Exploring the Spatial and Temporal Dimensions of Micro-Resistance: The Tactical Mimicry of Social Enterprise by English Third Sector Organizations

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Abstract

This article sheds light on a largely ignored form of resistance: 'tactical mimicry' whereby practitioners 'act' as social entrepreneurs in order to gain access to important resources such as money or status. We present insights derived from a longitudinal qualitative study to illustrate how the symbolic and material advantages emanating from tactical mimicry may be used to increase space for collective agency. Our contribution is threefold: we demonstrate that the force of 'social enterprise' policies and programs resides in the financial and symbolic incentives made available to those who identify with government's public transcript. Second, we add nuance to recent discussions in organization studies which have discounted non-antagonistic forms of resistance as "decaf" by alerting us to how tactical mimicry produces conditions of possibility from which favorable outcomes can arise. And third, we argue that the productive nature of tactical mimicry could not have been unveiled without recognition of mimicry's spatial dimension, thus calling attention to the theoretical and methodological implications this has for research on micro-resistance.

Keywords: Social enterprise, third sector, voluntary servitude, productive resistance, space, tactical mimicry

To succeed as a country we have to make best use of all our resources. We have great social entrepreneurs and it is time for the public sector and socially responsible investors and businesses to get behind them. Expect the quiet revolution to get noisier.

Nick Hurd, UK minister for civil society, writing in Guardian Professional, 3 April 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2013/apr/03/social-innovation-nurturing-quiet-revolution

Introduction

The introduction of social enterprise discourse to the third sector in advanced liberal democracies has occurred against the backdrop of a general atmosphere of anti-welfarism and associated attempts to render the public sphere a space of competition, individual responsibility and self-organization (Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010). Social enterprise, broadly understood as business for a social purpose, has come to play a central role in both individualizing and economizing the social by demanding entrepreneurial virtues and behaviors from people who until recently were not envisioned as entrepreneurs (Dey, 2013). England perhaps leads the way in developing support structures for promoting social enterprise (Nicholls, 2010). A vast arsenal of discursive re-articulations and material incentives, such as performance-based contracts, policies, grant programs, education schemas and new legal forms have been used to establish an entrepreneurial culture at the heart of the third sector. Perhaps unsurprisingly social enterprise was not unambiguously welcomed by practitioners. "*I spit on it*" was the reaction of Andy Benson, director of the National Coalition for Independent Action at a seminar in Northampton in late 2012[i].

Academic research provides limited nuance to the "love it" or "hate it" debate popularised in third sector discussion forums. Spearheaded by Parkinson and Howorth's (2008) seminal inquiry, , scholars became increasingly interested in exploring whether practitioners identify themselves with the terms prescribed by English government to unleash the third sector's entrepreneurial spark. This research shows that practitioners do not act as ideal subjects thereby emulating the rationalities laid out by governmental social enterprise policies(e.g. Seanor & Meaton, 2007; Froggett & Chamberlayn, 2002). As with previous work on micro-resistance in the workplace (e.g. Clarke, Brown & Hailey, 2009; Doolin, 2002; Thomas & Davies, 2005; Trowler, 2001), research on the English third sector has shown that

practitioners are not necessarily determined by incessant attempts to shape their modus operandi in accordance with the demands of market capitalism. Rather they retain a certain degree of agency as epitomized in their ability to displace, appropriate or negotiate their own meanings and identity within the political context in which they work (Dey and Teasdale 2013). These insights caution against understandings of social enterprise as 'dominant discourse' by showing how third sector practitioners' critically engage with the entrepreneurial identity offered to them as their true nature.

Contending that this research has mainly focused on antagonistic forms of resistance at the expense of alternative forms, in this paper we offer an account of resistance which does not work antagonistically (i.e. via provocation or disidentification) but through counterfeited identification with 'social enterprise'. To theorize on the productive possibility of such non-antagonistic resistance, we draw on longitudinal research from the English third sector to present the case of 'Teak'[ii], a charitable regeneration company, which overtly mimicked the discourse of social enterprise in order to gain access to important resources such as money or status. Counter-acting the imputation of 'misbehavior' which others such as Nobel laureate Muhammed Yunus have associated with such ostensible infelicities (Dacin et al., 2011), we show how 'playing the game' might qualify as a productive form of resistance on the condition that the advantages gained from mimicking government stipulations are used to advance collective and not just selfish ends. We theoretically frame our empirical insights alongside Michel de Certeau's (1984) distinction of strategies and tactics, thus coining the term 'tactical mimicry' to contend that whether or not mimicking qualifies as misbehavior largely depends on the larger effects such behavior makes possible. Tactical mimicry thus suggests that dramaturgical consent with 'social enterprise' in one space might enable desirable effects elsewhere, outside the view of power. We argue that dramaturgical consent with government stipulations of social enterprise might this be regarded as a productive form of resistance: even though it eschews struggle and, therefore, does not change extant relations of power. Finally we discuss the political, conceptual and methodological implications of our study.

Post-welfarism and the activation of the English third sector through social enterprise

The essential shift between traditional welfarism and what could be called, following Dean (2010), post-welfarism is that welfare is no longer provided directly and unconditionally by the state but transmitted through various programs and policies which aim at activating the

people while shifting the previous responsibilities of the state onto the individual. While government still exerts a significant influence on the provision of welfare through defining what welfare is and shaping the conditions under which it is provided, its primary operation becomes the construction of self-sufficient and self-relying subjects. These "neo-liberal" transformations from the welfare to the enabling state (Elvidge, 2012) in many advanced liberal societies have relied on some form of 'activation' (Lessenich, 2011). Such processes in England usually draw on a classical repertoire of "neoliberal" interventions: the promotion of competition, entrepreneurship, flexibility and individual responsibility as crucial ingredients for generating a certain action-orientation on the part of the individuals and communities being governed. Such interventions have often been accompanied by a strong anti-welfare rhetoric. Since the election of a New Labour government in 1997 both major political parties have accepted the move away from unconditional entitlement to social assistance, and a greater emphasis on individual responsibility and self-sufficiency.

