Resisting the power of organizations in *Modern Times* :

May we all be Charlot?

Résister au pouvoir des organisations dans les Temps Modernes : Peut-on tous être *Charlot* ?

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Abstract:
A large body of literature has emphasised the importance of every day forms of resistance in the workplace. In this paper, we seek to overcome the criticism of localism and banality that has been directed towards the everyday view of individualistic resistance as well as the limits of the conception of creative resistance that aims to co-produce change within a given system of power. To do this, we highlight and discuss the ideas concerning resistance generated by the film *Modern Times*, and more particularly by the tramp's character. We focus on a local, highly individual, spontaneous and not formally organized kind of resistance, but one that builds on dissensus and reconfigures the order of a situation radically. Relying upon Rancière's philosophy, we develop a conception of resistance that takes the form of *affirmation* rather the mere reaction to a system of domination. This allows us to underscore the power of the 'aesthetic regime' in understanding individual resistance as part of a universal claim for equality.
Key words: Aesthetic regime, Affirmation, Modern Times, Power, Rancière, Resistance

Résumé :
Une abondante littérature a souligné l'existence de nombreuses expressions de résistances quotidiennes au sein des organisations. Ces formes de résistances ont cependant été critiquées pour leur incapacité à remettre en cause les systèmes de pouvoir au sein desquelles elles s'expriment. Dans cet article, nous cherchons à surmonter ces critiques de localisme et de banalité au travers d'un dispositif analytique mobilisant le film *Les Temps modernes*, et plus particulièrement le personnage de *Charlot*. En nous éloignant des interprétations classiques du film comme dénonciation du taylorisme, nous proposons d'envisager le personnage de *Charlot* comme une figure originale de résistance organisationnelle en mesure de reconfigurer radicalement l'ordre établi. En nous appuyant sur la philosophie de Jacques Rancière, nous développons une conception de la résistance qui prend la forme d'une affirmation plutôt que la réaction à un système de domination. Cela nous conduit à souligner la puissance du «régime esthétique» et à envisager la dimension universelle de la résistance individuelle comme une revendication à l'égalité.
Key words: Affirmation, Temps Modernes, Rancière, Régime esthétique, Résistance.

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INTRODUCTION

Twirling around in the toy section, gliding on one foot through the bedding aisle, or pirouetting in the basement bar, the department store's new night watchman surprises and enchants us. What exactly is he doing, or rather 'not doing'? Is he working or playing? Perhaps he is doing both at the same time, or neither. Taken on as a watchman thanks to a letter from the sheriff, the most famous tramp in the world is not, in the department store, where he is supposed to be, anymore than in the factory or the restaurant, where Charlie Chaplin has him conduct his 'funny kind of resistance' to organized work. This article originated with the idea that *Modern Times* is not so much a denunciation of Taylorism, as it is often understood, and instead a unique meditation on the resistance to the norms of work, advanced by an enigmatic poet whose instinctive liberty is never hampered by misery or oppression. We argue that *Modern Times* allows us to think about a form of resistance that has thus far been avoided in the literature — one that is local, individual, and not formally organized, but that radically reconfigures the order of a situation.

A large body of literature in organization studies has emphasised the importance of everyday forms of resistance (*e.g.,* Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) compared to forms of collective resistance that aim at transforming a society. This more limited and individual approach to resistance can be divided into two main lines of research. The first one emphasizes ordinary, informal or spontaneous activities (Collinson, 2000 ; Prasad & Prasad, 2000 ; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007) whereby people subvert managerial control in the workplace via discursive tactics (Mumby, 2005) or concrete practices (*e.g.,* Baster & Kroll-Smith, 2005). This conception has provided important insights into the way resistance is understood. However, it has been criticized for being too trivial, unambitious or even 'decaf' (Contu, 2008), because this kind of resistance would not undermine a situation radically and would be devoid of emancipatory purposes. A second line of research focuses on the creative (Thomas & Davies, 2005) or productive nature of resistance (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012) so as to overcome a pessimistic conception that would not value the transformative dimension of resistance and its concrete organizational effects via the co-production of change. The focus on these forms of resistance has provided stimulating contributions, as it goes beyond an

adversarial perspective that sees resistance as a fixed opposition between irreconcilable goals. Yet, while this conception of resistance values cooperation and the search for consensus rather than struggle and dissent, it has been argued that this resistance can be embraced by management and recuperated by the capitalist system (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

In this paper, we seek to overcome the criticism of banality that has been directed towards the everyday view of individualistic resistance as well as the limits of the conception of productive resistance that aim to co-construct agreement and remove dissent. While Rhodes (2009) has already emphasized a kind of individualistic, disorganized, extreme and overt form of resistance that rejects all the dimensions of the capitalist system, we highlight a conception of resistance that takes the form of a positive stance, that is to say, an *affirmation* in the sense given by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. This kind of resistance, although local, individual and not formalized, consists in asserting equality in every place. It is built on dissensus and reconfigures the order of a situation radically.

To develop our argument further, we rely on the film *Modern Times* and analyse the tramp's activities and experiences that resist the laws of work. Taking the power of fiction as given (Panayiotou & Kafiris, 2011: 265), we highlight and discuss the ideas concerning resistance generated by *Modern Times*. Following Rhodes and Westwood (2008: 51), our purpose is to "forge productive connections between theory and culture" to develop an innovative way of understanding the concept of resistance in the workplace.

Built on Rancière's philosophy, the perspective we suggest has implications for the way we conceptualize resistance. First, it adds to the literature by overcoming the limit of localism, self-defeatism and banality present in certain visions of resistance. It also goes beyond the idea of creative resistance that seeks to co-produce change within a given system of power. Second, we develop a conception of resistance that builds on dissensus, but takes the form of 'affirmation,' rather than the mere reaction to a system of domination. Third, we highlight the power of the 'aesthetic regime' (Rancière, 2011, 2014) in understanding resistance as part of a universal—and not localized—claim for equality.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first provide an overview of the literature on individual and everyday forms of resistance and explain the perspective chosen in this paper. Second, we introduce the method based on the analysis of *Modern Times*. Third,

we expose our main findings and discuss their implications for the conception of resistance in the workplace.

