A shift, it's a family... they always work together, they spend nights and weekends together.*
10 *[...] How do you break that? Well, you break it by mixing them, by bringing in people from all*
11 *over the place. [...] When I came here, the message was clear. I was told: 'Thierry, you have to*
12 *mix the teams, it's going to be good.'"* (Thierry, PCI manager)
13

14 The intermixing of teams was expected to deconstruct shift-worker collectives and dynamics,
15 by preventing too much familiarity between them. However, these measures did not work:
16 interviewees attribute the resilience of their “*shift spirit*” to the constant interplays between
17 space and time and home and work, which inevitably solidify the teams:
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21 *"When I arrived here, I was welcomed with whisky! [laughs] Once the bosses have left, we talk*
22 *a lot, we stay two hours drinking coffee or else [finger pointing toward a cupboard, where bottles*
23 *of alcohol are stocked]. Dart games, beers, football in the shed... and parties at each other's*
24 *homes. There's a work atmosphere here, actually I don't know if it exists elsewhere. We turn out*
25 *more like friends than colleagues. It necessarily ends up going beyond work."* (Kevin)
26
27

28 As a result, such everyday encounters by workers bear concrete political effects that,
29 accumulated over time, shape a representation of their resistance as influential, even if not
30 accepted as legitimate by management. This partially explains why managers themselves
31 present shift workers as a population traditionally “*very hard to manage*”:
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35 *"Shift-workers are a nuisance. You cannot manage shift-workers like day folks. It's really hard*
36 *to manage shift-workers."* (Jean, former PCI manager)
37

38 After I asked, Marie [head of social relations] printed and showed me her job description after
39 the interview. I looked at it on my way back and was surprised to read, written at the beginning
40 of an official job description: “*The head of HR carries out his/her duties in a conflicting and*
41 *rarely constructive social context within the establishment.*” (fieldnotes)
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43 The plant director himself confessed in his interview that when shift workers threaten to stop
44 the machines, “[*management*] *has to negotiate*”:
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48 *"With only 10 guys, you can rip the plant apart. [...] If they don't want to work and you can't*
49 *replace them, you're fucked, you have to talk, you have to negotiate with them. [...] If tomorrow*
50 *my managers start a strike and ask me for a raise, I'd say no. But if the guys in the units tell me*
51 *we want a raise or we give you shit, I will not necessarily say yes, but at least we'll talk."*
52 (Stephane, director)
53

54 This illustrates the extent to which shift-workers’ subversive practices become part of the very
55 functioning of the organization. As unambiguously expressed by Saïd when asked about their
56 ordinary insubordination: “*Why and how I don't know, but truth is it doesn't change [laughs].*
57 *We're known for that!*”
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3 Our data thus highlight the professional, social and geographical conditions that enable a group
4 of working-class workers to perpetuate a high sense of belongingness and, eventually, to keep
5 their dissident pattern active in a hostile context of neoliberal restructuring. Their collective
6 insubordination is comprised of instances and places where resisters overtly display their
7 power, creating enduring patterns of resistance that management is forced to include in its own
8 politics.
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13 14 15 **Discussion**

