Journal of Management Inquiry
http://jmi.sagepub.com/

Rationality and Relationality in the Process of Whistleblowing: Recasting Whistleblowing Through Readings of Antigone

Alessia Contu

Journal of Management Inquiry published online 2 March 2014
DOI: 10.1177/1056492613517512

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://jmi.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/06/02/1056492613517512

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
Western Academy of Management

Journal of Management Inquiry
1–14

DOI: 10.1177/1056492613517512
jmi.sagepub.com

Rationality and Relationality in the Process of Whistleblowing: Recasting Whistleblowing Through Readings of Antigone

Alessia Contu[1]

Abstract

Reporting wrongdoing is seen as desirable to fight illegal practices, but whistleblowers often suffer retaliations and are in need of protection. Overall, whistleblowers engender strong reactions and are cast either as saints or rats. I consider why whistleblowers are seen as unsettling and ambivalent figures by exploring the analogy between Antigone, the Sophoclean heroine, and whistleblowers. These reflections reconfigure the rationality and relationality of the process of whistleblowing. The rationality of the whistleblower is singular and not easily subsumed into universalizing norms which explains some of the limits reached by the empiricist pro-social research agenda. The relationality of the process of whistleblowing indicates that the reactions of those who hear the whistle are as important. This opens up to an appreciation of the ethical and political valence of the process of whistleblowing and highlights a number of counter-intuitive and interesting issues in its synchronic and diachronic dimension.

Keywords

power and politics, ethics, corporate social responsibility

Introduction

"Blowing the whistle" in organizational and public life is akin to speaking out and openly denouncing wrongdoings.[1] Changes over the past 30 years in the corporate landscape and the legislative framework have been facilitated by the denouncements of whistleblowers. The whistleblower Sherron Watkins helped uncovering the Enron scandal that initiated deep organizational and institutional changes, such as the Sarbanes–Oxley Act in relation to U.S. rules for companies' financial reporting. In the United Kingdom, the 1998 Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) was also linked to various scandals involving whistleblowers, or more precisely, the perceived lack of them.

Whistleblowers might have had some positive impact on our societies, but overall their figure is seen as ambiguous and unsettling. The whistleblower figure disturbs those witnessing it, raising emotional reactions often polarized in casting whistleblowers, for example in the media, as either as saints or rats. Perry (1998, p. 240) also suggests that "there is an ambiguous status of whistleblowing and contradictory responses associated with instances of such behavior." This ambivalence while often noticed in the literature lacks analysis and sustained elaboration. I suggest that exploring this ambivalence offers a new, much-needed perspective on whistleblowing because despite 30 years of research in management studies, it remains difficult to predict who reports wrongdoing, and in what situation. As Morrison (2009) put it commenting on Miceli, Near, and Dworkin's (2008) book summarizing the extant literature,

> existing models for conceptualizing the whistleblowing process have gotten a bit stale (. . .) it may be time *for some new theoretical models or perspectives that will inspire scholars to think about whistleblowing in new ways* and thereby help to generate the added research energy that seems needed to push this area further. (p. 345 emphasis added)

Here I address some of the limitations of the traditional empiricist research agenda and discuss the process of whistleblowing in its synchronic (as it happens in a context at one point in time) and diachronic dimension (as it develops through time). I build these contributions by exploring the ambivalence of whistleblowing. The main question guiding this work is as follows: Why are whistleblowers on the whole

[1]University of Massachusetts, Boston, College of Management, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Alessia Contu, University of Massachusetts, Boston. College of Management, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125, USA.
Email: Alessia.Contu@umb.edu

seen as unsettling figures who perturb those witnessing their acts?[2] Importantly, I consider the subjectivity of whistleblowers and their rationality (as the model devised by Miceli et al., 2008 does), but also their relationality, that is, the relational process of what they engender in the subjects who hear the whistle. I suggest that the rationality of whistleblowing is better understood as singular, that is, concerning the subject with a unique, individual, extraordinary act that cannot be easily subsumed into universalizing norms. This elaborates the first contribution because to understand whistleblowing as involving singularity enables to account for its ambivalence. Whistleblowing shocks and fascinates because its singularity is "out of joint" with the smooth functioning of routine actions, the expectations, and modus operandi reproducing social (and organizational) relations. This also explains (and this is the second contribution) some of the limits of the empiricist research agenda and particularly its difficulty in building a complete picture of the predicting factors of whistleblowing and identifying what motivates it. The final contribution builds on the relationality of whistleblowing. I cast this as a process with an ethical and political valence because whistleblowing intervenes in and questions the constitution of subjectivities, not only of the whistleblower but also of those who hear the whistle. Here I borrow a view of ethics (see Weiskopf & Willmott, 2013, pp. 469-470) that is not conflated with morality defined as the prescriptive ensemble of values and rules for action regulating a given social order; rather, it is the realm of subjective constitution and responsibility. The act of singularity involved in whistleblowing dislocating the modus operandi—the prescriptive ensemble governing one's organizational and social fabric—shows its contingency thereby opening the space for new possibilities of "being" (i.e., the ethical) and "doing with and over others" (i.e., the political) to emerge.

Many approaches would be pertinent to answer my research question (e.g., Feminist, Aristotelian, or Habermasian) and elaborate our contribution. Here I choose the literary path investigating the analogy between Antigone, the Sophoclean heroine, and whistleblowing. As I show later, Antigone's allure and ambivalence is analogous to that of whistleblowers. The philosophical and psychoanalytic readings on Antigone are productive in answering my main research question and in so doing facilitate the emergence of new ideas and views on whistleblowing called for by Morrison (2009).

In what follows, I discuss the leading management research agenda and explore the figure of the whistleblower to ascertain its ambivalent and ambiguous character as depicted in academic literature and the cultural domain. I introduce the methodology and then move on to Antigone. A discussion follows on implications and final considerations.

Whistleblowing in Management Research

The work of Miceli and Near and their co-authors has been fundamental in constituting whistleblowing as a unitary phenomenon to be studied according to the rules of positivist management and organization science. This knowledge is empiricist and instrumental (Gutting, 2005) as it attempts to explain whistleblowing (Near, Dowrkin, & Miceli, 1993; Near & Miceli, 1996) by predicting and controlling the variables that favor it, and the dispositional and situational factors associated with it (Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2003; Miceli & Near, 2002); what consequences there are and why (Hunton & Rose, 2011;Miceli & Near, 1984; Parmelee, Near, & Jensen, 1982; Regh, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008); and what makes whistleblowing successful (Miceli & Near, 2002; Near & Miceli, 1995; Skivenes & Trygstad, 2010). Miceli et al. (2008) posit whistleblowing as a form of pro-social behavior, a behavior that enhances the welfare of those it affects. Their pro-social organizational behavior model suggests that the process of whistleblowing involves moments of subjectivity (p. 39) as organizational members go through a number of decisions and affective reactions (p. 37) when assessing a focal activity, that is, something that the individual may perceive as wrongdoing and on which a decision needs to be made to act (by speaking out and reporting it) or not. But I also consider the subjectivity and rationality of those around her—not only the direct interlocutor of the whistleblower but also the bystanders.[3] I consider the relational process of what blowing the whistle engenders in others. Morrison (2009, p. 344) indicates that Miceli et al.'s book shows that much is still unknown about whistleblowing. She amplifies the frustration of Miceli et al. who say that from 1996 their conclusions are largely the same and that more research is needed (p. 345). The limits of this research for them are predominantly methodological (p. 186), as this research is straddled between the requirements of empiricism and the constraints of post-empiricism, hence it finds it difficult to proceed. Responding to Morrison's call to propose new perspectives, I suggest that the literary exploration of Antigone and her allure, by thinkers such as Hegel and Lacan, provides interesting ways to re-think whistleblowing. I now explore the figure of the whistleblower in the media and academic literature.