RESISTANCE IN THE WORKPLACE AND ITS VARIANTS

Resistance at work is often defined as 'anything you consciously are, do and think at work that you are not supposed to be, do and think and which is directed upwards through the organizational hierarchy' (Karlsson, 2012: 185). As the workplace is seen as a contested terrain (Mumby, 2005), a body of literature in critical management studies tends to highlight the prevalence of everyday forms of resistance (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999 ; Fleming & Spicer, 2007) compared to macro-modes of resistance that aim at radically transforming not only the workplace, but also society and its entire socio-symbolic structure (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992: 435–438). In order to overcome the limits of a too 'grandiose' conception of resistance that would not take into account the contradictions, paradoxes and tensions that typically characterize any set of power relations (Spicer *et al.,* 2009), some scholars have indeed thought to develop a more limited and often individual approach on resistance. Two main streams of research seem then to have emerged. The first one focuses on pedestrian activities whereby people momentarily find 'loopholes' in managerial control that provide local emancipation. A second line of research insists on the transformative, creative (Thomas & Davies, 2005) or even productive dimension of resistance (Courpasson *et al.,* 2012) that makes it possible to modify temporarily a situation's power configuration. The analysis of these forms of resistance has provided important progress in how we understand this phenomenon in organizations. However, in what follows, we argue that these two forms of resistance either remain local or consider power as a means of achieving something in a search for a practical agreement, without reconfiguring the order of things radically.

Firstly, a large body of literature on resistance turns its focus towards minor forms of resistance whereby people temporarily escape from domination in their everyday work-life through spontaneous and ordinary activities (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). This shift in interest from organized and collective resistance towards an interest in individual and informal resistance is defined as 'everyday resistance' or 'infra-politics' (Johanson & Vinthagen, 2014: 8 ; Scott, 1985). This refers to ordinary weapons and acts that are 'everyday' because of their commonplace or ordinary nature (Hollander & Einwohner,

2004) as in Collinson (2000) or Prasad and Prasad (2000). The major assumption here is that 'control can never be absolute […] and [that] employees will constantly find ways of evading and subverting managerial organization and direction at work' (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999: 47). In this vein, many forms of micro-resistance, often heterogeneous and contingent (Johanson & Vinthagen, 2014) have been described. For example, scholars have studied discursive tactics (Mumby, 2005: 32) 'including irony (Fleming & Sewell, 2002 ; Trethewey, 1999), cynicism (Fleming & Spicer, 2003 ; Fleming, 2005), humour and joking (Collinson, 2002 ; Fleming & Spicer, 2002 ; Korczynski, 2011a ; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995), bitching and gossip (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999), mimicry (Prasad & Prasad, 2003), parody (Graham, 1993), cultural micro-practices (Bell & Forbes, 1994 ; Korczinski, 2011b) or discursive distancing (Collinson, 1994).' Everyday forms of resistance that take place at the 'interstitial spaces of organizational life' (Mumby, 2005: 35) also include concrete practices such as promoting the active appropriation of time (Baster & Kroll-Smith, 2005 ; Paulsen, 2013) or engaging in private activities in the workplace such as sexuality, sleeping and day-dreaming. These forms of tactics are supposed to have resistive meanings and contribute to autonomous shop-floor cultures, which inform acts of informal collective resistance (Korczinski, 2011b). Overall, they refer to subtle subversions (Prasad & Prasad, 2003) and ambiguous accommodations in which social actors undertake a local process of emancipation.

However, some important limits regarding this form of resistance have been underscored (Huault, Perret, & Spicer, 2014). One of the first limits refers to the issue of banality. In this vein, acts of resistance are considered as trivial and insignificant. In addition, the focus on everyday resistance would have shifted the attention of scholars from radical and important collective struggles towards temporary, informal and locally confined forms of resistance that have no real impact on people's life. This conception may even give rise to a latent conservatism. The second limit is formulated by Contu (2008: 367). She indicates that transgressions including parody, irony, satire, humour, scepticism or cynicism are inherent transgressions of the liberal capitalist relations in which they are observed. Rather than transgressing the system, they serve as a support of the rule of law. Rather than disrupting the order, they 'support the fantasy of ourselves as liberal, free and self-relating human beings to whom multiples choices are open and all can be accommodated' (Contu, 2008: 370). This everyday form of resistance would be the very vehicle of the ideology of the post-modern liberal capitalist society. It does not represent any threat to the order of things and never undermines the institution. Finally, the third limit as underlined by Huault and colleagues

(2014: 28), is that the focus on micro-resistance may lead to a fragmented understanding of the phenomenon. Struggles are viewed as separated and local, 'thereby losing sight of the more profound and far-reaching dynamics that actually underlie or indeed connect such struggles.' This can result in a myopic vision, whereby the examination of only minor struggles does not allow taking large-scale social struggles into account. In this perspective, resistance is 'emasculated' (Contu, 2008) and is not able to challenge the aims and goals of the organization in which it takes place. It is reduced to unambitious local activism devoid of emancipatory attributes.