16
17 This paper demonstrates that workers' collective resistance can remain a constitutive response
18 to neoliberal contexts of domination. The collective production of enduring resisting patterns
19 indeed appears as abnormal in such contexts, where expected norms rather sustain subjugation
20 to competitive social relations. Empirically, we illuminate how practices of belongingness and
21 collective insubordination are closely intertwined, thereby allowing resistance in the factory to
22 endure. Workers indeed demonstrate their belongingness through their very insubordination.
23 Reciprocally, this insubordination becomes expected by workers themselves. It marks most of
24 their interactions, at work and home alike, and is therefore experienced as a way of reconciling
25 the two realms. Everyday life in this group of workers is fundamentally characterized by
26 subversion and defiance toward management. This analysis confirms the power of interactions
27 within a close-knit group (Sutherland, 1949) that can be analyzed as a "social cocoon" (Greil
28 & Rudy, 1984) serving as a bulwark against the pressures of neoliberal management. Put
29 differently, the resistance of the group of workers is partly based on social modalities that are
30 motivated to construct and maintain a sense of the vivid necessity of insubordinate behaviors.
31 Insubordination becomes 'regular,' although not mundane. This in turn fosters normative
32 control within the group by generating a set of unique relationships among the individuals,
33 based on the vehemence of their opposition to management as well as their systematic
34 participation in meaningful subversive social practices (Shortt, 2015).
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49 Another empirical contribution of this study is to show that the practices of belongingness
50 developed by workers are politically effective because they rest upon *territorial* norms of
51 conduct, based on certain shared representations of what a 'true' shift worker ought to be.
52 Belongingness is therefore strongly related to place-making (Cresswell, 2004). The active
53 socio-spatial production of insubordination is generated by the construction of an exclusive
54 view and practice of both geographical and social boundaries around the group of resisters. This
55 suggests that insubordination is not a fixed, temporary or static individual gesture, but a
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3 relational process emerging from place-based interactions – i.e., relations that are purposefully
4 chosen to matter when and where a concrete encounter with the ‘adversary’ is happening.
5 Resisters’ insubordination is thus undergirded by both the geographical constitution of their
6 “fun” places and the symbolic representation of these places as special places that only carefully
7 chosen individuals may access. In these places, resistance is seen as almost natural, inherent to
8 the expected behavior of the people inhabiting them.
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14 Third, our data suggest that managers perceive the enduring force of workers’ collective
15 resistance as influencing the political relations of the factory. Our data show that this political
16 significance is shaped in unpredictable but locally meaningful configurations: resistance is
17 significant because it is how the PCI workers see their life, embracing issues of both factory
18 politics and outside life in the same movement. This suggests a complex interplay between life
19 inside and outside the factory, in which the usual categorical binary structures of resistance are
20 negated. Resistance of the PCI workers represents rebellion against the neoliberal odds as a
21 permanent feature of social life: Elyachar (2014) calls resistance “the stuff of everyday life.”
22 Put differently, resistance is a way of life that is supported by social conditions involving co-
23 workers who all defend the mutually constituted experience of belongingness and
24 insubordination. This collective resistance is so deeply entrenched that it is preferable for
25 management to include it in the organizational power relations, rather than overtly resisting it.
26 The expression of identification with the shift-work group is thus ultimately reflected in the
27 factory politics (as seen in the job definition of the HR head), which could also be interpreted
28 as a form of neutralization of its potential destructive effects on the organization.
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The endurance of resistance that we descriptively analyze through the entwinement of
belongingness and insubordination has theoretical implications. We specifically propose a way
to rethink the political significance of everyday resistance through the lens of resistance as a
way of life, to contribute to a more fruitful dialogue between recognition and post-recognition
politics (Fleming, 2016).

Resistance as a way of life.

The paper shows that the entwinement of belongingness and insubordination allows everyday
resistance to galvanize agency in lively acts of resistance, involving humor, objects, places and
gestures that are the very reflections of a collective life, and that in turn help to perpetuate the
social and affective boundaries of the group. In other words, *protesting* neoliberal rules is tightly
interrelated with *protecting* the life of the group. The practice of resistance draws upon specific