This activation perspective involved not only the responsibilization of the (dependent) welfare recipient, but has attributed a more active role to the third sector in solving societal problems in general and the negative ramifications engendered by the economic crisis in particular. This is noteworthy to the extent that rather than dispensing with welfare, English government has introduced a new form of welfare provision. The 'third sector' is often used as an umbrella term that combines a myriad of organizations such as charities, self-help and nongovernmental organizations (Corry, 2010). In the particular case of England, 'third sector' also forms an important political category in the repertoire of government where it designates a territory of human conduct which needs to be both governed and supported (Carmel and Harlock, 2008). Since the 1990s there has been growing political interest in the use of the third sector to solve the problems associated with traditional (read government) modes of welfare delivery. Different initiatives and measures were introduced to redefine the third sector from a passive object of government to be acted upon into a self-sufficient entity of self-organization.

Activating the third sector according to the logic of post-welfarism is not a trivial task. Its success depends upon the discursive legitimization of practices and rationalities derived from the business sphere as solutions to the problematic of the social (Dart, 2004; Hervieux et al., 2010). English political discourse holds that third sector organizations, particularly those involved in public service provision (Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010), should professionalize by demonstrating proper management skills and a more business-like approach to their way of doing things. These pleas have in turn paved the way for normalizing

the social enterprise model (broadly understood as businesses which trade for a social purpose). With the benefit of hindsight it is probably not coincidental that social enterprise emerged as a political construct in England in the late 1990s (Teasdale, 2012) at the same time as post-welfarism became the new political norm.

The promise of social enterprise is that pooling the third sector's service ethos with the business acumen of the private sector will spark an unprecedented potential for social change. This is manifest, for instance, in a commitment to social enterprise made by then Prime Minister Tony Blair:

> *Our vision is bold: social enterprises offer radical new ways of operating for public benefit. By combining strong public service with business acumen, we can open up the possibility of entrepreneurial organizations - highly responsive to customers and with the freedom of the private sector - but which are driven by a commitment to public benefit rather than purely maximising profits to shareholders.*

(Tony Blair, Social Enterprise White Paper, 2002)

Under New Labour social enterprise gained political prominence, with the establishment of a Social Enterprise Unit within the Department for Trade and Industry in 2001, which was later moved to the new Office of the Third Sector in 2007 (Teasdale, 2012). Considerable financial resources were made available to third sector organizations seeking to move towards financial sustainability through the adoption of the social enterprise model. A new legal form for social enterprises, the Community Interest Company, was introduced and revealingly, "business support" for social enterprise was delivered by the Government's Small Business Service. The message was simple, if third sector organisations were able to adopt business principles then the problems caused by an overbearing welfare state could be solved and well-meaning, but ultimately ineffective, charities could be transformed into efficient businesses.

Despite social enterprise being widely associated with New Labour and the Third Way, UK policy makers in the new Conservative led coalition government of 2010 continued to provide both rhetorical and financial support to the idea of social enterprise as part of its Big Society philosophy (Hogg & Baines, 2011). The English coalition government's Big Society program offers an instructive example of how the third sector[iii] is endowed with redemptive qualities by conjuring a golden past whereby voluntary organizations, co-operatives and mutual associations supposedly delivered welfare services effectively and without the need for government intervention (Teasdale, Alcock & Smith, 2012). The Big

Society is an "endorsement of the positive and proactive role that [...] social enterprise could play in promoting improved social inclusion and 'fixing Britain's broken society'" (Alcock, 2010. p. 380). One of the most noteworthy events was the launch of Big Society Capital in 2012, a social investment wholesaler managing capital worth £600 million which is lent to social enterprises, charities and community groups. Further support mechanisms have been introduced more recently, such as the Public Services (Social Value) Act which (on the surface) aims to help social enterprises win public contracts through encouraging commissioners of public services to take wider social value into account (Teasdale, Alcock and Smith, 2012).

Although the political meanings of social enterprise have changed over time in response to changing political priorities (Grenier, 2009; Teasdale, 2012), its essential ideological operation is to encourage third sector organizations to "to think and act like businesses" and to "develop the requisite entrepreneurial skills to guide the transition from grant funding to trading" (Mason, Kirkbridge & Bryde, 2007, p. 286). The idea is that making third sector organizations more "market-driven, client-driven, and self-sufficient" (Tracey, Phillips & Haugh, 2005, p. 355) would create healthy competition between providers and thus drive down costs and improve efficiency. In this way, social enterprises are at the same time both part of and a central driver of the post-welfarist regime.

Resisting social enterprise through disidentification

The overarching theme uniting critics of social enterprise is that it offers a neoliberal response to the problems caused by neoliberalism (Amin et al., 2002; Blackburn & Ram, 2006),in the process de-politicizing community engagement by rendering collective identities and processes subservient to 'what works' (Pearce, 2003) and ultimately posing a threat to third sector organizations' social mission (Seanor & Meaton, 2008). Commentators have looked at government-third sector collaborations as a mixed blessing (Reineke, 1994) because they on the one hand offer third sector organizations important resources while in return demanding that they act according to the stipulations laid out by government (Curtis, 2008). But while social enterprise might be little more than an "extension and intrusion of 'business' into the 'social' and political arenas" (Grenier, 2006, p. 137-138), it would be wrong to assume that social enterprise automatically hegemonizes the third sector through a set of mainstream business ideas which are at odds with its social objectives.. Such an interpretation eschews issues of agency and resistance as they occur on a day-to-day basis.

