Tactics and the Quotidian: Resistance and Professional Discourse

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If it is true that the grid of "discipline" is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what "ways of operating" form the counterpart, on the consumer's (or dominee's) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order.

Michel de Certeau

It may be that the rewards of critical teaching must always be found in such small, tantalizing moments of classroom encounter, not in measurable advances on the grand schemes that theoretically propel the enterprise.

C. H. Knoblauch

The research I discuss in this essay addresses what I take to be an unfortunate imbalance in current research on professional writing. Research reports in journals and in edited collections describe different professional discourses, how they are formed, how they operate, how organizational structure and discourse are related, and how writers learn to participate productively in institutional discourse. With some notable exceptions, very little of the research being reported concerns the ideologically coercive effects of institutional and professional discourse—what my students and I have come to call "the dark side of the force." If Foucault had to argue that cultural theorists should think of power as productive rather than merely repressive, I argue that rhetoric needs to recognize that the opposite is also true of discourse. That is, research in professional and nonacademic writing should begin to investigate not only the ways in which discourse produces knowledge, but also the ways in which it extends the grid of discipline and the ways in which writers resist the mute processes to which de Certeau refers in the epigraph above.

When research reports ignore the power of institutional styles, genres, and disciplines to enforce dominant cultural positions at the expense of dissenting positions, they misrepresent the cultural complexity of much writing in professional and institutional settings. If we think of writing as a form of cultural
production within institutional or organizational discourses, then we must consider the many ways in which writers often work at cross purposes to the dominant position legitimized by discourse. Here de Certeau's critique of the myopia he finds in social theory applies equally well to research in nonacademic writing: “the presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users” (xiii). De Certeau argues that social agents should be thought of as “consumers” of culture, and that as consumers, people often use the representations or any other of the resources provided by discourse in unconventional and uncontrolled ways. Thus, if we only consider the authorized discourse, we oversimplify the complexity of cultural relations and overlook the diverse cultural and discursive practices that contest the authorized discourse. Furthermore, this misrepresentation of the cultural dynamics of writing creates a number of problems in the way we think about and teach nonacademic writing. As I read research reports with my students, it seems as if organizational and cultural change is impossible and that writers must, as my students put it “just do as they are told” and adapt to the demands of the institution in which they work. Finally, this misrepresentation maintains an all too common schism between the way many teachers talk about learning in writing classrooms and the way we represent the writing that occurs outside the academy. Despite the recent efforts of colleagues like Cynthia Selfe and Marilyn Cooper, Carolyn Miller, Thomas Miller, and Dale Sullivan to introduce the notion of praxis into professional writing, there has been very little research that helps us think beyond the classroom.

In this article, I focus on the concept of resistance as it has been theorized in rhetoric and argue that writers outside the academy engage in resistance in a wide variety of ways. The material upon which I draw in making this argument comes from a case study of the writing of a civilian biologist working on a large military base. I argue that in the process of doing his job, and doing it quite well, this writer engages in a range of resistant activities through which he intervenes in and, to a limited degree, alters the activities of the institution within which he works.

Problems With Exploring Resistance
There are at least two difficulties involved in making the argument that resistance occurs in professional discourse which make doing this research problematic. The first difficulty is the fact that, while resistance is the central concept in theories of liberatory pedagogy and in many theories of cultural action and change, the definitions of resistance upon which much of this work depends are vague and, to borrow Althusser's distinction, descriptive rather than theoretical. For Althusser, descriptive theory “casts a brilliant light on all the facts observable,” but does not articulate the mechanisms through which the phenomena works (139). Such is the case with research and theory in rhetoric which concentrates on the issues of resistance and cultural struggle. Within
rhetoric and composition, resistance is usually defined in contrast to discursive “accommodation” and “opposition.” Among other problems with this definition, however, is the fact that it is not easy to distinguish “resistance” from “opposition” in practice. In the recent collection Composition and Resistance, for example, the contributors engage in an ongoing debate about resistance and seem unable at various points to decide whether students’ resistance to the classroom agenda of radical pedagogy is the same phenomena as the liberatory notion of resistance against dominant ideology. At the close of one such passage, James Sledd comments that “Because I am aware of World War II, [“resistance”] has a very positive value—it’s just splendid—and the gradual deterioration of the status of this term is an index of what’s happened to our society” (8). I would add that this confusion is also an index of the uncertainty with which resistance has been theorized. Often this uncertainty collapses the distinctions between opposition and resistance, between the local and the structural, thus equating students’ resistance to classroom practice too easily with a social agent’s resistance to the kinds of powerful cultural interests which dominate the culture within which a writing teacher works.