The Figure of the Whistleblower

Whistleblowers are deeply present in the cultural domain. In 2002, *Times Magazine* named three whistleblowers as "Person of the Year." Lately, the media have been replete with reports and comments, often quite polarized, on the U.S. intelligence disclosures of Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. There are plenty of films that have

immortalized whistleblowers. For example, Dr. Jeffrey Wigand featured in the film *The Insider* spoke out against industry practice of adding carcinogenic substances to the tobacco mix. His denouncements made possible a lawsuit against "Big Tobacco" and participated in changing the discourse on tobacco products' manufacturing and marketing. But the cost was high. Dr. Wigand is now seen as a hero, but reactions to his act were highly polarized with part of the media mounting a vicious smear campaign against him. He lost his job and had to fight a lawsuit—his life was changed forever.

The academic literature also offers some remarkable examples of ambivalent concrete responses to whistleblowers. A survey has shown a certain ambiguity in the general public with 83% stating whistleblowers should be supported but only 49% think they are supported in their organizations (Griffith Media Release, 2012). Organizational research has indicated that whistleblowers are seen frequently as traitors, disloyal dissenters who bring about conflict and disharmony and are often met with intimidation and retaliation (e.g., Glaser & Glaser, 1989; Jos, Tompkins, & Hayes, 1989; Miceli et al., 2008; Nam & Lemak, 2007; Wee, 2002). Because of such reactions, some authors consider whistleblowing as an act of self-sacrifice (Alford, 2002; Bouville, 2008) that makes them analogous to secular saints (Grant, 2002). Subversive rats or heroic saints—this is the ambivalent portrayal of whistleblowers.

Reactions to whistleblowers are, in short, polarized and highly emotive. It is interesting to note the twirling questions their acts generate. Since whistleblowing has been depicted as an ethical dilemma between loyalty to society/public good and loyalty to the organization (Randall, 1987; Vandekerckhove, 2006; Walters, 1975), much of the questions are about their motives and their ability to act on behalf of an interest higher than their own, that is, the public interest. Are their motives "pure?" Can we trust them, Koehn (2002) asks? How do we know that they have evaluated correctly the nature of public interest (Westin, 1981)? Where is their professional responsibility (Bok, 1980)? What about their *real* motives? They might be trying to "save their own skin" as, after all, in the moment of disclosure they assign responsibility to others (Koehn, 2002, p. 472). Their motives are ambiguous and, as Miceli et al. (2008, p. 36) conclude, they "can have mixed motives at the time of deciding to act and it is often difficult empirically to ascertain motives."

Given such ambivalence part of the academic debate addresses normative aspects—when, and how, whistleblowing is morally justified, when it is a moral duty, and when one is morally exempt from acting (Bowie, 1982; De George, 1986; Duska, 2004; Hoffman & McNulty, 2011). This supererogation spurs the legislator to protect whistleblowers. Yet much protective legislation is too often "practically irrelevant" (Alford, 2002, p. 31). The example of the National Health Service (NHS), the U.K.'s state health care provider, is emblematic in briefly illustrating the complexity of reactions to whistleblowing. While the General Medical Council and the PIDA indicate that the duty of a doctor is to report malpractice and that she or he is protected from confidentiality clauses, an investigative feature published in *Private Eye*, tellingly titled "Shoot the Messenger" (2011), shows how whistleblowers are routinely "silenced and sacked." Having established the ambivalent reactions to whistleblowing and the ambiguity ascribed to whistleblowers' motives, I move on to explain my methodology.

Methodology: Literary Text, Reading, and Writing

Methodologically, this article draws its inspiration from a long-standing debate on the contamination and inbreeding between literature and organization studies, evident in the wide use of literature and narratives for pedagogical and research purposes (Phillips, 1995). Literature is used to educate students and managers in grasping the multi-faceted experience and complexity of organizational life (see Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994; Gabriel, 2004). On whistleblowing, Garaventa (1994, p. 374), for example, discusses Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" to understand whistleblowing since "the use of drama and literature on current business problems can provide novel insights for managers and researchers."

Management and business ethics scholars often build an analogy between Antigone and whistleblowers (e.g., Drascek & Maticic, 2007, p. 3). In 2009, the European Business Ethics Network staged Antigone and her disobedience was indicated as a paradigm of whistleblowing (Lagopoulos, 2009). Antigone is considered the political parrhesiastes (Foucault, 2001; Taylor & Vintges, 2004, p. 89; Tindemans, 2010, p. 817) who, according to O'Toole (2008, p. 57), like the celebrated whistleblowers Enron's Watkins, WorldCom's Cooper, and FBI's Rowley, had the courage to speak truth to power. In this article, I invite readers to explore the parallel scholars have drawn between Antigone and whistleblowers by considering what thinkers such as Hegel, Lacan, and Heidegger have written about Antigone, and what such readings of the tragedy can offer to the understanding of whistleblowing.

I read what Hegel has written on Antigone and I re-think whistleblowing with/through him enabling us to appreciate the synchronic but also the diachronic dimension of whistleblowing. I then examine at length the work of Lacan bringing in some of Goethe, Heidegger, and Butler's writings on Antigone. I concentrate on Lacan because he has addressed directly Antigone's allure and her unsettling stance,[4] which, as suggested, is also important for whistleblowers. This elaboration makes it possible to answer the research question and more precisely to recast the synchronic understanding of whistleblowing as a relational process that involves an act

with a political and ethical valence. My intent, to be clear, is not primarily pedagogical. By focusing on reading writings on Antigone, I am sensitive to the "literature turn" (De Cock & Land, 2006) in organization studies (e.g., Cunliffe, Luhmann, & Boje. 2004; Linstead, 2003; Sliwa & Cairns, 2007; Zald, 1996) which has shown how inter-textuality, narrative, and fiction open the space for new knowledge on organization and organizing, including, I suggest, that on whistleblowing. Rhodes (2009), following Taussig's suggestions, has considered the poietic aspect of writing, that is, the making and the performance of a text, where issues of reflection and reflexive responsibility are bounded up with the text. Antigone is a text that brings this to the fore in a powerful way, as argued below.

Philosophers, play-writers, and artists have studied, appropriated, and repeated Antigone for centuries. Hegel considered Antigone the most accomplished of tragedies. She has been subjected to a myriad of interpretations (Leonard, 2005; Söderbäck, 2010; Steiner, 1984; Wilmer & Žukauskaitė, 2010) having been taken as an emblem of anti-authoritarianism, resistance against oppression, and a feminist heroine; used to forward anti-fascism and anti-apartheid in cultural productions of various kinds but also "to justify the most pernicious element of Nazism, the ideology of racial purity and superiority" (Fleming, 2006, p. 165). Interestingly then, it is not only in content that Antigone works as an analogy for a whistleblower's act (its mimetic aspect) but also, importantly, in the obvious allure her ambiguous and ambivalent figure has exercised on Western thinking for the past 2000 years. As indicated, whistleblowers engender the same fascinated ambivalence and ambiguity. This poietic aspect, I argue, opens up ethical dilemmas in as far as Antigone's (and a whistleblowers') act address our ethical stance by questioning our subjectivity. In other words, rather than showing "a way to understand the world" (De Cock & Land, 2006), it is its undecidability and indeterminacy that is suddenly and disturbingly made visible by the acts of Antigone (and that of whistleblowing). Now Antigone.