In order to promote another and less pessimistic conception that would avoid using an adversarial perspective and insist instead on the productive capacity of resistance, another recent line of research has focused on the transformative dimension of resistance in the workplace. For example, creative resistance (Thomas & Davies, 2005) is supposed to generate subversion and the re-inscription of dominant discourses, and then, foster new identities. It places resistance and power in a dialogical relationship with the aim of developing experiential and practical actions to improve life in the workplace. Other scholars seek to understand how resistance can actually and truly influence workplace change and top management's decisions (Courpasson, *et al.,* 2012). In this vein, Courpasson and colleagues argue that productive resistance relies on the skilful work of 'resisters' and the creation of 'objects of resistance' that make it possible to modify temporarily a situation's power configuration. The challenge here is to shift from analysing resistance as a fixed opposition between irreconcilable adversaries, towards analysing the process by which resisters achieve their ends. Productive resistance insists on positive solutions for the organization and 'leads to a concentration on the processes through which concrete organizational effects of resistance are produced' (Courpasson, *et al*., 2012: 801). The focus on the micro-sociological processes of resistance aims at highlighting its added value for the whole organization. This is the perspective adopted by Carroll and Nicholson (2014: 2) who challenge the traditional reliance on power and resistance as oppositional in a binary logic. They look at how moments of resistance offer practical possibilities for grappling with the dynamics of learning. Rather than deviance, resistance is seen as something that fosters the co-production of change. Analysing how resistance operates in leadership development programmes, they 'examine the way resistance can be intentionally and productively created by facilitators and participants as a site of potential learning and leadership' (Carroll & Nicholson, 2014: 7).

All these research works have provided stimulating insights in the way resistance is conceptualized in the workplace. They particularly present resistance as made of concrete acts rather than considering it to be embedded in the conflicting structure of relationships. They underscore the importance of the work of 'resisting' (Courpasson, *et al*., 2012), with the underlying assumption that without the productive commitment to action, resistance is empty and circular.

However, what seems to prevail in this conception of resistance is the search for the co-construction of change or the co-production of a common future, which implies 'acting within a given system of power, offering solutions, assuming de facto managerial roles' while sometimes confronting top management (Courpasson, *et al*., 2012: 817). Therefore, the emphasis is more on the idea of cooperation, mutually beneficial relationships, and the reduction of internal tensions or accommodation rather than struggles and dissent. Although the configuration of power may be temporarily undermined, the ultimate goal seems to be to seek to build consensus, which presupposes finding common ground for recognizing the issues at stake. In this vein, resistance takes place within a given spatio-temporal structure and the real challenge is to arrive at an agreement between actors in order to erase discord. One can argue that this kind of resistance can be embraced by management and recuperated by the dominant paradigm. This latter could learn from innovations created by resisters or 'rebels' (Courpasson & Thoenig, 2010) which could then be re-incorporated into the capitalist system (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005), making the critical experience a 'dead-space' that lacks all radicalism. This process of valuing active collaboration and cooperation may also entail a form of institutionalisation of resistance that can result in a loss of critical experience.

In this paper, we seek both to move beyond the criticism of banality directed towards the everyday resistance view, and the limits of creative resistance which 'values small pockets resistance that make a difference to how people live their lives' (Thomas & Davies, 2005: 701) and which aims at co-constructing agreements through collective deliberation in the final search for consensus. To overcome these critics, Rhodes (2009) had already pointed out a form of highly individualistic and disorganized, yet extreme and overt form of resistance, which he defines as a resistance that not only works against the power structure of one organization but also rejects all aspects of capitalist work relations other than those necessary for survival. It appears, however, that this form of individual and radical resistance, by adopting a nihilistic path, goes *against* a dominant order.

We also emphasize a conception of local, individual, and not formally organized resistance that builds on dissensus, and that reconfigures the order of a situation radically. However, drawing upon the work of Jacques Rancière, we argue that this kind of resistance can take the form of a positive stance, or to say it another way, of an *affirmation*. This term emphasizes the importance of asserting the power of equality in every place, without reducing it to the mere reaction towards a system of domination. This conception allows for registering some kinds of spontaneous and individual experiences, which are expressed in reference to themselves, without directly confronting or explicitly accusing the dominant order, but which nonetheless make a claim for universality. They are located within what Jacques Rancière called the aesthetic regime.

RESEARCH APPROACH

In the wake of the linguistic turn in organization science (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), the idea according to which social reality is constructed through multiple narratives (speech, texts, works) spread throughout organizational studies (Czarniawska, 1998, 1999). This interest in *narrative* form was accompanied by a particular focus on the concept of *fiction*. On the one hand, the fictional aspect of scientific writing, and more generally, the issue concerning the blurring of the modern boundary between fiction and research, has provoked interesting epistemological reflections (see, for example, Becker, 2007 ; Phillips, 1995 ; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). On the other hand, it became increasingly common to appeal to fictional works, no longer merely as pedagogical illustrations (*e.g.,* Bell, 2008) but also to aid in research and the construction of theory. By exploring organizational phenomena that were often extreme, strange, idiosyncratic or unattainable (rather than typical, habitual or 'average'), this fictional detour would thus offer an opportunity to 'think differently' in order to expand the limits of imagination in organizational research (Beyes, 2009 ; Hassard & Buchanan, 2009 ; Phillips & Zyglidopoulos, 1999).

What are these new colours that the expressive qualities of fiction caused to appear on the researcher's colour chart? First, narrative fiction enables gaining access to a sensible knowledge of organizations and markets, by engaging the emotions and sensations to speak of an intimate, affective and embodied experience of organizational life (Beyes, 2009 ; Hassard & Holliday, 1998 ; Hassard & Buchanan, 2009 ; Patient, Maitlis, & Lawrence, 2003 ; Philips, 1995 ; Rhodes & Westwood, 2008). Second, the appeal to works of narrative fiction is also a

way to look into the complexity of organizational situations. The art of narrative is indeed fed by elements that are ambiguous, paradoxical, subtle, invisible, strange, ephemeral, etc. They therefore represent a useful counterpoint to the logical and rational methods that tend to 'clean up' their texts of anything uncomfortable, ambiguous, or having a 'surplus' of nuances (Barone & Eisner, 2012 ; Phillips, 1995 ; Rhodes & Westwood, 2008 ; Watson, 2012). Finally, the distancing effect created by fictional representation enables putting dominant representations (fictions) 'into crisis' by questioning their legitimacy, authenticity or uniqueness (Barone & Eisner, 2012 ; Carr, 2007 ; Rhodes & Westwood, 2008).