Attempting to overcome this over-generalized conception of social enterprise's political influence, scholars have turned toward third sector practitioners to gain a better view of whether and how they respectively comply with or break free from the normative expectations conveyed by government. For instance, Howorth, Parkinson & McDonald's (2011) study showed that the language being employed by policy-makers, social entrepreneurship incubators and other powerful actors is not in accord with how practicing social entrepreneurs construe their social realities. Baines, Bull and Woolrych (2010), studying initiatives intended to advance entrepreneurial and business-like approaches in the realm of public service delivery, show that government authorities (i.e. public sector commissioners) and third sector organizations often face difficulties in relating to the other party's world view and assumptions. Conducting interviews with participants of a social enterprise network leads Seanor and Meaton (2007) to conclude that most practitioners come to reject the prevailing image of the heroic leader and even deny wanting to become social entrepreneurs. Froggett and Chamberlayne (2004) further show that practitioners' stories sidestep New Labour discourses of social enterprise which stresses individualism and a consumerist and modernisation-oriented model of community development. Evidently, questions of agency and resistance appear distinctly different when viewed through the perspective of third sector practitioners as compared to the programmatic level of concrete social enterprise programs and policies.

These studies suggest that social enterprise programs and policies only partially achieve their initial intent. This gap between policy and practice suggests that practitioners are anything but 'docile bodies', in the process thus offering situated understandings of how practitioners transgress government stipulations of 'ideal subjectivity' by producing their own accounts of reality and identity. However as we argue in this paper, the agonistic engagements of practitioners with social enterprise programs and policies form just one way in which resistance can be practiced. Social enterprise programs and policies might also be confronted in non-antagonistic ways. Resistance can be non-adversarial (Courpasson, Dany & Clegg, 2012) whereby practitioners do not confront 'social enterprise' head-on but, rather, undermine the normative expectations associated with the respective programs and policies through surface-level consent or what later will be referred to as tactical mimicry. To establish a sound comprehension of the productive thrust of such non-antagonistic forms of resistance, we present the results of an in-depth study to disclose how dramaturgical acts in one space can, under certain conditions, give rise to favorable effects in other spaces. But first we provide

more details of "Real Times", the qualitative longitudinal study of the third sector from which our analysis derives.

The Real Times Study

Real Times is an ongoing Economic and Social Research Council funded qualitative longitudinal study of fifteen 'core' third sector organisations now into its fifth wave of fieldwork. Real Times broadly aims to understand how third sector organizations work in practice, how they change over time, how they respond to the challenges they face, and under which conditions they flourish. Space limitations prevent us from providing more than a necessary contextual overview of the study here. A more detailed description of the rationale behind the study and overview of the case study organizations can be found in Macmillan (2011) and Macmillan et al. (2011).

Data collection

We were able to draw upon more than 500 semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals between March 2010 and March 2013 connected to the 15 case study organizations at the time this article was written. Interviews were fully transcribed and then stored and coded in NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis tool. Although data collection was not structured towards this article, the generalist nature of Real Times made the retrospective repurposing of data particularly suitable for our objectives.

Approach to analysis: The role of the deviant case

The overarching interest of our inquiry was to understand how, and indeed, if the political reforms of the English third sector were getting into people's minds (Foucault, 1982). Our aim was to shed light on how political stipulations of the ideal third sector subject – the social enterprise - infiltrate the level of everyday practices. Initially operating on the assumption that processes of identification and disidentification would play an eminent role in the reproduction of social enterprise, our early analysis attempted to develop a typology of ways in which practitioners identified or disidentified with the social enterprise label. One of the classifications we began to develop was provisionally called manipulation and arose through our analysis of transcripts of interviews with practitioners in Market Garden, a small social enterprise and Community Interest Company engaged in training people for employment through volunteering placements in a garden centre. We were somewhat puzzled by what we initially perceived as a deviant case.

The director (and self-proclaimed social entrepreneur) of Market Garden explained that not just anybody can be a social entrepreneur, you need '*ability and knowledge and*

experience' (August 2010). He was an enthusiastic adherent of the language of social enterprise making numerous references to '*sustainability'*, '*business plans'*, and 'managing *sales'*. Market Garden operated in a deprived geographic area where the directors were seen as outsiders. According to the director his unique skills gave him the ability to operate in this area where local businesses failed:

> "*I couldn't see anybody in [the local community] doing something like this* [operating a business]*... the people who did the catering at the family fun day, they've gone under... So it's really, really hard, it's really hard, and you know it, cerebrally, that to run your own business is really, really tough. Until you do it you just don't realise how tough it is*." (September 2011)

But the rhetoric of social enterprise used by the director did not appear to relate to the realities of their funding environment. While their business plans made predictions of profits in the long term (5- 10 years) almost all of their funding came from grants. After much persuasion they were given their premises at a peppercorn rent by a local community trust following the council deciding to charge them for previous space:

> "*Honestly, we're a small, social enterprise doing things for their community and they want to charge us. Bloody nonsense.*" (Director, Market Garden, September 2011)

Our initial impression at the time was of an organization manipulating the language of social enterprise to access grant funding (from local authorities, and the European Union), and we were also somewhat sceptical as to the balance between personal gain and community benefit of their motivation for doing so. We decided not to include this case in our first paper derived from Real Times data (Dey & Teasdale, 2013), partly because of the ethical issues involved in reporting what we felt to be deviant behaviour, but perhaps more so because when we reflected upon the case with the interviewer we began to feel that perhaps Market Garden was not a deviant (or unique) case and that the "manipulative" behaviour might be common across a wider range of organizations.