A second difficulty in exploring the notion of resistance in discourse, especially in professional writing, is that we tend to look at resistance in terms of large scale action and public confrontations. In one of the few research reports that explores something like resistance in institutional discourse, Anthony Paré describes the exclusionary power of discourse regulations in his analysis of the case reports written by Canadian social workers. Paré argues that the guidelines which determine what evidence is and is not admissible in court not only produce case reports, but they also force social workers to suppress information that they feel is relevant. Paré writes that social workers sometimes resist those discourse regulations and send inadmissible evidence to court when they think it necessary for the client, even at the risk of being reprimanded or fined by the court (118).

Paré’s essay provides a powerful example of one sort of discursive resistance, but there are other, perhaps more common forms. Theorists have discussed resistance in terms of relatively large texts and relatively extended projects—a student’s major research paper in a class or career-threatening acts like those Paré describes. This way of thinking suggests that resistance is an ongoing project which manifests itself in large, often dangerous actions. In contrast to this image, I think that resistance occurs more frequently in rather small actions. In the classroom, this model of resistance looks more like the notion of underlife which Robert Brooke used to explain the way students establish their identity in a writing class. Brooke describes daily events in a classroom and argues that “behaviors normally seen as misbehavior . . . [are] exactly this sort of constructive, individual stance-taking” (144), the “small, tantalizing moments of classroom encounter” to which Knoblauch refers in the second epigraph above. Certainly acts of resistance can take large, publicly disruptive forms, but this model of traumatic confrontation does not correspond
to the understanding of everyday cultural action articulated by contemporary theories of discourse and practice. Furthermore, this concept of highly charged action makes resistance such a dangerous and costly project that it becomes practically impossible. The quotidian is never as glamorous as a newly minted theoretical insight, but the unglamorous, difficult ground of everyday practice is the terrain on which agents struggle. Thus, research on resistance in professional discourse should eschew the grandiloquent and focus instead on the relatively small, often unremarked actions of writers.

**Toward Theorizing Resistance**

The concept of resistance emerges from the cultural theory of critics like Althusser, Bourdieu and Passeron, and Giroux who argue that schools produce the forms of knowledge and subjectivity favored by a culture’s dominant interests. In the starkest form of this position articulated by Althusser, the school is an “Ideological State Apparatus” which produces cultural subjects properly suited to their social and economic positions. Structuralist theories such as Althusser’s describe ideology and domination as monolithic and all-powerful and regard the subject as an unwitting product of social structure. Most of the early research on schooling influenced by Althusser focused on the issue of class and social inequity in schooling. Paul Willis’ *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, for example, describes how the structure of schooling leads working class students to drop out and take on the same working class jobs their parents had. More recent, less determinist work in social theory has tried to explain education’s role in producing stable cultural relations, but also providing for some degree of social change, what Bourdieu calls “regulated revolution.” Social theorists like Giddens, Bourdieu, and Giroux have argued that determinist theories deny the possibility that people can become self-reflexive social agents or that real change can occur.

In composition and rhetoric, theorists inspired by Freire have developed the concept of resistance as a reaction against the pessimistic determinism of structural theories. For pedagogues such as Giroux, Shor, and Macedo who believe that education can be a source of social change, the concept of resistance fills the gap between the constraining power of ideology and institutions, and the possibilities for agency and social action. Thus resistance has become a crucial concept. It allows theorists to recognize the way education is influenced by and often reproduces existing race, class, and gender relations, but resistance also leaves open the possibility that schools can be a site of social change in the face of powerful social interests.