Among the "fictional case studies" mobilized by organization researchers, novels hold the most sway (*e.g.,* Beyes, 2009 ; Phillips & Zyglidopoulos, 1999 ; Rhodes, 2009 ; Sliwa & Cairns, 2007), but films have also led to some remarkable texts (*e.g.,* Costas, 2009 ; Foreman & Tchatchenkerry, 1996 ; Hassard & Holliday, 1998 ; Panayiotou & Kafiris, 2011 ; Rhodes & Westwood, 2008 ; Spicer, 2001). The present paper is based on a 'great classic' of fictional films, *Modern Times*, written and directed by Charles Chaplin in 1936. It was the popular character of 'the tramp' that first dictated this choice. Appearing for the first time a century ago, in 1914, in the short film *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, the tramp has always been the opposite of anything sedentary, coercive, regulated, and rigid (Boyer, 2001). Constantly out of step with regards to the economic realities he encounters, generally indifferent to money, it is clear he is a stranger to the laws of work. This mythical character appeared for the last time in *Modern Times*. From the first few minutes of the film, the spectator familiar with Chaplin's films (that is, all of us, or almost all of us) understands that something is different: the tramp, wearing blue overalls, is on the assembly line! He then goes on to work in a shipyard, a department store, another factory and a restaurant. The film can thus be viewed as a consistent experience in which the tramp is plunged into various spaces dedicated to organized work. The ideas that emerge during this unique cinematographic experience are what this article will seek to explore and discuss.

The approach used in analysing the work consisted in several attentive viewings of the film, which gave rise to numerous debates among the three authors, which were then refined by the reading of secondary sources related to Chaplin and his work.[1] Little by little, the analysis of the narrative structure and the mise-en-scène of *Modern Times* revealed an atypical resistant figure and form of resistance (through the gesture of diversion, the work/play dialectic, the

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[1] Boyer (2001), Chaplin (1964), Magny & Simsolo (2003), Ramozzi-Moreau (2003), Le Blanc (2014).

absence of intentionality...), which are difficult to grasp using only the interpretative frameworks of collective or individual resistance. These challenges thus led us to alternative ways of interpretation, in particular, that of philosopher Jacques Rancière dedicated to the 'aesthetic regime' of art (Rancière, 2001, 2011, 2014), which we closely associate with *Modern Times*.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE

The film is composed of a series of sequences of varying lengths, more or less autonomous. The famous tramp takes on five jobs in succession: assembly-line worker in a factory, (very briefly) worker in a shipyard, night watchman in a department store, assistant mechanic in a factory, and waiter and then a singer in a cabaret restaurant.

After the famous credits 'on the clock,' followed by the no less famous metaphoric montage between a group of workmen exiting the subway and a herd of white sheep (in the middle of which a black sheep appears), the first sequence of the tramp's work begins—in the factory. What is it producing? It is never revealed, except perhaps that it is producing 'assembly line' workers. In the factory, two temporalities, two rhythms run alongside one another. The first is the chosen and languid rhythm of the boss, alone in his gigantic office, who is momentarily interrupted from reading the newspaper or doing the jigsaw puzzle only to roughly oversee the pace and the yield of the workers. The second is the imposed and impossible rhythm of the worker on the assembly line, underscored by the tempo of the music. Like the boss, whose face appears on immense screens and voice comes through the speakers, the worker is himself *instrumentalized*, a simple tool always *mechanically* repeating the same gesture. Chaplin's character is in fact a hybrid being, half-man half-machine, whose humanity is always questioned by reflex and 'mechanical' movements inscribed within his very flesh (tightening the bolts). The film pushes the idea of man being comparable to the machine to the extreme since the worker, after having been forced to eat the bolts by the 'Pillows eating machine,' is himself swallowed by the assembly line! Among the workers, only the tramp resists the pace, privileging leisure and free time as soon as he is able (smoking a cigarette, doing his nails, stretching...). Once he is 'spat out' by the assembly line that swallowed him, the dazed worker steps out of line, leaves his assigned place and happily begins to disrupt the factory-machine and to disorganize the scientific organization of work. In his delirium, the tramp diverts objects (file, nut, spanner, oil can...) and transforms the entire factory into a gigantic

playground. This reconfiguration of the productive space does not, however, bring about the participation of the other workers, with whom the tramp (the black sheep) shows no class solidarity. To stop them from catching him, our protagonist even uses the assembly line as a kind of paradoxical ally. By restarting it, he requires the other workers—who continue to be prisoners to their assigned position—to return to work and abandon the pursuit.

After this episode, the tramp is sent to the psychiatric hospital, before returning to the street, unemployed. Inadvertently picking up and brandishing a flag fallen from a truck, he then finds, in spite of himself, that he is at the front of a demonstration for 'liberty' and 'unity,' which leads him straight to prison. In the prison sequence, the character again shows no solidarity with the other prisoners, whom he stops from escaping. In the commotion, however, a trick is played on him, which leads to his escape! The tramp was very comfortable in prison. Compared to the factory, it is a dream: he is fed, housed, and can do nothing productive (he lounges, reads, plays cards with the warders...). Again, the tramp has diverted an institution, making the prison into a hotel residence. After he gets out, our protagonist is briefly employed in a shipyard where he reveals he is unsuitable for work (in his clumsiness, he causes the ship under construction to sink). It is at this point that he meets his alter ego: the "gamin", a miserable orphan, rebellious to the established order and propriety. After a few episodes and some hesitation, the tramp finally decides to pursue his adventures with her. Sitting on the side of the road, the tramp and the young girl are for a moment swept away in their imaginations by the sedentary life, the comfort of the middle class. The dream life the tramp describes to the gamin is, however, especially filled with abundant food (fruit, milk, steak). As for the rest, comfort is judged to be useless, superfluous, even cumbersome (in his dream, his feet become caught up in the rug, he throws the apple core on the floor and wipes his hands on the drapes).