Antigone

Antigone is the protagonist of a tragedy bearing her name, written by Sophocles and first performed in Greece circa 2500 years ago. Given that the story of Antigone has captured the imagination of countless writers, filmmakers, philosophers, and psychoanalysts—what is the story about? Below is a synopsis:

> The play takes place in Thebe, a city-state in ancient Greece. Thebe was the kingdom of Oedipus but after his death his two sons Polyneices and Eteocles struggled to accommodate who should rule. Polyneices went into exile and Eteocles ruled Thebe. However, Polyneices made an alliance with a rival state and waged war against his brother to take possession of the city. In a fatal battle they perished under each other's arms. This is where the story actually begins.
>
> Creon, the closest male relation to the deceased brothers, takes possession of Thebe and orders "Honor for one, dishonor for the other." While Eteocles is buried with all rites, for Polyneices he decrees that:
>
> "None shall bury him or mourn for him; he must be left to lie unwept, unburied. For hungry birds of prey to swoop and feast" (verses 27-28)
>
> Those infringing the edict must die. But Antigone, sister of Eteocles and Polyneices, does not obey his orders. After a heated discussion with her sister Ismene, who decides not to follow her, Antigone goes not once, but twice to bury her brother. She does so in front of witnesses; and when brought to Creon's audience she is, in the Chorus words, "fierce, defiant: she will not yield to any storm."
>
> She admits she did the deed. When Creon asks her if she knew that this act was forbidden, so giving her another chance to recoil and change her story, she simply says "Of course I knew. There was a proclamation." Creon is almost incredulous "and so you dared to disobey the law?" Antigone launches into a long response. She questions Creon's authority as his decree was only that of a man and she would not disobey the laws of heaven - not for fear of a man or death; and "if you think it folly, then perhaps I am accused of folly by the fool."
>
> Creon is incensed.
>
> "This girl already had fully learned the art of insolence when she transgressed the laws I established; and now to that she adds a second outrage. To boast what she did, and laugh at us. Now she would be the man, not I if she defeated me and did not pay for it." (verses 479-84)
>
> Creon sentences Antigone to be buried alive in a cave. Eventually, Creon, after dissenting discussions with his son Hemon (fiancé of Antigone) and Theresia (the seer), going against everything he had said, changes his mind. But when he reaches the cave to free Antigone, she has already hanged herself. Hemon, Antigone's fiancé and Creon's son, is also at the scene and "with anger in his eyes" attempts to sword his father but misses him and "in remorse" kills himself. Creon is completely broken as he also loses his wife who cursed him for the death of her son as she "put a dagger to her heart and drove it home."

As indicated earlier, O'Toole (2008), for example, proposes an analogy between Antigone, the political parrhesiastes, and the whistleblower. What is the analogy based on? If one considers the meaning attached to the Foucauldian political parrhesiastes, one finds four relational aspects that are similar:

a. There is an asymmetrical relation as the person who speaks out is less powerful than those s/he is speaking to (e.g. Foucault, 2001, p. 18).
b. There is an unsettling nature of such an act and such a figure. Free speech, as Foucault puts it, "acts on people's mind" (p. 12).
c. Both Antigone and the political parrehsiastes speak frankly on what they "believe and know is true" (p.14). Belief and truth coincide and they can not be swayed.
d. There is an element of risk involved. By speaking out one meets with danger (p. 16).

There are also other features that show Antigone as someone who is at once more and not enough of a political parrhesiastes. As a woman, she does not have the specific personal, moral, and social qualities that Foucault finds were necessary for the political parrhesiastes to play its role and speak out checking the power of the sovereign. Antigone is utterly excluded. Her truth coincides with her *logos* that coincide with the *nomos*, but the *nomos* is not hers. As a woman, she is speaking beyond legality, utilitarian rationality, and custom. In addition, no one granted her the parrhesiastes contract empowering her to speak out. Antigone was also more than a political parrhesiastes since, like Socrates, her truth, *logos* and *bios* coincide. She is also, in other words, an ethical parrhesiastes. Not only does she speak truth to power, but she also acts in a way that is congruent in practice with the belief she knows is true. Admittedly, Foucault although referring to her brothers, never writes of Antigone. In this article, I do not draw specifically on Foucault exactly because he has not written about her. However, as indicated, many have drawn the parallel and indeed, as illustrated, there are significant points of contact even if Antigone does unsettle the notion of the political parrhesiastes. Perhaps this is why Foucault did not consider her. She does not quite fit the role of the political parrhesiastes as he deciphered it. Yet, she still fulfils the key aspects of its meaning. This unsettling nature of Antigone, also in relation to the political parrhesiastes, is productive so we shall consider it when significant for our reflections on the figure of the whistleblower.

Reading Antigone With G.W.F. Hegel

The analysis of management and business studies on Antigone pivots around the clash of two moral imperatives—"moral divine law versus human law" (Drascek & Maticic, 2007). Sucher calls it the challenge of "right versus right": two competing rights or moral positions (2007, p. 26). On the one hand, Creon represents the rule of law, the state and the authority keeping the social bond intact (p. 26). On the other hand, Antigone stands for the deep bond of family loyalties (p. 43). This binary opposition reverberates in the traditional Hegelian reading—two rights coming head to head (Hegel, 1807/1977, pp. 266-279; Hegel, 1821/2000, pp. 206-207). However, for Hegel one does not witness a comical situation of a collision of duties (1807/1977, p. 279) but the real and necessary moment of self-consciousness and the pathos of two individuals expressing the necessity of the movement of the human law and the divine law (p. 287). Nonetheless, from where they stand each other's acts are criminal. Antigone finds in Creon an accidental human violence; while Creon, sees only the self-will and disobedience of an individual insisting on its own authority (p. 280). What appears as the will of an isolated individual, Hegel suggests, is the spirit of feminine singularity (pp. 288-289). This singularity of the feminine (the household, the family, the divine, subterranean law) offending, subverting, and as Creon puts it, deriding the masculine (the polity, the public community, the human law) makes possible for the subterranean divine law of kinship to come to the fore as the enemy of the community that needs to be repressed. For Hegel, the community becomes itself only through the suppression of the spirit of singularity (pp. 287-289). Fundamentally then, through Antigone's act toward her brother the family circle is dissolved and the ethical significance of the two sexes can appear and the community be present to itself fully (pp. 275-278). The masculine is established as the realm of polity, law, order, and war that constitutively excludes the feminine (Cavarero, 2010; Derrida, 1986; Irigaray, 1985; Söderbäck, 2010). Arguably then, Antigone, the feminine, the whistleblower, saves the order by threatening the system of power holding the community together with her singular commitment to her brother.