We thus returned to our transcripts and began searching for examples of deviation – conceived of as feigned consent with social enterprise. This did not yield a great deal although we were able to collect some examples of seemingly deviant behaviour – for example one external interviewee had questioned whether one of our cases was spending too much time speaking on the *"social enterprise self-gratification circuit"* of conferences and awards dinners and neglecting the day to day business. When we questioned representatives of the social enterprise in question they initially highlighted their desire to promote the social

enterprise movement to outsiders (and policy makers). However, a particular advantage of an in-depth qualitative longitudinal study is that over time the interviewer gets to know participants better and interviews become more like conversations. Perhaps as the participant realises that (so far) nothing damaging to their organization has emerged in papers arising from the project they begin to become more open about their motivations and desires behind wanting to become a social enterprise. Moreover the longitudinal nature of the project allows the interviewer to return to the organizations and develop themes arising from earlier waves of interviews. By the time of the fourth wave of interviews in 2012/13 we began to focus in more detail on this theme of manipulation.

Over subsequent waves of fieldwork then, participants increasingly gained trust in one of the authors, sharing thoughts and beliefs which had initially been kept private. As a result, it became obvious that part of what we had learned (or thought we did) during the initial stages of the research about third sector practitioners' relationship with 'social enterprise' was in fact a staged performance more or less explicitly aimed at producing a desirable image toward us as researchers. With increasing levels of trust and understanding, which changed the interplay between the research participants and us as co-creators of meaning, participants became more willing to disclose more negative attitudes toward government stipulations of social enterprise. Also, participants offered reflective accounts of their identity work, making it clear that their conformity with the social enterprise discourse was tactical rather than genuine or authentic.

Returning to the example of the self-gratification conference circuit, when pressed two years later as to why the directors spent so much time addressing conferences and attending awards dinners the interviewee revealed that this was in part motivated by a desire to boost the public profile of their organization. This in turn led to their organization being featured widely in policy documents as an example of a successful social enterprise and meant that organizations became keen to provide grant funding to the social enterprise, partly because this might be seen as a way of "investing" in a "proven winner" but also through a desire to be associated with these "proven winners". Reducing this to a simple economic level, the financial pay off from spending time in one space (the social enterprise self-congratulation circuit) was perceived by the directors as more effective in acquiring resources to be used at a later time in another space (providing enjoyable activities for young people with mental health problems which could not be funded through public contracts). As we demonstrate in more detail in the subsequent section, when studying organizations in greater depth and

longitudinally the researcher begins to construct a different impression to that left by the initial "snapshot" gained from research undertaken at a single point in time.

Findings

Embracement of the social enterprise label?

Our first wave of interviews conducted in 2010 appeared to confirm our initial assumption that practitioners either reinforce and support or challenge and appropriate the social entrepreneurship identity which was ascribed through the political context in which they worked. As we have discussed elsewhere (Dey and Teasdale, 2013) some cases which might be seen by others as social enterprises explicitly rejected the social enterprise label. However it appeared that practitioners were increasingly embracing social enterprise in contrast to those in Parkinson and Howorth's 2008 study. For example a director of Beech (an environmental social enterprise focusing on recycling and work integration) responded to the question are you a social enterprise: "*without a shadow of doubt*", while other members of staff were also keen to demonstrate their identification with a social enterprise ethos. According to one member of staff at Beech: "*we're a social enterprise and we're something different, we're not perceived as part of the system, in a way*" (Program Manager, Beech, October 2011). The website of Teak (the case we primarily draw upon in this paper) proclaimed that Teak was "*one of the largest social enterprise groups based in the Midlands… delivers projects both nationally and internationally*". Their stated mission was "*delivering social justice though enterprise.*" The organization had been created to provide in-house maintenance to a parent charity in the mid-1990s and had gradually expanded to incorporate a wide range of subsidiary businesses including construction and hospitality companies. The Chief Executive, Liam, had been brought into Teak initially to manage the construction company and had become chief executive in the mid-2000s.

Much of the language used by Liam in our initial interview could have derived straight from the policy rhetoric surrounding social enterprise at the time. In accordance with New Labour's definition of social enterprise (which has been seen by authors such as Defourny and Nyssens (2010) as being "*first and foremost*" about business) "*a social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives…*" (DTI 2002, 8), Liam emphasized the business-like nature of Teak:

> "*We just want to trade as a company. … we're not particularly selling ourselves as a Social Enterprise, we're selling ourselves because we'll deliver a product on time, to a quality, at a cost.*" (March 2010)

During the same interview Liam set Teak apart from charities and other social enterprises which were dependent on government hand-outs. At a government meeting (which we will return to later) he observed those organizations:

> *"didn't give a shit," just keep giving us the money, we'll carry on doing the hand out and let someone else do the hand up".* (March 2010)

Here we felt that Liam was trying to convey the impression of a tough (male) business and to set himself apart from well-meaning but patronising charities which inadvertently perpetuated poverty. Again the language used by Liam was reminiscent of the dominant policy rhetoric surrounding social enterprise in the final period of the labour government which has been characterised by Teasdale (2012) as underpinned by a logic of "voluntary failure" and presented as a sustainable solution for the voluntary sector.