Encouraged by the gamin, the tramp eventually finds a new job in a department store as a night watchman. The department store, a vertical temple of consumption, is the counterpart to the factory, a horizontal temple of production. It is at night, when everyone has left and he is sheltered from prying eyes, that he can devote himself to this world to which he does not belong. Again, the tramp transforms his work into play, the department store into a recreation area (traveling through it on roller skates) and Ali Baba's cave (the cake, the mink, the soft bed). Visiting the different floors like a museum of affluence, practising roller skating blindfolded, Chaplin's character diverts the store and it use from their purpose, just as he

previously diverted the factory and the prison. This nocturnal reconfiguration of the commercial space becomes a way to right wrongs (he allows his friend to enter) and to re-enchant the world. Driven by hunger, former workers, who have become burglars in spite of themselves, break into the store that night. Again, against his will—although aided by alcohol—the watchman, who was supposed to stop them, fraternizes with them in the middle of this illusion, this dream of luxury and play in an enchanted nocturnal digression.

After ten days in prison, he finds the girl again, who has begun to outfit an old shack, which recalls—and comically contrasts with—the house of paradise from the scene of the waking dream... A small job advertisement in the newspaper throws him back into the world of work. Tricking everyone, he returns to the factory, not on the assembly line as a victim of the impossible pace of the machine, but appointed to repair the same assembly line as an assistant to the mechanic. This scene repeats the first scene once again, and serves somewhat as its (more or less) inverted counterpart.[2] What has not changed is the tramp's propensity to divert everything comically (an oil can becomes a shovel, a chicken becomes a funnel, etc.) and his lack of solidarity with the other workers (the tramp seems quite vexed when the strike is announced). Again, he finds that in spite of himself he is leading the protest (the cobblestone inadvertently strikes the head of the police officer), and he returns to prison. During his stay behind bars, the girl finds work as a dancer in a cabaret restaurant. She pleads with the manager to give the tramp a chance. His first job is as waiter. Once more, the workplace becomes a playground, an imaginary space. With his feet caught in a dog's leash, he 'dances' with his tray; the workman's drill becomes a machine to 'manufacture' Gruyere cheese; the roast duck becomes a ball and the room a rugby pitch. Everything changes, however, when he becomes a singer in the same restaurant. Unable to comply with the rules and to learn the words of the song by heart, he is obliged to improvise. His delightful gibberish and comical choreography are a triumphant success. Clearly, it is in the realm of diversion, improvisation and the imagination that he finds himself, that is, in the poetic reconfiguration of work. Except that for the first time, the tramp is in the music hall, in a show, and here, improvisation and diversion are assets, not weaknesses. This artistic profession, where gesture is performed for itself (the words of the song are incomprehensible, anyway), is the first one that matches

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[2] The tramp is no longer prisoner of the assembly line, but instead he makes it suffer; he is no longer 'swallowed' (and then spat out) by the assembly line, but instead he gives it his tools to eat (which the machine violently spits out one after the other); he is no longer force-fed, but instead he gives his boss something to eat (in a scene that is still famous and serves as counterpart to the episode of the 'eating machine'). Finally, he is not excluded from the factory because of his deviant behavior, but the strike and the other workers cause him to be laid off.

his playful spirit that remains impervious to imposed regulations. It is also a job where the body is entirely free (dance). In the music hall, the tramp is finally at home. Even there, however, he will not be able to stay: the police come to arrest the girl, and in order to escape, they are both again on the move.

AN ATYPICAL RESISTANCE AND RESISTER

The Gesture of Diversion as a Form of Resistance

Created and developed in the era of silent film,[3] the character of the tramp is not a man of words[4] but a man of gestures. His resistance to organized work is thus first manifested in the body, in a series of non 'conformist,' offbeat, non-prescribed gestures and movements that are able to open up temporary spaces for freedom at the heart of organizations. The only time the tramp is unable to resist is when his body is completely enslaved by the Pillows eating machine. Unable to make the slightest movement, he is (temporarily) defeated. The remarkable gesture the tramp uses to resist (and that is always associated with this character in all the films in which he appears) is that of diversion, which he uses to break the connection between signifier and signified. By looking at things in an offbeat, playful or poetic way, the tramp thus diverts not only objects (file, oil can, levers, nut, spanners, roller skates, watch, chicken, drill, roast duck...) but also spaces (factory, prison, department store, restaurant...) from their primary function. Spanners for tightening become the horns of a bull, the watch a shovel, the prison a hotel, the room in the restaurant a sports pitch, etc. These diversions, which reconfigure things in unexpected ways, come about in creative improvisation, play, and even the imagination (the middle class house that is diverted to become a 'paradise' during the waking dream). Everything is equally stripped of its original purposes to become something related to play, creative inspiration, the poetic depiction of the world, and pure imagination. This gesture to divert objects and spaces disrupts rules (the bed on display in the department store becomes the golden bed for a night for the young girl in rags), prescribed movements (pirouettes in the factory) and of course purposes (the worker's file becomes a nail file, the restaurant a rugby pitch, etc.). Through these creative reconfigurations, the tramp allows himself the ultimate freedom to not passively follow the ordered movement of things, but to invent, on the spur of the moment, original gestures which

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[3] Even though when *Modern Times* came out in 1936, it had already been seven years since the cinema started 'talking'...