As indicated earlier scholars and commentators largely ascribe to whistleblowers the idea that their act is done in the name of the public good. Reading Hegel invites a more complex interpretation. Antigone never said that burying her brother was done for society's betterment. When it comes to whistleblowers, it is difficult to say with certainty that they act following a moral reasoning that identifies the good of society. Miceli et al. (2008, p. 59) specify that "statistical evidence is scant that employees have actually blown the whistle because of moral reasoning or values" (including religious ones). What Hegel's writing suggests is that the public good, the strengthening of law and order, results from facing the threats that whistleblowers pose in as far as they appear *qua* enemies to such an order. With Hegel one can add that it is the emergence and recognition of the enemy that enables the transformation into a more accomplished and fully actualized ethical and social order.

Can the whistleblower be considered the enemy within? Garaventa (1994) has indeed explored the view of the whistleblower as the "enemy of the people." Moreover, some comments on whistleblowers from distinguished management scholars offer support to such a paradoxical Hegelian reading where the appearance of the enemy strengthens the very order she is deemed to threaten. Prof. Koehn (2002, p. 472), for example, specifies that "whistleblowing creates a whirlwind of suspicions and the impression that corruption is everywhere" thereby stirring an unhealthy doubt that threatens

organizational order. More famously the management guru Peter Drucker was so worried about whistleblowing that for him even encouraging it "corrodes the bond of trust that ties the superior to the subordinate" as doubts are cast on the willingness and ability of the superior to "protect his [*sic*] people" (1981, p. 33). The very social bond, and with it the authority and legitimacy that grant subordination, is seen as threatened by whistleblowing (Mansbach, 2009, p. 367). However, it is not only a synchronic "closing of ranks" against "the will of singularity" that whistleblowing generates. But it is also its working at a diachronic level that Hegel invites us to consider.

The Hegelian reading sheds light on what Vandekerckhove (2006) identifies as the evolution in the discourse of whistleblowing from a conflict between society and organization (the collision of duties) into a discourse of full legitimization offered by burgeoning global protective legislations (p. 3). This normative assurgency, it could be argued, works as the dialectical synthesis that resolves the long-standing conflict between society and organization and, in such a synthesis, Western capitalist societies reach their highest ethical development. The legislative framework suppresses the spirit of singularity by institutionalizing whistleblowing in rules and regulations of how, when, and to whom one must report information about wrongdoings. Tsahuridu and Vandekerckhove (2008, p. 115) call this operation the "institutionalization of the individual," which transforms "employees into centaurs—part human, part organizational being." On similar lines, Alford (2002, pp. 127-130) in an assessment of whistleblowers' stories goes as far as to suggest that it is the sacrifice of whistleblowers that keeps organizational autonomy alive by containing any dangerous individuality. Antigone is entombed and dies. She is not preserved in, and does not belong to, the new ethical order. Likewise it would seem for whistleblowers, who do not belong to the current normative order. They are transformed into dutiful and loyal employees doing their jobs; more "organization man [*sic*]" than ever was thought possible by management commentators who in the 70s and 80s raised the issue of whistleblowers in the United States (Nader, Petkas, & Blackwell, 1972; Randall, 1987; Walters, 1975).

With Hegel, I have established how whistleblowing involves an act of singularity. This has been fecund because it has moved us to consider the synchronic process it generates, that is, a closing of ranks against the enemy that threatens stability. But Hegel's reading has also enabled us to think about the diachronic development of whistleblowing characterized by normative assurgency designed to facilitate and protect whistleblowing by transforming it into an act of duty to inform. The normative assurgency is akin to a parrhesiastes contract tasking all to take the role of speaking out to check the power of those in office and to make sure that such power is not abused. This flattens whistleblowers on to the political parrhesiastes. However, I argue, the "spirit of the singularity" is not completely subsumed into a new order. It always returns as an inhuman perturbing image that never fits completely the role of the political parrhesiastes. Antigone, in her tragic splendor, keeps on provoking philosophers, artists and poets; whistleblowers keep on haunting organizations despite all of the protection afforded by the normative assurgency as scholars like Miceli et al. (2008, p. 34) have ascertained, and the cases of the NHS whistleblowers mentioned earlier exemplify. Now I move on to explore singularity further.

Reading Antigone With Jacques Lacan

One of the most intriguing aspects of whistleblowers is that it is difficult to decipher their motives. In the same way, Antigone is ambiguous in motivating her act. She refers to her family and to the unwritten laws of the Gods; all "high" motives, if with alarming consequences. But then, at a certain point, she says,

> For never, if I had been the mother of children, or if my husband had been moldering in death, would I have taken on this task in defiance of the citizens. To what law do I defer in saying this? My husband being dead, I could have taken another, and a child by another man if I had lost a child; but as my mother and father are hidden in the house of Hades, no brother could have been born again. Such was the law by which I singled you out for honor; but to Creon I seemed to be doing wrong in this and acting as a reckless criminal.

Antigone singles out her brother as motive for her act, the love for her brother in its uniqueness. The above-cited passage of the tragedy is important because it is frequently overlooked and its authenticity often questioned. Goethe, for example, looks at it "as a blemish, quite unworthy after her noble motives." He is so provoked by it that he would "wish for a philologist to prove that it is interpolated and spurious" (Goethe, Eckermann, & Soret., 1850, p. 371). Alas that was not to be. Lacan insists on this passage exactly because the reaction it generates, even for someone like Goethe, points at the ambivalence and ambiguity of what emerges as an act. This act is not as much, Antigone insists, about family or God(s). This is about her brother and her brother only. She hears no reasons about the rights or wrongs Polynices would have committed (toward his family, his city, his honor, etc.) or the perils for herself in burying him. As Lacan writes "Antigone's position represents the radical limit that affirms the unique value of his being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polynices may have done" (1996, p. 344). Her act is a moment of singularity. This is defined as something that is beyond universalizing norms, habits, and wishes. In this sense she is at the limit of what makes sense to others. Antigone's act is seen as senseless and meaningless by those witnessing it, as it regards something that not even her sister appreciates, and it is only, precisely, particularly, and singularly about her—her "pure desire." (p. 348)

Pure Desire

Antigone comes to embody what Lacan calls "pure desire," that is, a desire that, as Van Haute clarifies, is "purified from every calculus, and every attachment that would make her anything other than 'a sister'" (1998, p. 113). In her "pure desire" there is no utilitarian calculus, or universal goodness she is acting in conformity with or for. Hers is a choice that, as Lacan suggests, "is literally motivated by no good" (Lacan, 1996, p. 296). As Miller (2004) elucidates this is "an act" because

> any act worthy of the name isn't deduced (. . .) Even if a careful consideration of the pros and cons precedes it, one recognizes an act as that which exceeds its reasons. The act is never of the order of guarantee, but of the order of risk.

By burying her brother Antigone risks everything. Antigone does not ask or wait for a parrhesiastes contract, and for anyone to authorize her act. As Copjec (2002, p. 42) indicates, she is the guarantor of her own act in as far as she does not seek validation from any other authority. This suggests that whistleblowers be considered, like Antigone, as subjects acting in conformity with the "pure desire" inhabiting them. The rationality of their act is singular and cannot neatly be subsumed into universalizing norms and categories. In this sense, theirs is an act of freedom from the consensual order they are situated in. For those around her, Antigone is at the limit of what makes sense, is understandable, is "human." "Crazy," is how the Chorus (e.g., Theban elders, the citizens) describes Antigone's act; "impossible" is how Ismene describes her sister's act. This is nothing unusual as also the rational abilities of whistleblowers are often questioned. Mansbach (2009, p. 366) indicates that the practice of discrediting whistleblowers in the workplace "by maligning their mental health is not atypical." While statistical evidence is lacking, there are plenty of investigative reports, news, and qualitative data suggesting that this is a familiar reaction to whistleblowers. In the NHS cases on whistleblowing, for example, Dr. David Drew's boss sent him to an urgent psychiatric appointment after he had spoken out against malpractices in the hospital ("Another Whistleblower," 2011).