However the economic downturn had hit Teak hard. As Liam explains, the industries in which they operated were particularly vulnerable:

> "*Construction, landscape, maintenance, conference and hospitality... it is one of the worst mixes in the present economic position. I mean we have got murdered this year. You know you couldn't think of anything [worse] – what do people cut first? Construction spend and training spend, bumph.*" (March 2010)

Liam stressed that protecting the jobs of his staff was of paramount concern and that Teak had drawn upon reserves to do so. He was particularly proud that:

> *"we've been here 11 years, no staff member's ever left, it's a family and they're reliant on me for their wages, and it's very close in here."* (Jan 2011)

Despite Liam's criticism of other charities and social enterprises which were dependent on government money (see above), it appeared that one consequence of the economic downturn was that Teak had for the first time engaged in contracting to deliver services for government, initially through the Future Jobs Fund - a New Labour government program designed to provide short term employment opportunities:

> "*So if I was very frank this is about survival in this market because we are totally and utterly reliant on contracts. There isn't any construction work out there, we're going to do it differently and now we've also just taken on as a delivery [agent] for the future jobs fund. We've [previously] avoided it like the plague, yeah?* (March 2010)

Liam had also become the manager of a government sponsored program designed to encourage third sector organizations to become social enterprises (and earn money through trading rather than rely on grants). At the time it seemed somewhat perverse that an

organization which had placed a high emphasis on trading in the private market place (competing on cost and quality) and avoiding government contracts appeared to be repositioning itself as part of the government supply chain.

So our initial snapshot impressions of Teak were of a social enterprise on the boundaries of civil society and the market positioning themselves as distinct from traditional charities and the public sector (the system) by virtue of their business-like nature. In entering new markets (the public contracting arena) they have effectively identified with the changing governmental stipulation of social enterprise which by 2010 had become associated with third sector organizations delivering public services (Teasdale, 2012). If the story were to end here, we would be left with the impression that government resources and discourses have effectively recreated Teak and Liam as an 'ideal subject' acting on their behalf.

Tactical mimicry by third sector practitioners

Qualitative longitudinal research allows the researcher and interviewee to build up a close working relationship over time. In particular as Taylor et al. (2014) describe in more detail when referring to the Real Times study, "*the advantage of the longitudinal study was that it provided time for them* [the researchers*] to excavate some of the more formalised organizational narratives that were presented initially and uncover the practices and tensions beneath.*" In the case of Teak in particular, a critical moment occurred when Liam, our chief informant, left the organization in September 2012. We felt that no longer being a central part of the organization allowed him to be more open and self-critical of the organization than might otherwise have been the case.

Returning to our chronological time line, by the time of the second wave of fieldwork in January 2011 a Conservative led coalition government had taken power and the (government) funding environment for social enterprises had become increasingly uncertain. The relationship with Liam had developed and we were regularly in contact regarding issues not directly relevant to the case study. I felt that he was being more open about his private thoughts about social enterprise, and more particularly public policy:

I think I'm a cynic because I think there's much more of a boys' club in this government, and there is much heavier linkage to large private sector... Yes, I am a cynic; I'm a very cynical person at the moment, but, as long as you understand the game... I don't think there's any point fighting it. You've got to play it... I had a conversation with someone the other days who's getting all uppity, I said, "Look, at the end of the day, I have a vision mission, which is to help people in need. Now if I have to wear a yellow shirt to

achieve the ability to do that, or a blue shirt, or a pink shirt, I don't really give a shit," so long as my morals don't go, and I'm still achieving it, yes, I don't care. You know, it's a bit like, you know, we shouldn't use dirty money from... Okay, yes, we don't like where it came from, but look at the good we can do with the ten quid, you know, so ... I don't think it's a time at the moment to stand on your moral high ground (January 2011)

Over the next two years Liam increasingly opened up to one of us about this 'game' he was playing. As the following section outlines more fully, the game involved surface level identification with the new government policy towards social enterprise and the Big Society to obtain what he saw as "dirty money" – i.e. from a government which he found morally repugnant because of its "boys' club" and links to the large private sector. The 'dirty money' was used to support the salaries of his workforce, most of whom had originally come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many of whom had been with Teak for 11 years.

The first hint of the rules of this 'game' came in our first interview back in March 2010. Referring to Teak's seemingly accidental move into delivering a (previous) governmental program to teach third sector organizations to be more entrepreneurial, Liam outlined how he had "*been asked by* [a government department] *to do a presentation on social business to a number of homeless organizations.*" The organizations who attended were those which Liam had observed "*didn't give a shit, just keep giving us the money, we'll carry on doing the hand out and let someone else do the hand up.*" (March 2010). In a "*loud and argumentative conversation*" which took place in the bar afterwards Liam had been asked for his thoughts as to how to change the situation by government. He proposed that the government department should fund a program which Teak would manage to encourage charities to become more business-like. Over subsequent interviews it became clearer that Liam had played upon the business like nature of Teak and his reluctance to accept government funding to manipulate a situation whereby the government would give Teak money to enable other organizations to copy Teak. Of course it is somewhat ironic that in the process Teak was moving towards a different financial model which relied more upon government money.

As Liam noted in January 2011 however, the rules of the game had changed again under the incoming Coalition Government. Despite the Big Society rhetoric, Liam saw the rules as tilted in favor of "larger private sector" companies. As regards the government program to encourage charities to become more business-like, it was unlikely that Teak would to get any more money because the program was seen as an initiative of the previous government. So Liam was trying to disassociate the program and Teak from the previous

government and connect it to the Big Society with a particular emphasis on the role that private business could play. Teak had developed links with "corporate partners", one of whom had agreed to host a big event in the City of London: "When will you get involved?" (a play on the Big Society message of community involvement by business). Liam had invited various speakers and representatives from the corporate world, particularly companies wanting to win contracts with government:

> *"and the strategy is actually saying this isn't a third sector organization saying, "We're Big Society". This is some of your biggest fucking suppliers. This is British Telecom Global Services, this is Price Waterhouse Cooper, this is Serco..."*

His feeling was that if he could present Teak as closely involved with government to the corporate world, and simultaneously as closely linked to the corporate world to government he might be able to gain more government interest and funding for the program. The final piece in the jigsaw was positioning Teak as an exemplar of the Big Society.