Giroux describes resistance as a form a cultural activity which appears disruptive, but which should be read politically as a break in the social process. Resistance differs from what he calls accommodation and opposition, by serving to reveal to a social actor the nature and structure of the social relations in which he or she works. Resistance also involves a degree of self-reflexive awareness on the part of a social agent, and an understanding of the ways in which social
reality is connected to material conditions and has been constituted to serve specific interests. Thus action which seems disruptive to those in positions of power and authority can also be understood as a positive movement toward critique and change in very much the same way Robert Brooke had described the activities of underlife in the writing classroom.

As helpful as Giroux’s definition is, however, it is still at the stage of what Althusser called descriptive theory. A more useful conception of resistance in complex social structures can be developed from Anthony Giddens’ theory of “structuration.” Giddens argues that earlier models of social structure and action made a critical mistake when they constructed a stark opposition between structure and the individual. Thus, theories of structure tended to describe subjects determined by an abstract and all powerful structure to which people have little or no access. Alternately, theories based on a notion of the autonomous individual accepted a romantic notion of the radically free social actor and were unable to grasp the power of institutions to limit and control discourse and action. Like other poststructural social theorists, Giddens seeks to avoid both the determinist and voluntarist positions offered by this dualism. The fundamental theoretical insight that allows Giddens to escape this dualist trap is his claim that the dualism of structure versus the individual should be understood as the “duality of structure” (Central Problems 1-95, Constitution 1-41). As part of this duality, structure does not exist outside of the ongoing process of everyday life, but is constantly recreated by action as what Giddens calls the “structural properties” of social practices.

Unlike earlier theorists whose notion of structure was based on a spatial metaphor and did not adequately recognize that social practices exist in time, Giddens describes structural properties as ways of thinking and operating that are extended in both space and time. That is, where structure had been a static architecture of power existing above or outside human activity, structural properties function like structures at any given moment, but they only exist in the real time of social activity and have to be constantly maintained by the actions and memory of social agents. Thus Giddens’ structural properties which shape our social actions are both the medium through which social agents work—the function of their structure-like aspect—and the outcome of ongoing social activity—the result of their being essentially social processes. By defining structural properties as the medium and outcome of practice, Giddens establishes a dialectical relationship between structural properties and social agents; structural properties shape what agents can do, think, and know, but the actions of self-conscious social agents maintain and recreate these same structural properties. The advantage of this complex notion of dialectical action is that it leaves open the possibility for the social agency and change. In the context of research on resistance, this theory explains the mechanism through which resistance can occur.

Like the theory of radical pedagogy, Giddens argues that social actors are not ignorant of the rules and politics of the social practices within which they operate. Social life does not go on behind their backs. Rather, social actors have a practical knowledge of how things work which remains tacit, and a more
limited discursive knowledge which they can articulate. Agents know how to act and get things done, but often cannot explain how and why they operate as they do. According to Giddens, social agents monitor their action reflexively, comparing their practical and discursive knowledge against the results of their actions. Along with the concept of structural properties, Giddens' notions of the reflexive self-monitoring of actions and his conception of practical and discursive knowledge provide a theoretical explanation of resistance. Given time, the process of action and self-reflection can allow people to articulate, to a greater or lesser degree, the shape of the structural properties through which they act. This expanded discursive knowledge is the result of the revelatory function of resistance and opens the possibility that agents can intervene in the dialectical relationship between themselves and the structural properties that their actions help recreate. On this model, resistance can be understood as a social agent's conscious attempt to put her expanded discursive knowledge of structural properties into action, thus attempting to make incremental social change.

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Although the theory of structuration provides a mechanism through which we can theorize resistance, it does not help us grasp the level at which resistance might occur. Giddens' theory concentrates on the most powerful position within cultural discourses rather than the multitude of marginal positions which contest this position. The notion of structural principles does not deny the fractured nature of social activity and the struggles between discursive positions, but the theory does not offer the kind of micro analysis that exposes the fissures within everyday practice, the level at which resistance most frequently operates. In order to explain how social agents engage in resistance to disrupt the mute maintenance of discipline or discourse, I turn now to theories of practice.