In recasting whistleblowing as a process that involves an act of singularity, it becomes possible to appreciate why motives are so "impure" that is, empirically they are confused, ambiguous, and difficult to study, as Miceli et al. have discovered. What are normally called "motives" stand for this thing that we cannot understand/ascertain that puzzles us. This is, I propose, nothing other than the disturbing emergence of the singularity of "pure desire." This seizes the subject who, often after years of witnessing questionable practices, "has had enough,' cannot stay silent anymore, and acts on what Alford (2002, p. 40) characterizes as a "choiceless choice." For whistleblowers, remaining silent is simply not an option any more (Mansbach, 2009, p. 369). Noticeably, "pure desire" is uncountable and unaccountable. Lacan calls it "an incommensurable measure" (1996, p. 388) that cannot be forced into categories and their variation counted. If at the synchronic level whistleblowing involves the assurgency of pure desire then one can see why "motives" are so slippery and ambiguous and are so difficult to classify and measure empirically. This explains the limit encountered by empiricist research in this specific area of studies designed to ascertain why individuals blow the whistle.

Interestingly, in the debate on whistleblowing at the diachronic level one notices a progressive *désintéressement* from motives and a simultaneous growing interest in whistleblowing as a way to access and control organizational information. Motives tend to lose their importance particularly in the efficiency thesis bounded up to the legitimization discourse (see Lewis, 2001; Vandekerckhove, 2006). This thesis affirms that the dominant process of institutionalization and legitimization of whistleblowing has been mostly performed and rationalized through calls to efficiency. At the current levels of complexity, it is more efficient for organizations to facilitate whistleblowing acts as this reduces wastage and costs, that is, possible lawsuits, damages to reputation, and brand power. If organizations are more efficient also in this ethical sense, then everyone is better off; the ideal is realized as the triple bottom line (economic, social, and environmental) is actualized. In this discourse, public good and organizational good are the same. All permutations between public good, organizational good, individual good, environmental good, and consumer good are possible as they are all punctuated by the efficient organization as the guarantor which produces a wealthier and happier world. Such a process of *désintéressement* performs a cleansing of singularity in as far as it (attempts to) transform(s) whistleblowers into dutiful informers, guaranteeing an organizational betterment which all (employees, customers, the public) can enjoy.

This attempt to sanitize the singularity of "pure desire" from social relations was identified by Lacan as the post-revolutionary perspective (Lacan, 1996, p. 391). Traditional ethics, Lacan suggests, attempts in all of its forms "the cleaning up of desire" (p. 386) to reinstate/posit subjects at what he calls "the service of good," that is, "private goods, family goods, domestic goods, other goods that solicit us, the goods of our trade or profession and the goods of the city" (p. 303). Being at the service of good for Lacan coincides with the morality of power. While this may have diverse versions/forms it has a common exhortation: "Let's keep on working and as far as desire is concerned come back later!" (p. 391). I submit that this is what one finds in the process of *désintéressement* performed by the legitimization discourse. It does not matter why one blows the whistle. What matters is that the information reaches official channels (Lewis, 2001, pp. 3,152), because, as Lacan writes, what counts is that "work must go on" (Lacan,1996, p. 387). The NHS cases reported in "Shoot the Messenger" (2011) follow this logic in as far as

the information is gathered and hence all is working appropriately; but, then, whistleblowers are routinely gagged. For example, investigations on the effectiveness of legislative protection, such as the PIDA, have shown that this is "subject to an effective gag" (James, 2011, p. 119), and that it is not fit for purpose (Hill, 2013). In practice, work must go on. No further disruption is wanted.

On accepting that whistleblowing involves an act of singularity, of "pure desire" that seizes the subject, then what one witnesses in this mushrooming normative and cultural transformation is the attempt to vanquish individuality not only as a particularity but also as an actual singularity. Copjec (2002) proposes a difference between the two that is instructive. She indicates that particularity is something that is ephemeral and does not endure. But, she notes, singularity has something "more" in that it gives rise to a sense of immortality, something that has the features of what "must be" and can not die (Copjec, 2002, p. 24). This is what forever returns/establishes the poignancy, fascination and insistence of Antigone's "pure desire." Such consideration presupposes someone witnessing such an act and feeling the poignancy, insistence, and fascination. So it is these witnesses I now discuss to highlight the relational process of constitution of subjectivities whistleblowing is linked with and its ethical and political valence.

The Limit

For Lacan, Antigone has a beautiful unbearable splendor when she is already inhuman even if she is still among humans. Her decision and her act is "inhuman" in the sense of it being, as her sister Ismene put it, impossible, that is, incomprehensible and alien. Antigone is already symbolically dead as with her act she no longer occupies the social, familiar place where she used to belong. Antigone does what is deemed impossible for a woman and breaks with the community bonds, with the expectations of her gender role, with the only familial ties she has left. She is living as if she was already dead, a position Alford (2007, p. 240) finds many whistleblowers to be in. Eagleton calls it "a twilight region beyond conventional mores" (2010, p. 101). Antigone is, and here Lacan meets Heidegger (1984/1996), uncanny and unhomely in the sense of what is not "at home" and "is a frightening and alienating place" (p. 71). In her trajectory to the cave where she will be entombed alive, she is on unchartered territory, at the limit-zone between life and death. In such a limit-zone, the tragedy's Chorus witnesses her and sees her in her beautiful splendor "Antigone has an unbearable splendor; a quality that both attracts us and startles us, in the sense that intimidates us: this terrible self-willed victim disturbs us" (Lacan, 1996, p. 305). Similarly, Heidegger tells us that the reaction to the uncanny "gives rise to anxiety" (1985/1996, p. 71). In summary, the encounter with such a beautiful image of the limit has "the most strange and most profound of effects" (Lacan, 1996, p. 306). These effects are not only at the level of knowledge in that confusion ensues and "critical judgments vacillate [and] analysis stops" (p. 346). But the effects also involve "a state of excitement" that Lacan indicates, "is involved in the sphere of power relations; it is notably something that makes you lose them" (p. 307).

This Lacanian reading of Antigone indicates, first, why whistleblowers afford the ambivalent perturbing and even fascinated reactions indicated so far. This is because whistleblowers with their act are in the position of the limit of the possible. They no longer respond to what makes sense that is, the web of expectations, the modus operandi, the organizational common sense, the rules of the game, where they are embedded and situated (which involves also ignoring certain rules, values, etc.). Their act disturbs the tranquillity and smooth functioning of what is normal, intelligible, and homely.

Lacan's reading of Antigone also suggests that witnessing such an act throws everything into confusion. One is affected not only at the level of knowledge because everything becomes confused but also one is affected with a state of excitement that seizes those witnessing whistleblowing. What one relied on for solidity and stability vacillates and suddenly the web of power relations that guarantees one's position (one's moves) is unbalanced. Measurable, accountable moves are suddenly lost and therefore new possibilities open up for a decision on where one stands and what one wants. In other words, new subjectivities are made possible including political ones. In the text we read that Hemon tells Creon that the city whispers support for Antigone. Antigone' defiant act interrogates the inhabitants of Thebe on what they want and what they think is right. The point suggested is that by encountering whistleblowers (as those inhabiting their "pure desire"), we confronted and interrogated "on the desire that we 'are'," as De Kesel (2009, p. 263) puts it. Such acts disturb all the moves (including ours) that keep the servicing of the good(s) going as the smooth running of work suddenly glitches. In witnessing such an act one cannot just "keep on working" as "pure desire" is made, for a moment, visible and its power affects us unaccountably.