[4] The only intelligible words in *Modern Times* are those of authority: the words of the factory boss through the television screen, the recording to promote the merits of the Pillows eating machine, and a radio ad heard in prison.

change them to his liking. Among all the gestures of diversion, there is one in *Modern Times* that is especially remarkable within a context of organized work, that of dance. In the first sequence, the inspired choreography in the middle of the factory, which draws as much from the circus and pantomime as from ballet, contrasts with the regulated metre of the worker's movement: the freedom of the nimble, gracious and improvised gesture of the dancing body versus the repetitive and mechanical gesture of the body on the assembly line. The film suggests that in a moment, these simple gestures can completely destroy and disorganize what had been so well structured and organized. In the same way, in the department store, the fluid movement and pirouettes of the roller-skating tour transforms the monotonous work of the night watchman into an enchanted parenthesis of infinite grace.

Ramozzi-Doreau (2001) very correctly notes how, faced with the experience of work, the tramp's gestures of diversion consists in causing the *otium* to enter into the *negotium*. Yet, contrary to some film characters from the same era who glorify inactivity and stage the sought after leisurely idleness as an end unto itself (*e.g., You Can't Take It with You* in 1938, or *Halleluja, I'm a Bum* in 1933 ; Levinson, 2012), the tramp does not contrast leisure (*otium*) with its opposite (*neg-otium*). Taking on several jobs in succession, the tramp is not content with doing nothing. His gesture is more transgressive: he causes the *otium* to interpenetrate the *negotium*, blurring the boundaries between productive and non-productive, doing and not doing, active and passive. The tramp plays with the tools/spaces of work (for example, worker or waiter, he dances and plays rugby), stripping the productive gesture of its productivity, dismantling the regular narrative of work, that of a succession of gestures and causes that produce successive effects within a given time. In the opposite way, he turns play into work, using his imagination creatively and gestures of leisure to carry out certain tasks (he uses the roller skates to move about more quickly in the department store). Finally, the last sequence of the improvised song perfectly brings together the *otium* and the *negotium*.

An Atypical Resister

The tramp's resistance to the different organizations he frequents does not follow the traditional paths of organized struggle which the other workers systematically resort to (in the film). We would even suggest that the tramp's way of resisting is systematically contrasted with the collective and institutionalized practice of the other workers, whether it be protests, strikes, or even more underground and violent forms of resistance. Each time, it is without his knowledge or by a stroke of luck (the episode with the cobblestone) that the tramp finds

himself associated with the organized worker resistance. The tramp never associates himself with words related to the collective, and even though he brandishes a flag one time, it is only to return it to its owner.... In the department store, again in spite of himself, the tramp, drunk, 'fraternizes' with the burglars, who are unemployed former workers driven by hunger. It is the same in the prison sequence, where his way of resisting the prison condition comically contrasts with that of other prisoners looking to escape. Rather than pointing 'at' the sheriff, he prefers diverting the entire prison to become a hotel... from which in the end he is expelled, compelled and forced to leave.

In fact, what distinguishes the tramp from the other workers is that he has no particular demands. His only requirement seems to be simply to live as he sees fit in the present moment. While he escapes the productive system of the company, he also escapes from the system of organized resistance which is supposed to 'work' to improve the workers' standing. The tramp's ethics of freedom is neither to produce a commercial object nor to make an advance socially, but to live. Chaplin saw in these two main characters (the tramp and his alter ego, the young girl) 'the only two living beings in a world of automatons; they are really living' (cited by Magny & Simsolo, 2003). Without a goal to reach or an identified enemy to confront, the tramp's resistance is also generally unintentional, in the sense that Chaplin's diversion seems neither thought of nor experienced as an act of resistance. When the tramp skates in the department store or improvises a rugby match in the restaurant, there is in effect no particular consciousness of going against an established order. In this, his resistance is not comparable either to the well-known forms of individual daily resistance such as humour, cynicism or parody, or to those of institutionalized collective resistance. Without any particular intentionality, Chaplin's gestures of diversion produce nothing of substance and have no concrete 'yield,' because they are not the means to any end. The product of play and poetry, they bear within themselves their own effectiveness, at the exact moment they are realized. This is why the tramp's gestures of diversion are first a product of aesthetics: their value comes from themselves and they are their own unending purpose.

To summarize, the tramp's solitary resistance does not follow any need, respond to any specific extrinsic motivation, any conscious intention except for diversion as a purely autotelic aesthetic activity. It does not refer to any enemy to be denounced, mocked or countered, and does not result in any changes to the rules in favour of the worker. And yet, this atypical resistance is not one that fades into the ordinary events of daily life, but changes

the work experience in a very concrete and tangible way and, more broadly, the distribution of power in the organization. To understand the 'political' yield of this atypical form of aesthetic resistance, we turn now to what philosopher Jacques Rancière calls the 'aesthetic regime' of art.

AFFIRMATION RATHER THAN RESISTANCE: REVISITING RESISTANCE THROUGH THE AESTHETIC REGIME

The Affirmation of the Egalitarian Principle

The figure of Chaplin's tramp offers a model of aesthetic, individual, unmotivated and unintentional resistance that manifests itself in the autotelic gesture of diversion that blurs the boundary between doing (working) and not doing (not working). This model of *aesthetic resistance* refers to a conception that can be related to the philosophy of Jacques Rancière. It can be understood as an attempt to actualize equality through creating a dissensus, which undermines the order of the sensible.