Work in cultural studies has altered the way we think about the relations between people and dominant culture. The prevailing model of these relations had been that of the Frankfurt School, most notably Horkheimer and Adorno's notion that people automatically accept whatever the culture industry produced, using the industry's own terms and values to recognize and consume its products (120-67). In terms of writing and discourse, this is very similar to those moments in Foucault's *Archaeology* when a discursive formation determines the kinds of statements we can make and the objects about which we can make them. In response to this model of a passive consumer, Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson have argued that the production and consumption of culture are two semi-autonomous moments in the circuit of cultural production. In their model, consumers engage in their own process of cultural production when they use what the dominant discourse produces to actively make their own products. In this way, neither process is autonomous, but neither is absolutely determined either. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau develops this understanding of consumers as semi-autonomous producers, and explores the ways people reappropriate dominant culture in producing their own alternative
culture. He argues that small, everyday actions of social agents deny the kind of totalizing order invoked by theories of structure and discourse. In their everyday practices, de Certeau argues, people regularly escape or evade the coercive efforts of the discursive regimes in which they operate. In the same way that readers construct meaning by using the material provided by a text, social agents use the products of dominant culture to produce their own, sometimes discordant meanings. “Everyday life,” de Certeau tells us, “invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others” (xii).

In order to explain how these marginalized practices work, de Certeau describes two forms of cultural action which he calls “strategies” and “tactics.” Strategies belong to institutions and subjects who occupy a recognized place in the social order. Strategies operate through the dominant discourse supported by the power that is the precondition for the knowledge they produce and the cultural position they reinforce. Tactics, by contrast, are calculated actions that are “determined by the absence of power” and which “play on and with the terrain imposed” by the dominant discourse (37). According to De Certeau, the tactic is not itself a discourse; it is too momentary. It is an action or the manner in which an opportunity is seized, what he calls a “conjunctural operation” (20). Tactics take advantage of the unique situation created by the temporary conjunction of changing conditions. The obvious rhetorical analogue is kaíros, the science of the propitious moment for rhetorical action which must be seized or forever lost. In describing how tactics operate, De Certeau offers a functional definition of resistance when he says:

> The actual order of things is precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends... Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is tricked by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance... (26)

This suggests that while resistance may come from a stable if relatively powerless position, the forms it takes change constantly. Like the consumers in Hall’s model, agents resist by using the products of the dominant discourse to insinuate heterogeneous positions and values into discourse. As tactics, resistance is an action “taken on the wing” (12), making do with what the situation presents.

**Looking for Resistance in Unlikely Places**

In order to investigate resistance in professional discourse, a colleague and I spent a year doing research at a large military facility. This may seem an unlikely place in which to study cultural resistance, but as Foucault has shown us, contemporary life is increasingly defined within the bureaucratic space shaped by institutional discourses and power. And a military base seemed to us a place where the grid of discipline would be especially clear and present to members of the community. Indeed, the base on which we worked seemed the epitome of the kind of powerful institution which regulates the discourse of writers. It
is the sort of place which pragmatists envision when they describe "resistance" as an academic fantasy, something that can occur in the classroom but not in the world where you have to do as you are told to keep your job.

Over the course of a year, we interviewed a number of base personnel and read the texts they wrote until we finally decided to concentrate our interest on one biologist in the base's Environmental Affairs office. We conducted multiple interviews with our principal informant, as well as interviews with his coworkers and supervisor. We taped most of these interviews and took field notes during the others. After our initial interviews, our informant gave us literally years worth of documentation on a number of major projects in which he had been involved. After analyzing these documents, we conducted follow up interviews, some structured as open ended interviews, some structured as discourse-based interviews where we asked about specific rhetorical decisions involved in the documents we had analyzed.

In the view of our principal informant, his office was responsible for protecting the natural environment by seeing that base operations observed both the letter and the spirit of EPA regulations. The interests of the field biologist who saw the area occupied by the base as a beautiful habitat for a wide variety of rare animals were decidedly different from those of the private contractors involved in base operations. Our preliminary work told us there were clear differences between the dominant military discourse and that of the civilian professionals who also worked on the base. Conflict seemed inevitable to us going into the research, and we were not disappointed.