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3 organizational capabilities, but mostly on experiences and emotions, produced by the life they
4 live together at work and at home. Our data show that for workers, taking control of their
5 everyday activities is a way to create a culture of resistance (Gaventa, 1980; O’Hearn, 2009, p.
6 497) that is strongly connected with their owned environment. In that view, it is impossible to
7 separate the factory from the home to think resistance. The very process of insubordination and
8 the achievement of small victories is empowering, providing encouragement for the group to
9 draw further on its collective life to neutralize subordinate relations and replace them with more
10 humanizing relations among themselves: the personal becomes “*inextricably linked to the*
11 *collective*” (Voglis, 2002, p. 533). This means that resisters act in concert with each other,
12 reinforcing the intersubjective effects of their actions with respect to each other and the
13 managerial authorities. Insubordination is an expression of how workers want to live their life,
14 both within and outside of the factory walls. Workers’ way of life is incompatible with
15 managerial neoliberal measures. Therefore, the group of workers is the very instantiation of
16 resistance itself, because it unites home and work in the same effort to overcome neoliberal
17 forces. This resistance is even more powerful, we argue, because it blurs the usual boundaries
18 between the [political] public sphere and the [a-political] private sphere (Ludtke, 1985). This
19 permits a different view of everyday resistance than a mundane exercise aiming to defy
20 authority or express spontaneous revolt because it rests upon the power of the symbols of life
21 underlying each act of insubordination: taking long meal breaks, using the shop floor as a
22 playground, or overtly mocking managers. By playing on these fundamental symbols of life,
23 resistance achieves the double effect of protecting inter-individual social relations *and*
24 upholding relations of authority within the factory.

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27 Thus, our study shows a political collective defiance that surpasses the current focus of research
28 on “[a-political] individual defiance” (Poutain & Robins, 2000, quoted in Mumby, 2016, p.
29 895) because it is experienced as a *way of life*. Seeing resistance that way, we argue, helps to
30 reposition the analysis of resistance *within* social life, rather than as an exotic abnormal activity
31 (Theodossopoulos, 2014). In order to account for the effectiveness of resistance, we need to
32 recontextualize resisting processes in the here and now of social life. Beyond isolating
33 resistance in hidden transcripts of subaltern consciousness (Scott, 1990; Theodossopoulos,
34 2014), scholars should focus on the local meaningfulness of resistance in intimate contexts of
35 social life (Hertzfeld, 1997) where resisting patterns are generated. Indeed, failure of
36 organizational research to account for collective resistance as credible way to oppose oppressive
37 powers may come from the valorization of a figure of the modern individual as passive (Elliott,
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3 2011, p. 260) or as looking outside of the factory walls to envisage her agency (Fleming, 2016).
4 Collective resistance as way of life, meaning as an enduring social praxis, sustained by
5 neighborhood and friendship ties, is therefore largely liquidated by this view.
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8 9 Reconciling recognition and post-recognition politics.

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11 These aspects bring us back to the possible dialogue between recognition and post-recognition
12 views of organizational politics (Courpasson, 2016; Fleming, 2016). Post-recognition views
13 focus on what is left when resistance is emptied from its material and situated substance.
14 Resistance shifts from struggles over the capacity of workers to determine their concrete
15 conditions of work, to the indeterminacy of meaning, affect and value in the organization and
16 beyond (Mumby, 2020; Skeggs, 2014), in short, to the everyday construction of self. The
17 consequence of this move is the relocation of the point of production to individuals, suppressing
18 the ‘shopfloor’ as the central place of resistance, because the “*self’s measure of effectiveness*
19 *thus lies within the self*” (Mumby, 2020, p. 8). In this perspective, collective resistance resting
20 upon the reproduction of communal relations among workers is hardly credible. What
21 concentrates individuals’ energy is the achievement of the self (Collinson, 2003), always
22 subjected to internal self-constraints that are individualistic obsessive achievements (Han
23 2017). In this post-recognition view of politics, collective socialities and their mutual
24 constitution with factory-based forms of resistance are rejected at the margins: the result is that
25 this version of politics run the risk of considering opposition as nothing more than the “*muttered*
26 *defiance behind the back of the dominants*” (Gledhill, 2012, p. 6), hardly politically articulated.
27 . In contrast, our study aims to put the interplay between situated resistance and local socialities
28 at the center of the analysis of organizational politics.
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43 We consequently engage a dialogue between post-recognition and recognition politics, rather
44 than separate them. We show that when resistance is experienced as firmly placed *within* life,
45 it permits workers’ emancipation from neoliberalism achieved within factory walls, which is
46 also an emancipation “*for [its] own sake*” (Fleming, 2016, p. 108). In a sense, seeing resistance
47 as a way of life entails both the complete achievement of ‘traditional’ recognition politics, and
48 the production of a peculiar autonomous relation to work in a neoliberal context that is sustained
49 by outside-of-work sociability. The combination of both ‘modes’ of politics enables collective
50 resistance to be incorporated as an integral element of corporate policies, not as a resource to
51 introduce effective change for the organization (Ford, Ford & d’Amélio, 2008), but as an
52 emancipatory project *within* the neoliberal machine.
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3 In our study, workers regard their insubordination not as mere resistance to management, but
4 rather as integral to their life, blurring the usual lines separating the factory walls from the
5 outside world. Workers are not insubordinate only for reasons related to work itself. The
6 accumulation of everyday subversive practices reinforces the complicity among them, thus
7 strengthening their sense of community and empowerment. Not only do workers challenge and
8 defy managers “*to show their muscles,*” but the mutual constitution of insubordination and
9 belongingness substantially shapes how they see their collective life within *and* outside of the
10 factory. As a result, their constant practice of resistance is not a disguised or hidden effort with
11 no explicit political purpose: it is indeed made visible and recognizable by the very existence
12 of strong, long lasting boundaries around the group that workers spend time to erect and sustain.
13 Everyday resistance is therefore both a kind of ‘life style’ within the boundaries of a social
14 cocoon, *and* a collective endeavor that is made politically visible and active, and subsequently
15 handled by managers as such.