Discussion

On reading writings on Antigone and relating this to whistleblowers, I suggest that whistleblowing cannot be predicted and controlled because it involves a moment of singularity. This recasting opens up new research avenues. One can stop pining over the little new advancement of the empiricist agenda and instead creatively engage with new research on whistleblowing. For example, one may research further the "legitimization discourse." This at the diachronic level indicates the normative solidification (at the legal and cultural levels) aimed at protecting, supporting, and favoring whistleblowing. Research is needed to explore empirically the

legitimization thesis (Artszulowicz & Gasparski, 2011; Lewis, 2001; Vandekerckhove, 2006). For example, to what extent this is widespread; what favors it and impedes it. Further research is also needed to evaluate more thoroughly (including empirically) the consequences this legitimization discourse has at the ethico-political level.

A current view on the impact and consequences of this legitimization discourse can be traced throughout this article. But it is worth elucidating it here. *Prima facie*, this discourse is an extremely positive development. It reduces the negative connotations of whistleblowing and it aims to protect whistleblowers. One cannot but welcome this as a progressive advancement. The discourse invites/produces the highest ethical organizational development and provides a win-win for all in our current Western social order. Whistleblowing is solidified as a duty of disclosure in the name of information gathering that increases efficiency, problem solving, and quality. Additional reflections on this discourse are, however, worth considering even if they may be slightly disconcerting.

In such a legitimization discourse whistleblowers are indeed cast as informers. Peter Drucker equated whistleblowing with informing but, as he dramatically hinted, "perhaps it is not quite irrelevant that the only societies in Western history that encouraged informers were bloody and infamous tyrannies" (Drucker, 1981, p. 33). *Pace* Drucker, in a full reversal "informers" are not seen as a negative feature of totalitarian regimes but rather as a positive feature to be actively encouraged, even demanded by company codes, industry and professional charters, and legal codes. This is problematic because it begs the following question: Could it be that rather than changing the way we perceive informers we have instead introjected the features of authoritarian regimes? It is worth leaving this question open as a stimulus to readers and as another avenue for further research. Certainly, readings of Antigone caution us on taking the progressive nature of the legitimization discourse at face value. It has a silenced political undertone, which repeats a conservative stance by predicating what good is. In other words, it gives "good" a full content and normalizes it as something good-for-all. Specifically, good is what delivers efficiency and quality so serving the continuation of the current socio-economic and political system with the efficient organization at its center. However, given the inequalities, injustices, and waste our global system perpetuates, something that is designed to perpetuate it may not be such a desirable thing after all. Moreover, as Miceli et al. (2008) have noticed, and the NHS cases exemplified, this does not work. Those labeled "whistleblowers" are not more protected/controlled "despite years of legislation designed to achieve the opposite" (p. 34). As Mansbach (2009) also puts it, "Existing legislation to protect whistleblowers from consequent harassment and job loss has proven, in the great majority of cases, to be ineffectual" (p. 367). As with Antigone, there is more to whistleblowers than the political parrhesiastes discussed by Foucault, as the total coincidence between *logos, nomos*, and truth is awry. Our reading of Antigone's pure desire has suggested why this maybe the case. It is not accidental that the legitimization discourse aims to erase the singularity of the whistleblowing act, as discussed so far, given that the emergence of singularity—of "pure desire"—terribly perturbs the normal functioning of the service of the good(s) on which the socio-politico-economic system relies on for its continuation. As Lacan puts it, the morality of power is clear, as far as "pure desire" is concerned "come back later!"

The other implication I draw from readings on Antigone is that whistleblowing has a political valence (Contu, 2008; Mansbach, 2009, 2011; Rothschild & Miethe, 1994). One needs to come to terms with the fact that whistleblowing acts cannot be completely eliminated by regulation/legislation. Empiricists like Miceli et al. have noticed as much. Philosophically this indicates what makes humans specifically humans. Humanity, I specify with Copjec (2002) earlier and now with Badiou (2001), is that which makes us "something other than a mortal being." Humanity is the immortal singularity we have seen emerging in Antigone's act, the uncompromising stance of not "giving ground relative on one's desire" as Lacan (1996, p. 319) puts it. In the most unpredictable of situations, everyone can be immortal and be seen to speak truth to power shaking the modus operandi reproducing the organizational reality one is embedded in. Empirical research has been unable to show that there are inherent differences between those who blow the whistle and those who do not (Miceli et al., 2008, p. 98). Whistleblowers have not been found to be especially "moral" people, "religious" people, "political" people, or "socially responsible" people. Indeed "most truth-tellers in the workplace are ordinary people" (Mansbach., 2009, p. 366). Anyone can in a particular situation speak out regardless of what everyone else thinks and regardless of their own good because something in the focal activity they witness suddenly coincides with their pure desire literally making it "their business" (Lacan, 1996, p. 319). Witnessing this shakes and moves the system of power where work goes on. This, as Mansbach (2011, 2009) put it, involves an individual micro-political act. Specifically, I suggest this act is to be understood as "political" because it becomes the condition of possibility for something that does not exist yet. What does it mean? To explain this, one needs to consider the process of what is engendered by the confrontation with the act as, in that moment of singularity, the smooth functioning of work and the motions and knowledge(s) supporting it quiver. In such conditions a reconfiguration and transformation of the existing modus operandi is possible. This is consistent with the understanding of the political (and of politics) as what is primary to the constitution and creation of social relations (e.g., Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and not only their reproduction where politics is under the principle of consistency. *Pari*

passu one should clarify that I am not saying that such acts provide a "model" for progressive ethico-political action (Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 114). Antigone, like most (if not all) whistleblowers, does not do that. Whistleblowing is not a model as it is not a representation; or, better, as a representation is always impure, ambiguous, and ambivalent to those witnessing it. As Butler put it,

> as a figure of politics [Antigone] points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to the political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed. (2000, p. 2)

Witnessing whistleblowing shakes and dislocates the smooth routine, and often tacit, modus operandi of work. Such witnessing bears important consequences that one can see in the process of the constitution of subjectivities therein generated. The main consequence is the decisions those encountering whistleblowing take in the moment in which what they do and know of is profoundly shaken. In other words, and this is another implication and hence our third contribution, whistleblowing is never only about "them," the whistleblowers. Instead, it is relational and quite obviously is about those witnessing whistleblowing and their responses to what they see and feel. Antigone's practice involves an act that makes Creon, his decisions and everything else quiver. Antigone's (and I argue whistleblowers') act "touches the void inherent in any normative order, a void revealing the contingent character of its working and the contingent character of any law that is universalizable" (Sjöholm, 2004, p. 108). When contingency comes into sight automatic processes of reproduction are momentarily suspended so a new political constitution is possible (Glynos & Howarth, 2007); a new subject may emerge, or the old one is "re-booted" but maybe with new features.