> *"I don't want to be saying to the new politicians who have this grand new idea, "By the way, we've been doing it for ages... What I would say is, "We're doing this which is good, actually, given a twist with yourselves, this could be a real good Big Society," (January 2011)*

This approach seemed to work. Liam had received a letter from the prime minister which he was using in the publicity material for the event:

> *"the information you sent us sets out very well what a valuable institute [this program] is, particularly because of its emphasis is based on sustainability in partnership with the private sector to enable [disadvantaged] people to become economically independent [the program] supports the coalition government's vision of the Big Society". (Letter from December 2010)*

As far as Liam was concerned it didn't matter what government wanted to label Teak as so long as he could get some money. He was just mimicking what he felt the government expected from a successful social enterprise in the era of the Big Society:

> *And, if [the coalition government] want to say "This is it," and I get a million quid out of it to deliver something, I don't give a shit. They want innovation, they want something different, they want something new, they want something they can put their own label on. ... What we're trying to do is work on the tactic, let's put that lovely apple that's shining up there, saying, "And let them come to us" (January 2011)*
>
> *(January 2011)*

When I asked Liam of he had used these mimicry tactics before he laughed and said:

We did it the first time we got this [with New Labour in 2008/09]. We said, "We've got an idea, you need to bring some money. You go off, do a deal, get the money"… I think, some of it, you've just got to be a bit... because it's bullshit... Confident bullshit, and we've got, you know, let's get it straight, TEAK punches way above its weight in presence and stuff, but you need to do it. (January 2011)

In the event the tactic had worked – Teak was awarded a contract for over a million pounds to run a revised version of the government program later in 2011. This constituted over a quarter of their annual turnover. This was particularly important as Teak's revenue from their other businesses was steadily declining. The money from the government program was being used in a different space to pay staff in the other businesses and protect their jobs. Despite all the 'confident bullshit' Teak was an organization which was dependent on the government contracts to maintain its size and even to ensure survival. When Liam was asked about his commitment to social enterprise he laughed and responded:

"What the masturbating in public?... I think it's just a badge... I don't think it's real in a lot of instances... And I think the bit that gets me is people aren't telling the truth, they're telling the flowery bit.… And I think people believe their own story whereas I don't." (November 2012)

Discussion

The starting point of this inquiry has been that amid the shift from Keynesian welfarism toward post-welfarism, social enterprise has come to play an important role in bringing the English third sector more in line with the rationality of the market. While social enterprise policies and programs chiefly call on practitioners to think and act more like 'real' entrepreneurs, this raises questions as to whether and to what extent practitioners respectively identify or disidentify with this desideratum. Judging from prior research which we have reviewed in the first part of this contribution, it would appear that practitioners in England are generally reluctant to uncritically identify with social enterprise. Yet, recent statistics suggest a different conclusion. In 2009 just under half of formally constituted third sector organizations claimed to fit closely the government's stipulations of social enterprise. However, at closer inspection many of these organizations seem to exhibit little more than surface level identification, with many not even engaging in trading (Teasdale, Lyon & Baldock, 2013) - a defining feature of social enterprise.

Our research helps qualify this "shift" of the third sector toward a more pro-enterprise attitude. Our empirical insights suggest that practitioners' identification with social enterprise may not be exclusively 'felicitous' or 'serious'[iv] (Austin, 1975). That is, Liam's overt consent with social enterprise is not serious in that he only acts 'as if' he were a social entrepreneur in order to fulfil the normative expectations conveyed by particular government stipulations. The infelicity of practitioners' 'as if' thus signifies that apparent consent with social enterprise is in actual fact a mere performance, comparable to what an actor does on stage (ibid., p. 21). By implication, a crucial limitation of research which accepts practitioners' identification at face value, including our own (Dey & Teasdale, 2013), is that it does not attend to the possibility that what practitioners such as Liam say might not necessarily correspond with what they actually think and do. In other words, existing research might have failed to understand that apparent consent (or even disidentification) might at closer inspection turn out to be a dramaturgical performance rather than genuine or authentic gesture (Hewlin, 2003). While the broader implications of this insight are numerous, we deem the following three most noteworthy.

The (limited) power of social enterprise

Central to the concept of tactical mimicry is that the 'socially constitutive power' (Trowler, 2001) of social enterprise is more limited than would it initially appear. How third sector practitioners act and speak does not necessarily reflect their beliefs or convictions. From a critical vantage point, our inquiry seems to foster the conclusion that government-led social enterprise initiatives are a congenially failing operation. However, such reasoning might be misleading for it ignores the central fact that social enterprise is constantly re-enacted, through texts and talk (Cooren et al., 2007), even though practitioners might not agree with what social enterprise' ideologically stands for. The question this poses is why this is happening. One possible explanation would be that government reproduces its rationality by simply relying on various forms of 'economic coercion' (Zizek, 1994). In other words, although social enterprise might not get into practitioners' minds the resources offered by government compel them to 'play the game'. Such an interpretation would be largely in line with commentators such as Mason (2012) who have argued that political actors in England who hold sway of important, particularly financial resources are able to render the third sector governable.

Read through the perspective of 'tactical mimicry', however, we come to a different conclusion. Rather than being subordinated to an overwhelming economic rationality, third sector practitioners may be able to cunningly deal with both the discursive and non-discursive

level of government-led social enterprise policies and programs. Tactical mimicry thus on the one hand illustrates that are anything but ideologically blinded as they are well able to appropriate the meaning of social enterprise, through dramaturgical consent, thus signalling to government authorities that they identify with social enterprise's normative 'baggage'. And although tactical mimicry demonstrates that practitioners are influenced by monetary considerations and instrumental reasoning more generally, the concept also reminds us that they are not thereby determined. The perpetuation of social enterprise on the level of practice is perhaps less the result of direct governmental manipulation of economic resources than of practitioners' tactical opportunism through which they appropriate public money (as well as status) which may in turn be channelled into the advancement of their 'true' social objectives. Importantly then, government money does not necessarily possess coercive power because practitioners possess considerable agency to "manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities" (de Certeau, 1994, p. 480).