What then does resistance look like in the writing of the biologist with whom we worked? Our research suggests that his resistance to the dominant culture and its discursive regime was organized around three powerful moments in the institutional discourse. The most powerful discursive strategy for both producing and disciplining knowledge was the reduction of complex relationships such as those that exist in the natural environment to quantifiable data. This standard feature of the engineering model of knowledge recognizes as legitimate only those things which can be readily measured and described in brief, almost tabular form. Writers' work was also regulated by the prevailing assumption that all regulations be read literally, constructing a minimalist interpretation of the law. Our informant characterized this as the difference between observing the "letter of the law," narrowly defined, rather than observing the "spirit of the law." Finally, the institutional discourse was regulated by the prevailing organizational structure which artificially separated individuals and working groups, in this case the Environmental Affairs office from the Natural Resources office.

Reducing complex relationships to quantifiable data is part of the institution's effort to manage large amounts of information efficiently. And this reduction was enforced by a prevailing style that demanded very short documents, usually comprised of bulleted sentence fragments. But as Steve Katz has argued, the rhetoric of expediency upon which such managerial pragmatism depends often has obviously ideological sources and severe cultural consequences. The
biologist with whom we worked explained that this reductive style largely excluded careful discussion of ecological issues. As he put it:

But when you can't get a document out of the office or beyond a certain place in the chain if it's longer than a page or written in complete sentences and they only want a bullet format—the famous . . . bullet format—you lose all ability to explain, to teach, to support your point of view. To me it feels very conspiratorial, because in a way it relieves these people. They can say “Oh well, somewhere down the line a decision was made.”

A moment later he added:

It is exactly the point that we are dealing with natural systems; it isn't your basic sort of engineering, statistical problem. There's far more. The ramifications are greater. They're more complex, they're harder to see, and they aren't easily quantifiable either.

In another discussion four months later, he returned to the issue briefly and said that this regulation style is:

not comprehensive enough, nor is it enough to make people see or read between the lines in order to understand the complexities of the issues involved.

Two kinds of knowledge are being excluded by this discourse. The “objective” ethos that rationalizes complex systems, reduces relationships to quantifiable data, and then presents them as bulleted items excludes not only explanation of ecological systems, but also what our biologist calls “intangibles.” Introducing an example of the first problem, he explained that the reduction required by the discourse made it all but impossible to acknowledge the complexity of environmental problems, and that this exonerated the institution from the necessity to deal with them. He said that even when you understand the environmental problem,

you can't prove a thing. He can't prove it. You can't prove it. The quantification of that type of removal from an immediate issue is so difficult to deal with that . . . it's difficult even if you understand the concept. I'm not just talking biomagnification. It means all kinds of stuff. I don't even know how to explain to people about biodiversity. . . . [A]re there secondary, tertiary impacts somewhere down the line that we can muck up around and pretend don't exist or are too hard to deal with so we're not going to recognize them officially or whatever. I think that's even more of the separation too.

The second kind of exclusion enforced by the discourse is even more striking. We had been reading through the field notes of a young biologist training at the base. The notes were unusual because they talked about the lovely scenery, the rare and unusual wildlife, the aesthetic values of the area. They could have come from Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. When we asked our informant why there was no other writing like this in the materials he had given us and whether he ever used such narrative in his writing, he said that these “intangibles” were not allowed both because they might bring up unexpected and
officially unnecessary data, and because they were regarded as unscientific and literally worthless. He explained that the ethos of “hard science” required that they omit all “aesthetic musings” from their language and restrict themselves to only those things which can be measured and which have a practical value, a value in dollars. The landscape and shoreline around the base are strikingly beautiful and it is difficult not to be moved by their beauty and relative rarity in America. But the discourse of institutional science precludes these issues. As our biologist put it:

The problem is it’s one of those intangibles. It is not respected by most of the people, agencies, other scientists that we have to deal with. We are constantly required to take the intangibles of the natural environment and try to label them with “what is the benefit to us?” . . . And dealing with intangibles, the entire field of natural resources has . . . not found a good way to attach, to make intangibles, the natural field, understandable or valuable to a group of people who attach dollar sign, measure worth by dollars.