Whistleblowing just like Antigone has a poietic aspect that questions the subjectivity of those coming into contact with it. This is why whistleblowing has an ethical valence, because it directs a question to what regards unswervingly our very being "subjects." By this I imply both meanings of the word "subject." The first is "subjects to" a specific order, authority, and system of power relations.[5] The second is "subjects" as what exactly escapes such a system. Here the latter was equated with the subject of the "pure desire" that inhabits each of us, which we do not know until it seizes us in a particular situation (for whistleblowers this situation has to do with the focal activity) which catches us as "the track of something that is specifically our business" (Lacan, 1996, p. 319). When one is blinded by the "splendor" of the image of this "subject" then in re-opening the eyes, the former notion—that of being subject "to"—shakes and a response on where one stands is called for. This opens up the possibility of what Eagleton (2010), for example, calls a metanoia, that is, a shift of mind, which requires a judgment and a reorientation. A new subjectivity is therefore possible: one that may politicize the particular situation transforming it into a political cause (Rothschild & Miethe, 1994). In short, as Mansbach (2009) suggests, whistleblowing has a political value "that should not be underestimated" as it "influences how subjectivities are produced" (pp. 21-22).

The actuality of what is then articulated after witnessing whistleblowing is important to politics proper as evident in the response given to the act of whistleblowing, specifically, in the decision[6] that retroactively enables an answer to the following questions: Do I support the whistleblower? What is now to be done? What actions do I actually take? To clarify, the momentary blindness, the vacillation of what I know of and take for granted, and the state of excitement therein generated, do not necessarily bring a radical or even progressive change. It is also possible that the responses (and therefore the subjectivity therein articulated) are "ideological" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) that is, they close down the radical contingency opened up by the singularity involved in whistleblowing. If we return to Antigone, as I have described above, people's support was growing for her in the city. One does not know support for what exactly, but what this implies is the possibility that after seeing Antigone's image, with its perturbing and unsettling features, those witnessing it are interrogated on what has happened and where they stand and what they want. Depending on their deliberations, the image of Antigone could be transformed into the symbol of a political struggle, for example, one could speculate, to free Antigone and to depose Creon; or, to guarantee public rights for women. These theoretical considerations offer new ground for exciting empirical investigations on the emergence (or not) of new subjectivities, if they have a political valence and if and how social (and organizational) change is spurred (or not) by whistleblowing.

The final proposed implication of our readings on Antigone points toward the ethical valence and dimension involved in whistleblowing. Exploring in full, this ethical dimension is far beyond the scope of this article. As suggested, this ethics is not to be conflated with morality as it does not regard the description of what good is and the prescriptions on how it should be practiced. But it regards the constitution of subjectivities and the responsibility of the answers given once the subjectivity (and its position in the world) is unsettled and radically questioned. This implies that deliberations and decisions matter and responsibility is heightened. In addition, here I want to suggest how this ethics is different from "business ethics" that is largely an "ethics of maintenance" where change (when deemed possible) is designed for continuity and for the smooth functioning of organizational operations (see also Jones et al., 2005). This maintenance requires constant communication on what good is and how to promote it and achieve it. The "good" comes under the diverse forms of duty, virtue, self-interest, and all the models on how to implement it. The discussion in business ethics, which attempts to establish when whistleblowing is a duty, is exactly of this kind.

The process of *désintéressement* I have highlighted facilitates the ethics of maintenance as it enacts a detachment from "pure desire" by attempting to pre-empt sudden bursts of immortality. As in one of the signifying traces of the term *désintéressement*, individuals are literally "paid off" to keep at bay the "pure desire" that inhabits them, so maintaining them as subjects to the system they belong to. Paying individuals off entangles them into their self-interest and into the market where everything, including one's words and deeds, can be counted, bought, and sold. The ethics one glimpses at through the acts of whistleblowers is an ethics where one does not accept payments and instead pays the price for accessing one's "pure desire." In the NHS cases Dr. David Drew, for example, refused a pay out of £250,000 to keep quiet.

Conclusions

Philosophical and psychoanalytic readings of Antigone may not be the most obvious place for a discussion on whistleblowing. One could simply accept that indeed whistleblowers act out of a pro-social desire. But, this line of research has stumbled across various obstacles. Political parrhesia, free speech, when it comes to organizations and the figure of the whistleblower, is a problematic practice and its control, prediction, and protection have proven to be extremely difficult. Difficulties include the unsettling and ambivalent reactions engendered in those witnessing (and studying) their acts; and the organizational complexities that, regardless of legislations/codes and procedures, have not been able to control and protect them, that is, the parrhesiastes contract does not work. In answering Morrison's call to replenish this research arena by proposing novel ways of thinking about whistleblowing, I mobilized readings of a literary text—Antigone. There are many precedents using literature, myths, and stories to discuss organizational phenomena (e.g., Gabriel, 2004) including whistleblowing (e.g., Garaventa, 1994).

Given the number of writings on Antigone, I have had to piece together the most poignant in relation to the research question on the ambivalent reactions that whistleblowers engender and the ambiguity of their motives. The Hegelian and Lacanian readings of Antigone have been central exactly because they enable answers to the question and the key related issues. Noticeably, Lacan's discussion on desire, pure and otherwise, moved on from the way discussed in Seminar VII, and it is hugely debated. And there are different interpretations of Hegel's work. But our literary exercise, furnished with real-life examples from the NHS, has generated a myriad of productive reflections to think about the process of whistleblowing in new ways, just as Morrison called for, thereby opening up to the r(el)ationality of whistleblowing. The rationality of whistleblowing is singular and does not fit universal codes. The process of blowing the whistle involves a singularity that can not be simply and fully pigeon-holed, counted, and accounted within the mores and rules (spoken and unspoken) governing the social (and organizational) fabric. This explains the limits encountered by empiricist research that aims to understand what causes for individuals to blow the whistle. The relationality of whistleblowing has helped us to highlight its political and ethical valence. The political valence is because by shaking the taken-for-granted the act involved in whistleblowing impresses on those witnessing it the contingency of the modus operandi of the organizational (hence social) order opening up new ways of doing. The ethical valence is because the act involved in whistleblowing opens up opportunities for critical reflections and the constitution of new subjectivities. As such this act is not purely pro-social. Paradoxically, this might be considered an act of "no good" in as far as it supersedes the order of morality, the set of values and rules for action that guarantees what I called here the "ethics of maintenance," which is pervasive in organizations (see Jones et al., 2005).