The tramp's character is not indeed a mere figure of resistance; it embodies the affirmation of the principle of equality. The tramp's resistance consists in ignoring a certain type of necessity that would force him to stay in his place. His actions are 'political' in the true sense of the term, in that they interrupt the order of the sensible through aesthetic practices, which create polemical scenes. This must be understood 'as a transgression by those who have no part of the rules defined by official political oligarchies' (Rancière, 1998: 225). While the *police* maintains order and assigns roles and places, *politics* is essentially anarchic. The resistance that takes the form of political action and affirmation implies breaking with the configuration of the sensible to transform the map of what is conceivable, speakable or doable, by taking individuals out of the places they are assigned to, so as to make them visible and audible. As emphasized by Beyes (2010), this way of organizing people and things refers to an aesthetic phenomenon that reconfigures what is visible and expressible in a spatio-temporal order. When Rancière considers the labourers of 19th century Paris, who used their leisure time to participate in cultural pursuits which were reserved for the Bourgeois such as reading literature, participating in political discussion groups and writing poetry (Rancière, 1981), he emphasizes the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look. By highlighting the experience of engaging in aesthetic practices, he focuses on 'the reconfiguration in the here and now of the distribution of space and time, work and leisure'

(Rancière, 2009: 19). Then, aesthetic practices destabilize hierarchies and oligarchies, as well as their continuous attempts to put (and keep) everything in its proper place (Beyes, 2010). The aesthetic effect is thus an effect of dis-identification (Rancière, 2009: 62), that is, aesthetic experiences such as the tramp's can free individuals from identities that are taken to be fixed (such as being a worker) and provide a way to explore new ones (such as being an artist).

In a nutshell, the tramp's kind of resistance, always individual, contingent and spontaneous as it is, is made possible by the affirmation of the egalitarian principle, the challenge being not 'to escape from the grips of a kind of tentacular monster, but to conceive of the possibility of leading other lives than the one we are currently leading' (Rancière, 2012: 112). This is why it is more important to speak of affirmation instead of resistance, and, as Rancière emphasizes, to affirm the power of equality wherever it is actually confronted with inequality.

The Power of the Aesthetic Regime of Art

In this way, Chaplin plays with this 'subversive virtue by not acting or rather by rendering action inactive and inaction active' which Rancière (2014: 80) notes in the works of artistic and literary modernity. Rancière's thought, which connects aesthetics to politics, consequently provides a relevant framework for analysing how *Modern Times* 'makes' resistance. *Modern Times* in fact represents a striking example of what Rancière calls the 'aesthetic regime' of art (Rancière, 2000, 2011, 2014). The tramp's resistance in *Modern Times* falls squarely within this aesthetic regime of art, which, by breaking with the traditional narrative, supports the successive popular emancipation movements. For, as Rancière writes (2014: 12) it is a matter of localizing 'the politics of fiction not on the side of what it represents, but on the side of what it *accomplishes*: the situations it constructs, the populations it convenes, the relationships of inclusion or exclusion it institutes, the borders it traces or effaces between perception and action, between the states of things and the movements of thought; the relationships it establishes or suspends between situations and their meanings, between the coexistences or temporal successions and the chains of causality.'

The aesthetic regime is in effect characterized by a new way of recounting stories, marked by a break with the traditional model of action. This model of action (and of the man of action) provides a narrative of a succession of causes and effects according to the rules of necessity or verisimilitude (the Aristotelian narrative), accomplished by an elite of "active beings" worthy

of being represented, because they have a will and are able to affect their destiny to accomplish their goals. Rancière uses an analogy to describe this model of the unity of events subject to causal law, that of '*the organism in which the members are coordinated and subject to a centre*' (Rancière, 2014: 120). According to the philosopher, modern fiction is working towards '*the destruction of the hierarchical model that subjects the parts to the whole and divides humanity between an elite of active beings and a multitude of passive beings*" (Rancière, 2014: 12). This model that dominated literature until the 19th century is the same used in Hollywood cinema in the 1930s, which was marked by the myth of American success and the American dream (Levinson, 2012).

The theme of the failure of action is at the heart of *Modern Times* and clearly identifies the work and its author with the aesthetic regime of art. First, by making the protagonist of his story a wandering and unproductive tramp, 'who fails at everything he succeeds in doing and succeeds in everything he fails to do' (Rancière 2011: 241), Chaplin defies the mythic narrative of America (and classic Hollywood cinema). This narrative is one of action, an active subject who 'succeeds' thanks to his force of will directed toward a productive goal of self fulfilment (Levinson, 2012). We then saw that the diversion of action is at the heart of the different sequences: working by playing, playing at working, producing by being unproductive, mingling the useful with the useless and what is free with what is profitable, etc. By blurring the boundary between active and passive, by identifying doing with not doing, the director causes us to rethink the hierarchical structure between active beings and passive beings that underpins traditional narratives, and makes the active beings subject to the passive ones. Finally, the autotelic creation of useless forms by the tramp attacks the 'causal logic which infers a concerted plan and the means used towards a desired end' (Rancière, 2011: 106), which is the basis of any 'company' that needs means, ends, and chains of causality to produce an 'object' for a specific intention.

Thus, it is by negating the causal logic of action which distinguishes the active from the passive, that the tramp's 'not doing' becomes affirmation. As we have seen, Chaplin's idleness does not mean abandoning all activity, but signifies instead pursuing organized activity in a 'diverted,' hybrid form, borrowing from unproductive leisure and play. In this way, the tramp does not leave the world of work, but reconfigures it in his way and thus 'ceases to live in a world constructed for him by the enemy' (according to Rancière):

This paradox [the equivalence of acting with not acting] is at the centre of the aesthetic regime of art and also at the centre of the problem of popular emancipation. Basically, the rupture comes not in conquering the enemy, but in ceasing to live in the world constructed for you by this enemy. (Rancière, 2011[5])

To break with the model of action also means breaking with the hierarchical model that underpins the classical (representational) regime, the Aristotelian narrative. In these 'old stories,' the world is divided between the man of action who makes things happen, and the passive man who only suffers the conditions of his existence. In the representational regime of art and literature, only characters preserved by their favoured social position (the men of action) can allow themselves to live in the present moment without concern for the future.

It is that it [the sensible capacity unbound from means and ends] annuls the hierarchy of ends which, since antiquity, has divided the world in two: there were those who, sheltered from this vital constraint, could conceive of more extensive ends, by inventing the means and taking risks. These people, for the same reasons, could just as easily do nothing or devote themselves to activities which were their own ends. And this is what constituted the supreme being. Thus, it is this privilege of the elect that the aesthetic capacity makes available to everyone... a unique 'ability to do nothing' that annuls the tangible difference between two humanities (Rancière, 2014: 81).