The third feature of the discursive regime that our informant struggled against was the organizational structure which separated the Environmental Affairs office from the Natural Resources office. This counter-intuitive organizational structure is a logical response to the legal context in which the base operates, but it has powerful discursive and cultural consequences for the biologists working within the organization. The Environmental Protection Agency regulations within which the base must operate have precise guidelines and specific legal penalties and enforcement powers. In the interest of efficiency and clarity, the base organized an Environmental Affairs office concerned only with issues that could incur specific legal penalties. The Natural Resources office, by contrast, manages everything else for which there is not clear, precise, legal regulation. Thus, the organization separates what it calls natural resources—anything from buildings, to the land and the shoreline, to the animals on the land—from environment—things specifically regulated by the Environmental Protection Act. This pragmatic response to EPA authority effectively isolates Environmental Affairs biologists from other biologists working on the base.

Our informant observes that this administrative structure creates a sense of isolation and powerlessness, a divide and conquer situation, that he said felt like “psychological warfare.” He also sees this organizational distinction as artificial and contrary to his professional training. His understanding of the environment and of natural resources is holistic as opposed to the narrowly legal understanding of the contractors, engineers, and the military environmentalists. He says, “to me it’s obvious that natural resources is integrated into traditional environmental issues. And you would think these people who have all gone through school the same time I have, they’ve all experienced the same advancement in environmental concerns, and yet they can sever Natural Resources from other environmental issues and I get no support from within my office.”
So What Does He Do?
Faced with this highly regulated discourse and the legalistic organizational structure, our biologist resists the institution's reductive culture in a number of ways. In the most extreme cases, he resorts to the kind of blatant action that Paré described in his analysis of Canadian social workers. He said that he is sometimes asked to be a "team player" and help the engineers conduct a project that comes perilously close to breaking environmental regulations. In such cases he sometimes refuses to do the job, and he then faces the same kind of consequences as Paré's social workers. In fact, he has been reprimanded for insubordination. These are the kinds of cases that our students are thinking of when they say that you can't resist powerful institutional ideology on the job. And the results of this sort of action are not necessarily very productive in the long run.

More interesting examples occur when our biologist completes the project or the document in question, but reappropriates the discursive conditions to resist and modify the institutional agenda. He said that when institutional style requires a reductive quantification of complex phenomena, he writes the required document, but accompanies it with another much longer and more detailed one. He says:

And I send it to a position of authority saying, based on all this stuff, these are my recommendations and I sign it as a Wildlife biologist and... staff specialist. This person now is supposed to take that and do something with it; that's his job.

As Pfeffer and Salancik have argued, one way for an organization to extend its control over the activity of its members is to limit the distribution of information across the organization (24). For the biologist with whom we worked, the institutional reduction of systemic issues to quantified data limits the kind and amount of information available to the readers of his reports. His action takes advantage of the institution's procedures to increase the amount of information available and to force it into wider circulation, effectively resisting the institution's attempt to silently extend its control of information.

In the case where excluding "intangibles" denies systemic relations and aesthetic, even spiritual values, he resorts to an even more indirect action, a "tactic" in De Certeau's terms. Because "intangibles" and aesthetics are prohibited, he avoids what would be seen as "subjective" or emotional language. If he uses this language, he gets ignored as a "Lizard Kisser." To circumvent this restriction, he sometimes talks privately with a project manager and, if the manager is sympathetic, he explains the value of the intangible considerations. More interestingly, he takes advantage of the institutional distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit" of the law. When he cannot explicitly describe qualitative issues in a project, he writes documents that hold the project managers to a generous interpretation of the law rather than their usual literal interpretation. In a literal assumption, any action that is not explicitly prohibited is acceptable, regardless of the consequences. Because the environment is
institutionally defined by strict legal codes, this sort of institutional reading radically limits the project manager's responsibilities and minimizes environmental issues. In one case he described, the biologist and a state wildlife biologist had negotiated a letter in which the base and the state agreed, after many years of work, on a plan for a project. In the formal letter, they inserted specific language saying that the base "will obey both the spirit and intent of this agreement." He saw this insertion as a tactical way of officially asserting something of the "holistic" perspective, the "intent of the overall direction" of environmental concern. He feels that he is engaged in what has become a game, and that he has to outwit the dominant interpretive regime. Like de Certeau's tactics, these actions are taken on the fly. He sometimes holds back a letter ready for signature and waits for the opportune moment when he thinks his superiors will sign it.