16
17 This combinatory view of resistance also complements the infra-political perspective (Marche,
18 2012; Scott, 1990, 2012): infra-politics suggest acts that unobtrusively sneak into the public
19 scene without being entirely identified as such. Their action is “*always pressing, testing,*
20 *probing the boundaries of the permissible*” (Scott 1990, p. 200). But infra-politics are by
21 definition “*beneath the threshold of the ‘political’*” (Marche, 2012, p. 5). This paper spotlights
22 workers who have managed to ensure a regular and accepted access to recognized political
23 channels in the organization, therefore exerting resistance from within these very channels,
24 through their quotidian insubordination and the ‘expulsion’ of management from their
25 appropriated places. This direct contribution to the organizational political life is close to what
26 a Scottian terminology would call a “workers’ public transcript” operating “in the face” of
27 management, rather than only “infiltrating” the public managerial transcript founded on
28 neoliberal measures. The practices of belongingness and insubordination serving as concrete
29 supports of this transcript are not constrained by management, not because they aren’t noticed
30 but precisely because they are, thereby becoming integrated into the usual political relations at
31 the factory.

32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 **Conclusion**

56
57 In this paper, we have illustrated the power of a collective resistance sustained by the mutual
58 constitution of belongingness and insubordination. We have shown that resistance is impactful
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3 because it is inscribed within the very texture of workers' social life. This helps to continue
4 bringing together resistance and its actual socio-geographical context, instead of rejecting
5 resistance as a matter out of place and time. This engaged version of resistance illustrates its
6 purposefulness as a way of life, through the constant intricacies between shop floor struggles
7 and life itself.
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12 We should neither romanticize nor downplay the resistance studied in this paper. For our
13 informants, resistance is part of the best times of their life, but signs of the inescapable force of
14 neoliberalism remain everywhere. The peculiarities of the investigated terrain should prevent
15 us from any attempt to generalize our findings. It remains that further research should focus
16 more on how such strong and undoubtedly rare intersubjective relations between resistance and
17 life may conclude, and what's next for the workers after their struggle has possibly ended. The
18 future of such politics will largely decide whether neoliberalism is decidedly the unique
19 ingredient of social lives at work, or whether collective patterns of resistance and solidarity are
20 likely to survive.
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31 **Acknowledgments**

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34 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers as well as senior editor Peter Fleming for
35 their careful reading, and constructive comments in the process of developing this manuscript.
36
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39 **Funding**

40
41
42 The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of
43 this article
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47 48 49 50 51 **Author biographies**

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54 David Sanson is assistant professor in management at the University of Québec in Montréal,
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Appendix

Figure 1.