By positing the equivalence of doing and "*far niente*" (idleness), Chaplin, in *Modern Times*, is thus positing the equality of boss and worker (or employee). As an example, in the first sequence of working on the assembly line, we explicitly see how the tramp joins the boss in his desire to combine leisure and work (smoking a cigarette, doing one's nails / doing the jigsaw puzzle, reading the newspaper). Worker and boss—the only two individualized characters who are not part of the mass, part of the body of others—join each other in a shared aspiration for lounging. In this way, the tramp does not seek to escape his condition as striking or struggling worker. He resists by his propensity for enjoying the present moment in a way that only the members of the elite should be able to do, without seeking to implement the 'strategy' that would allow him to improve his material fate. In this way, he is not where

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[5] Interview in *Libération*: http://www.liberation.fr/livres/2011/11/16/la-rupture-c-est-de-cesser-de-vivre-dans-le-monde-de-l-ennemi_775211

his social position says he should be, namely in demanding and actively struggling to escape his condition. Chaplin reunites boss and tramp in the equality of pure sensation, in the unmotivated enjoyment of the senses.

> We have to properly understand the subversive power of this innocent *far niente* (idleness). *Far niente* is not laziness. It is the enjoyment of the otium. The otium is literally the time we are waiting for nothing, the time specifically denied the plebeian, who is condemned, due to the concern to escape his condition, to always expect the effect of chance or plot. It is not inoccupation, but the abolition of the hierarchy of occupations (Rancière, 2011: 68).

By refusing to follow the managerial narrative that organizes the productive succession of tasks, the tramp posits the equality of worker and boss, of plebeian and economic elite. Chaplin's recognition of the tramp's ability to experience moments of existence denied to him, on principle by his social position thus connects with Chaplin's adoption of a fictional model at odds with the traditional Hollywood narrative that distinguishes winners from losers. At the narrative level, the director/screenwriter constructs a circular and repetitive story (a succession of semi-autonomous sequences 'work-unemployment-prison'), without beginning or end, which is itself narratively 'unproductive.' In this way, he suspends the causal logic of events and the unity of action where the individual elements are subjected to a central system, like the worker subject to the boss's will. With *Modern Times*, Chaplin as director is claiming that he is concerned neither with efficiency nor with productivity. On the contrary, his film appears to be an attempt to subdue such a cinema based on efficiency. Just as the tramp diverts objects from the imperialism of ends, Chaplin 'diverts' the classic Hollywood cinema (speaking, with an upward narrative outline, a 'hero,' and narrative closure) to threaten the model of action and offer a form of aesthetic resistance in response to the tyranny of productivity.

Overall, this aesthetic regime is part of a more universal claim for equality (Huault, *et al.,* 2014), which refers to Rancière's concept of the 'singularisation of the universal,' *i.e.,* the ability of individuals to move away from the pre-established social order. This idea enables moving beyond the notion that resistance is condemned to being localised, and instead provides a way to see that diverse experiences—even though they are individual, specific and contingent—express their universality. A political scene for dissensus is constructed from the moment the universal principle of equality is asserted and a space opens up for the

reconfiguration of the sharing of the sensible. The principle of equality and the effects of actualising it are thus elements of a universality.

In this way, *Modern Times* not only challenges the world of organization and work, but also challenges the dream factory that industrially produces well-constructed stories of American success, in which the active hero fights to succeed 'in the world constructed for him by the enemy.' In 1947, ten years after the film came out, Chaplin wrote in *Reynolds News*:

> Hollywood is no longer concerned with film-making, which is supposed to be an art, but solely with turning out miles of celluloid. I may add that in this city it is impossible for anyone to make a success in the art of cinema if he refuses to conform with the rest; if he shows himself to be an 'adventurer' who dares to defy the warnings of cinematographic big business. [...] Hollywood is now fighting its last battle and it will lose that last battle unless it decides, once and for all, to give up standardizing its films, unless it realizes that masterpieces cannot be mass-produced in the cinema like tractors in a factory. I think, objectively, that it is time to adopt a new path, and to make it so that money is not the all-powerful God of a decadent community.

This perfectly expresses the similarity between the organizations mocked by Chaplin in *Modern Times* and the film industry itself. It is the same system—which produces objects on an assembly line as well as celluloid by the mile—that Chaplin is calling for us to resist.

CONCLUSION

Modern Times, although located in the field of fiction, gives us some important insights for thinking about the issue of resistance in the workplace. The tramp's experiences and activities contrast indeed with previous kinds of everyday resistance emphasized in the literature, that either suffer from the limitation of localism and banality, or are accused of being potentially recuperated by a given system of power. Highly individual, dis-organized, spontaneous but able to reconfigure the order of the sensible radically, the tramp's resistance consists in asserting the power of equality in every place rather than resisting a system of domination. This positive assertion which at the same time implies the construction of a political scene for dissensus, directs our attention towards the way that everyday activities can actually create a sense of fundamental disruption or break in people's working lives and identities (Huault *et al.,* 2014).

This form of resistance belongs to the aesthetic regime of art as it has been defined in this article. *Modern Times* in effect works towards the destruction of the hierarchical model that divides the world between active beings and passive beings. From this perspective, diversions, the blurring of boundaries between 'doing' and 'not doing,' or even artist and worker, are part of a universal (and not localized) claim for equality. The vitality and creativity of the tramp, a conceptual figure that invents scenes of protest and the framework for a constantly renewed insurrection (Le Blanc, 2014), reveals possible ways to not be governed by the norms of the world of work. By engaging with this conception of resistance as affirmation, we may be able to develop powerful resources for imagining alternatives and re-energizing resistance in the workplace.

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