In this case, the biologist struggles on the institution's terrain, using available materials to circumvent the dominant commitment to quantitative reduction and minimalist interpretation. He has used writing the way consumers use tactics to "insinuate" alternate and marginalized positions into the dominant discourse. Once his documents are signed and become part of the official record, he has set precedent and forced the institution to recognize, if only temporarily and indirectly, something of his environmental agenda and with it the value of "intangibles."

Conclusions
It could be argued that the biologist whose actions I have described is not involved in resistance in the privileged sense I argue for, but that he is merely being obstructionist, merely fighting the institution in which he works. But the combination of three elements of this case distinguish the biologist's actions as discursive resistance. The first and most obvious is the fact that he is an environmental biologist working in an institution dominated by engineering and technological interests. The dominant concerns of the organization often conflict with the biologist's environmental concerns. And his relative lack of power in this institution mirrors the relative power of industry and environmental preservation in American society in general. His is not the dominant position either locally or globally.

The second element of this situation that suggests that the biologist is engaged in resistance is the fact that he does not accept the situation with which he works as natural; he can describe the material and political conditions which shape his situation. He can, for example, describe relationship between the organizational structure which separates Environmental Affairs from Natural Resources and the legal distinctions involved in Environmental Protection Agency regulation. And he recognizes the concomitant opposition between the holistic, systems-oriented nature of environmental thought and the Cartesian distinctions inherent in the dominant legal and engineering models. While he does not explain his thinking in precisely these theoretical terms, the biologist does understand the realities of his situation as historically and ideologically constructed and, thus, open to challenge and change. Furthermore, he can
describe the way this organizational structure limits the scope and power of environmental discourse. This rather sophisticated understanding demonstrates considerable discursive knowledge of the structural principles which regulate the discourse of his institutional culture. Faced with this situation and armed with this knowledge, the biologist acts as a conduit between the two groups, Environmental Affairs and Natural Resources, changing the modus operandi of the institution and more effectively performing his job of protecting the environment.

Finally this biologist can be said to resist the institutional discourse because he acts from the kind of conscious political commitment which characterizes resistance. At the end of one long discussion, he summarized his commitment to his work in this way:

> If I was a person with a different frame of mind I would be finding ways to avoid the laws and would be helping them to bend or go around them. But I became convinced that the military needed more people like myself, who would be willing to tell them that their antiquated ideas were not the way of the future, and to try to push them— with dynamite if necessary—to pick up the pace and get with the program. That that was important. And the longer I've stayed and put up with the bullshit, the more I believe that those who remain and continue to fight are maybe the better biologists in the long run.

This biologist is committed to both doing his job well and to changing the institution within which he works. Like those resistant students Brooke describes in undergraduate writing classes, he is sometimes seen as a disruptive element in his institution. As resistance, however, this disruption should be understood as a tactical intervention in the dominant culture.

I close with three final observations both theoretical and methodological. I suspect that the form resistance takes will vary with context. In classroom studies, resistance may appear as an individual student's struggle to preserve his or her independence from the dominant cultural and pedagogical model and only minimally on the effect of his or her actions on the class as a whole. In professional contexts such as the one described here, individual agents engage in resistance, but the goal is often to change the institution, its discourse, or the products of the institution's activity. Certainly people like the biologist described in this essay struggle to maintain their professional and cultural position, but they are often committed to larger cultural work and institutional change. That different aspects of resistance emerge in such different situations is not surprising. The social theories upon which the notion of resistance depends argue for a dialectic between opposing theoretical elements. Giddens' theory of structuration argues for a duality of structure, balancing the power of structure against the actions of social agents. And the contemporary concept of agency entailed in any theory of resistance maintains both the ability of social agents to act and the power of social structures to constrain that action. This dialectical relationship suggests that, in any given situation, the form resistance takes depends on which of these elements—the social agent or the institutional structuring principles—takes precedence. Given the close relationship between
resistance and context, I wonder whether studies in less structured settings with less clearly defined institutional interests than those outlined in this study would reveal other modes of resistance, perhaps forms of resistance which are more overt, more contestatory, and, perhaps, less traumatic.