Our conversations with other practitioners suggest we cannot claim originality for these observations as 'plying the game' through tactical mimicry is an obvious reality of many practitioners working in the English third sector. Evidently, it might not be unusual that organizations adopt the language, practices and legal structures of social enterprise to achieve certain ends (cf. for example Teasdale, 2010; Scott & Teasdale, 2012). As Trexler (2008) remarks in this regard: "social enterprise reflects the recurring tendency of the charitable community to engage in strategic symbiotic mimesis, adapting by adopting what it believes to be the traits desired by potential supporters" (pp. 66-67). What is needed, therefore, are further inquiries, viewed through the lens of tactical mimicry, exploring the complex ways in which government stipulations of social enterprise change the third sector. Such inquiries should adopt a dual focus, thus simultaneously looking at social enterprise' discursive and non-discursive (e.g. financial) aspects In line with Thompson and Harley (2012), our study shows that the discursive dimension of social enterprise is "too important to leave out of the equation, but not so important that it can bear the burden of explanation on its own" (p. 1378). Paying heed to the discursive and the non-discursive dimension of social enterprise, while placing at the heart of the analysis the complex performances taking place between government authorities and third sector practitioners, might offer fertile insights which eventually permit us to reach a more nuanced understanding of the success and / or failure of government-led social enterprise programs and policies.

From misbehavior to productive resistance

A further question arising from the concept of tactical mimicry is whether the infelicity to which our inquiry points casts a negative light on third sector practitioners? Recent media coverage in England has taken an interest in the problems related with cases of 'bogus social enterprises' (Floyd, 2012), among other things purporting that such fakes tend to pretend to be interested in the social good while in actual fact just being "in for the money" (Secret Social Entrepreneur, 2013). These views tend to focus on people or organizations mimicking social enterprise for personal gain. But our study suggests that misbehavior can, at least in principle, produce largely favorable effects thus calling into question the kind of a priori condemnation expressed by some commentators.

On a broader note, the recent theorizing on the positive aspects of 'misbehavior' (for an overview cf. Richards, 2008) reflects discussions in organization studies which stress the productive role of resistance (Courpasson, Dany & Clegg, 2012). Unlike research which sees resistance mainly as standing in an agonistic relationship with power (Foucault, 1982), thus emphasizing struggle (Fleming & Spicer, 2008) alongside various forms discretion (Thomas & Davies, 2005), productive resistance is primarily concerned with activities that change extant relations of power toward the better. More specifically, productive resistance comprises acts which modify existing relations of power by influencing the way those in power think, especially by voicing "claims and interests that are usually not taken into account" (Courpasson et al., 2012, p. 801).

It is in light of this that an important difference between productive resistance and tactical mimicry becomes visible: tactical mimicry does not change existing power relations. At the core of our conceptualization are the deviational tactics that parasitically engage with relations of power without necessarily changing them. Our focus, quite in contrast to Courpasson and his colleagues, was the opportunism or indeed the "guileful ruse" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37) involved in third sector practitioners' dramaturgical use of social enterprise. Despite the fact that such a perspective, due to its emphasis on how practitioners apply "clever tricks" (ibid., p. xix) to gain a momentary advantage, seems to be preoccupied with infrapolitical forms of resistance [v] which have increasingly fallen out of favor in organization studies due to their purported ineffectiveness in changing the status quo (Contu, 2008), we contend that tactical mimicry is amenable to a more affirmative reading for it does comprise a productive potential for change.

Hence, a further contribution our paper makes is that it extends the understanding of productive resistance to phenomena which do not so much try to influence power but to take advantage of the opportunities power offers. Nesting practitioners' tactical mimicry in terms

of productive resistance appears pertinent because the act of mimicking is ultimately geared toward extending possibilities of action outside of the direct influence of power. At the same time, our conceptualization acknowledges that mimicry is not *ipso facto* productive or unproductive. Such normative judgment presupposes shedding light on the broader conditions of possibility to which tactical mimicry gives rise. Being able to distinguish favorable from less favorable forms of mimicry requires taking into account how the resources being appropriated are used. Theoretically, practitioners might use the advantages gained through tactical mimicry do one of the following things: they might mimic power to pursue their own advantages (Thomas & Hardy, 2011), create a temporary respite from the influence of power (Scott, 1990) or, as this paper illustrates, create space to advance collective ends. Hence, although there might be no shortage of inquiries dealing with the dramaturgical aspects of identification and identity work, notably as it pertains to apparent consent, façades of conformity or impression management (e.g. Collinson, 1992; Hewlin, 2003, 2009; Murphy, 1998; Stormer & Devine, 2008), we feel that there is a paucity of research probing the parting line between more egoistically inclined and more politically motivated forms of mimicry. Though we do not denigrate the value of the former kind of mimicry, which often happens "out of prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favor" (Scott, 1990, p. 2), we feel that it is important to gain a deeper understanding of tactical forms of mimicry where individuals act 'as if' they were in line with the expectations of to contribute to the common good. Understanding whether or not a given instance of mimicry actually increases the possibilities of collective agency requires, as the ensuing section argues, a proper grasp of the spatial dimension of such performances.