The tradition of describing resistance as a traumatic confrontation or a dangerous public intervention to which I referred in the first section of this essay, not only misrepresents the scale of cultural activity, it bequeaths us a problem-atic narrative legacy. The protagonist in such research tales ineluctably appears as a heroic figure. James Sledd's recollection of World War II resistance and its “splendid” value is not unusual; some such sentiment lies behind most discussions of resistance. Why use the word if not to profit from its cultural cachet? Useful as this emotional appeal is, however, it often generates a narrative structure which undermines the theoretical point. Whether the protagonist of the research tale figures in a heroic epic or a tragedy, both genres write their central figure as the exceptional individual. The work of cultural and discursive resistance, however, is an integral part of ongoing, mundane activity; its agent has more in common with Everyman than with Aeneas. Scripting the resistant agent as a heroic figure not only distorts the level of activity and makes resistance too dangerous a discursive option, this narrative strategy also displaces resistance, locating it outside the normal process of institutional and cultural activity of which it is a part. And this is a powerful narrative lure; it makes for great reading and a potent emotional appeal. Indeed, the biologist described in this essay begins to take on heroic proportions in places. And he is a genuinely admirable person. His story is shaped by the mythic narratives that Thomas Newkirk sees operating in or through case studies. But to the extent that he appears the extraordinary exception to everyday discursive practice, resistance recedes further into the utopian distance.

Finally, the research I have discussed is only a beginning; it is illustrative rather than conclusive. It depends rather too heavily on the evidence from one restricted case study, and I have not supplied textual evidence or precise details of specific confrontations. Whatever my own methodological shortcomings, I think this is a problem born of the unfortunate but unavoidable relationship between the research topic—ideological and discursive resistance—and the research methodology—naturalistic inquiry. Simply put, most ethnographic or case study research in professional writing requires the consent of the group or organization being studied. This consent, however, comes from precisely those interests which such studies will identify as the dominant interests against which discursive resistance acts. For rather obvious reasons, administrators and corporations do not willingly open themselves to such criticism; access can be limited and texts legally protected. Given this pragmatic situation, documenting resistance in professional discourse will be a very difficult research task.

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Notes

1 Foucault argues in *Power/Knowledge* that Marxist theory has mistakenly understood ideology as only a repressive form of "false ideology" and failed to recognize that ideology also produces knowledge and social life.

2 The work of Steve Katz and Beverly Sauer are notable exceptions to this omission, and demonstrate two different ways in which rhetorical research has begun to embrace cultural criticism.

3 Geoffrey Chase’s analysis of student writers is a good example of the way the terms accommodation, resistance, and opposition have been used to analyze social action in academic discourse.

4 The origin of spatial metaphor for structure and its determining relation to action is Marx’s metaphor of the base and superstructure in *The German Ideology*. Many Marxist theorists have recognized the problem with Marx’s metaphor and offered alternate reformulations of the concept, most notably Raymond Williams’ notion of the “relative autonomy” of economic conditions and cultural forms. Giddens’ critique of the spatial metaphor and his concept of temporal process is typical of contemporary theories of practice.

5 The model of cultural action as a circuit of production and consumption that Hall and Johnson put forward makes explicit what remains largely implicit in Giddens’ theory—the way the result of one cultural action becomes the pre-existing condition for subsequent action. Critics such as Huspek argue that structural constraint on action is completely missing from Giddens’ theory. While the argument against Giddens seems exaggerated, Hall and Johnson’s model of the closed circuit provides a way to modify Giddens’ model. Simply enough, the unintended consequences of actions that Giddens describes as following from an agent’s actions become the conditions, recognized or unrecognized for that agent’s further action.

6 I have heard a number of researchers in rhetoric tell stories in hallways and in workshops about articles which were suppressed because they were critical or merely unflattering of the objects of their naturalistic inquiry. My own experience in this case stands in marked contrast to these discouraging tales of intimidation and threat. The commanders of the military base I studied gave me access to material and personnel and, after reviewing my manuscript, gave me permission to publish without requiring any substantive revisions. I thank them for their generous cooperation.

Works Cited