The theoretical and methodological role of space and time

Our results indicate that time has been an important factor in the epistemological process of our research. That is, the insights reported in this paper would not have been possible through a synchronic account based on one-off interviews. It is with the benefit of hindsight that we were able to comprehend that the stories we were initially offered by the participants of our research project did not necessarily reflect their true convictions. Rather, practitioners' ostensible consent with social enterprise often formed a theatrical performance in line with how they might act vis-à-vis government authorities. Delving beyond practitioners' dramaturgical consent became possible only after trust was developed over time. And yet, probably even more significant was the realization that the productive role of mimicry could not have been detected without attending to its spatial whereabouts. Concurring with Thanem (2010) that space forms an important, if mainly neglected, aspect of

resistance, a central contribution tactical mimicry makes is that it builds a sense of space back into inquiries of resistance. To this end, research on resistance needs to develop a better sensitivity to the possibility that ostensible conformity with power in a particular space might be a tactical maneuver designed to create space for alternative modes of (co)existence outside of the direct influence of power. Spatializing our understanding of resistance thus permits us to see that movement between and the creation of (alternative) space are crucial factors in how actors enact realities that cunningly deviate from the 'dream of the strategist'. In the case of Teak, Liam cunningly submitted to government stipulations of social enterprise in one space in order to create liberties for realizing his true convictions elsewhere, that is, outside of the immediate influence of power. These liberties reflect that there is often, with the exception of utterly restricted constellations of domination, loopholes for creating other spaces or what Foucault (1986) termed heterotopias in which possibilities of collective action can be increased. Such a spatial perspective helps us further stress the positive connotation of mimicking by showing how resistance works to produce favorable effects (cf. above). Resisters such as Liam, though deviating from the mandate given to them by government, can be viewed as entrepreneurs of a different kind. That is, though it might well be that Liam is not the sort of social entrepreneur government wanted him to be, he might still be an entrepreneur in the sense described by Hjorth (2005): "It is the *entre* and *prendre* of entrepreneurship. Entre for creating space, spacing, and stepping into the in-between, and prendre for the grasping of opportunities."

Placing more emphasis on space's eminent importance in tactical mimicry specifically, and resistance more generally, requires methodological procedures that are able to capture the possibility that compliance in one space might be a precondition for more radical action in another. While we were only alerted to the spatial dimension of tactical mimicry when practitioners started to openly admit that there was another side (or space) to what they had initially told us, future research should adopt methodological procedure that give explicit emphasis to the spatiality of social reality. It is in this connection that mobile methods (Urry, 2007) appear most helpful. Unlike many ethnographies which study cultural practices in a relatively limited geographical realm (e.g. an office or a village), mobile methods suggest that researchers participate in patterns of movement to become part of the powerful performativity of their research subject. Though mobile methods might just be viewed as one option among others, we deem it important that researchers who are interested in resistance, notably as it occurs in dynamic social settings, will be co-present in the

respective movements and apply a range of interviewing, observing, and recording technologies 'on the move' (Büscher et al., 2010).

A post script against romanticism

Arguably the single most important contribution of tactical mimicry is that it alludes to the positive liberties of acting as it allows people to practice agency and realize their fundamental purposes (Berlin, 1969). Although it was never our intention to contribute to an overly idealized image of tactical mimicry, we are aware that this paper might nevertheless contribute to a romanticized understanding of micro-resistance (Mumby, 2005). To correct this view, it should be noted that there are a lot of ways in which tactical mimicry might go wrong. It is in part because tactical mimicry is inherently ambiguous that we have chosen a case which failed, in the ultimate sense of the term. By 2012 Teak's cash flow situation had become increasingly precarious. In June a prime contractor cancelled Teak's sub-contractor status and decided to carry out the work in house.

> *And we hunted round and tried to get [other money] – but you just couldn't do it. So in end of July I started saying, with the board basically … the market's changed, the market is different. If we could have seen a way out in the next six, nine months... but the market's not going to change.*

Liam paid all his staff and the "small sub-contractors" before closing down the construction company and conference centre. This ensured the costs of redundancy were passed to the government. Over the next few weeks Liam worked hard to find employment elsewhere for his staff before resigning himself. Reflecting on his time as a social entrepreneur (or the feigned performance thereof), Liam posed himself the rhetorical question as to whether social action might simply be easier if the rules of the game were changed and social organizations would not have to mimic the latest government fashion in order to access "funny money":

> *Can you actually do some of this without some funny money? Should there be funny money or should it not be called funny. Is there an economic case for support but in a much more* [obvious way] (September 2012)

We believe that Liam's hope might be utopian in that government's "funny money" will probably remain contingent, at least in part, on guileful behavior such as tactical mimicry that avoids taking liberties to be authentic. However, another, maybe even more relevant question concerns whether tactical mimicry is a form of deviance which occurs only under exceptional circumstances such as those encountered by Teak or whether it is actually a defining feature

of how social organizations these days operate. As we alluded to in the methodology section, our wider Real Times study suggests tactical mimicry is a form of deviance which extends beyond the single case of Teak. But is tactical mimicry a defining feature of how social organizations must now operate? Since this question is beyond the limits of this paper, it will be the task of future research to clarify the precise role and prevalence of mimicry and feigned performances in the context of organizations operating in the social sphere. The focal purpose of such research should not be to dismantle these organizations as mere impostures, but develop a sensibility for the inherently dramaturgical aspect of social organizations and establish understanding that such dramaturgical acts are often a *sine qua non* for engendering social value.

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[i] See http://beanbagsandbullsh1t.com/2012/11/21/cant-see-the-fig-leaves-for-the-smokescreen/ for further details.

[ii] All names of organizations and people in this paper have been anonymised to protect the identity of informants.

[iv] Austin (1975) has famously distinguished serious utterances from un-serious ones which are mere imitations of the former.

[v] Scott (1990) conceives of infrapolitical resistance as forms of resistance that are unobtrusive.