Moreover, fundamental to our new way of thinking about whistleblowers is that whistleblowing is pro-social, but in a paradoxical and impure way. This is because blowing the whistle involves an act that is "at the limit" of the social fabric where the individual blowing the whistle are situated and embedded in. Their acts have an ethical valence that maybe paradoxically for "no good," at least of "good" as we know it, that is, the good(s) we serve. Based on the reflections produced here, I have highlighted a number of avenues for empirical research which can be useful to scholars who want to engage with this subject but found unappealing its lack of progress or its empiricist agenda. In conclusion, I reiterate with Brown (and replacing the word "Antigone" with "whistleblowers") the key idea of this article:

> what matters about whistleblowers [is] not that we should respond to them in a particular way but that they compel such serious attention, forcing us, as we respond, to confront some of our most fundamental ethical assumptions. You may love whistleblowers or hate them, what no thinking person has ever managed to do is to ignore them. (Brown, 1986, p. 10)

This article has examined this poietic and relational aspect of whistleblowing by investigating why their acts are seen as so ambivalent and ambiguous. I have also addressed why they still "haunt" organizations, despite the fact that organizations, the legislator, and management researchers eagerly attempt to control and protect them. Whistleblowing, by showing the unsettling contingency of work's modus operandi, questions the very constitution of subjectivities. This is because hearing the whistle, that is, seeing the singularity of the act, shakes us and demands the responsibility for deliberations and decisions that have a political and ethical valence as they are an occasion for reiterating or reshaping values and practices. This act offers us glimpses of an ethics that is only potentially and paradoxically "pro-social," and it is not necessarily "for the social" as we know it.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the participants and the organizers of the three events where I presented some of the main ideas of this paper, for graciously inviting me and for offering many insightful comments. The first was the keynote for the Researching Work and Learning 6th International Conference in Denmark in July 2009; the second a seminar I gave at Cardiff Business School, UK, in November of the same year; the third was the 2nd Lacan at Work Conference hosted in June 2013 in Paris by Gilles Arnaud at ESCP Europe. I also thank Martyna Sliwa for the useful references she suggested on the literary turn in OS and Kate Kenny for discussing her research on whistleblowing with me. Thanks finally go to Adam James, Andre Spicer, Andrew Brown, Campbell Jones, Davide Nicolini, Hugh Willmott, Iain Munro, Martin Parker, Michaela Driver and three anonymous JMI reviewers for their detailed comments on earlier drafts.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. This definition excludes anonymous reporting because this is a consequence of whistleblowing as a phenomenon. Organizations have been advised to introduce anonymous hotlines as one of the ways to manage their ethical conduct and increase the chances of detecting wrongdoings exactly because anonymity reduces the chances of retaliation experienced by whistleblowers, that is, those who actually report wrongdoings directly to whoever can act and put things right. Anonymous reporting can be abused and misused. The KMPG (2007) study, however, shows it also has major positive effects.
2. Clearly, also the readers of this paper would have a positive or negative attitude toward whistleblowers as their presence has already made an enduring mark on our collective lives and also on many of our individual lives. Therefore, to avoid the dismissal of our work due to the reactions to the whistleblowers rather than to an evaluation of our argument, I invite readers to bracket their reaction and attitude and adopt an open and reflexive stance, so as to follow our argumentations.
3. Similarly to Miceli, Near, and Dworkin. (2008), I do not build on the distinction between internal and external whistleblowers as this distinction is not productive in answering our current research question. Miceli et al. have indicated most external whistleblower were first internal ones, so researching this distinction may be useful for other questions, for example, when investigating what prompts them to become external ones.
4. Antigone is a figure of contention in cultural studies and political philosophy circles. Slavoj Žižek and Yannis Stavrakakis are two of the authors who have had a long-standing debate on the significance or not of Antigone to the project of what Stavrakakis calls the Lacanian Left. I enter this debate fully in another paper for a different audience because doing so here would be a distraction from whistleblowing—our main issue. However, we do refer to this debate briefly (p. 28) when it is relevant to make a point on whistleblowing. Without going in much detail suffice here to say that what is missing in this debate is exactly the question of the lure of Antigone, her poietic stance, and why she "bothers" everyone so much. This is the question to ask which is productive for understanding the ethico-political valence of certain acts, including whistleblowing.
5. This is why a certain overlapping would seem to appear here between the ethical and the political.
6. Decision here is not to be reduced to cognitivist or intellectualist terms because, among other reasons, those are also shaken and dislocated by coming face-to-face with the singularity of the act.

References

Alford, C. F. (2002). *Whistleblowers: Broken lives and organizational power*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Alford, C. F. (2007). Whistleblower narratives: The experience of choiceless choice. *Social Research Spring*, *74*, 223-248.

Another whistleblower refuses to take the hush money. (2011). *Private Eye*, n.1293.

Artszulowicz, M., & Gasparski, W. (2011). *Whistleblowing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher.

Badiou, A. (2001). *Ethics*. London, England: Verso.

Bok, S. (1980). Whistleblowing and professional responsibilities. *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, *11*, 277-295.

Bouville, M. (2008). Whistleblowing and morality. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *81*, 579-585.

Bowie, N. (1982). *Business ethics*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Brown, A. (1986). *Sophocles: Antigone*. Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips.

Butler, J. (2000). *Antigone's claim: Kinship between life and death*. NY: Columbia University Press.

Cavarero, A. (2010). On the body of Antigone. In F. Söderbäck (Ed.), *Feminist readings of antigone* (pp. 45-64). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Contu, A. (2008). Decaf resistance on misbehaviour, cynicism and desire in liberal workplaces. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *31*(3), 364-79.

Copjec, J. (2002). *Imagine there is no woman: Ethics and sublimation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cunliffe, A., Luhmann, J., & Boje, D. (2004). Narrative temporality: Implications for organizational research. *Organization Studies*, *25*, 261-286.

Czarniawska-Joerges, B., & Guillet de Monthoux, P. (1994). *Good novels, better management: Reading organizational realities*. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers.

De Cock, C., & Land, C. (2006). Organization/literature: Exploring the seam. *Organization Studies*, *27*, 517-535.

De George, R. T. (1986). *Business ethics*. New York, NY: MacMillan.

De Kesel, M. (2009). *Eros and ethics*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Derrida, J. (1986). *Glas*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Drascek, M., & Maticic, S. (2007). What managers could see in the philosophical block of "free will"? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *8*, 11-14.

Drucker, P. (1981). What is "business ethics." *The Public Interest*, *63*, 18-36.

Duska, R. (2004). Whistleblowing and employee loyalty. In T. L. Beauchamp & N. Bowie (Eds.), *Ethical theory and business* (7th ed., pp. 305-309). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Eagleton, T. (2010). Lacan's Antigone. In S.E. Wilmer & A. Žukauskaitė (Eds.), *Interrogating Antigone in postmodern philosophy and criticism* (pp. 101-109). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Fleming, K. (2006). Fascism on stage: Jean Anouilh's Antigone. In V. Zajko & M. Leonard (Eds.), *Laughing with Medusa: Classical myth and feminist thought* (pp. 163-188). NY: Oxford University Press.

Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless speech*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e).

Gabriel, Y. (2004). *Myths, stories and organizations*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Garaventa, E. (1994). An enemy of the people by Henrik Ibsen. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *3*, 369-374.

Glaser, M. P., & Glaser, P. M. (1989). *The whistleblower*. New York , NY: Basic books.

Glynos, J., & Howarth, D. (2007). *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Goethe, V. J. W., Eckermann, J. P., & Soret, F. J. (1850). *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret* 1. London, England: Smith, Elder and Co.

Grant, C. (2002). Whistleblowers: Saints of secular culture. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *39*, 91-99.

Griffith Media Release. (2012). *Australia not an "anti-dobbing" culture: First whistleblowing survey results*. Retrieved from www.griffith.edu.au/whistleblowing

Gundlach, M., Douglas, S., & Martinko, M. (2003). The decision to blow the whistle. *Academy of Management Review*, *28*, 107-123.

Gutting, G. (Ed.). (2005). *Continental philosophy of science*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). *Phenomenology of spirit* (A.V. Miller trans.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press (Original work published 1807)

Hegel, G. W. F. (2000). *Elements of the philosophy of rights* (A. Wood, Ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (Original work published 1821)

Heidegger, M. (1984/1996). *Hölderin's Hyms "the Ister."* Bloomington: Indiana University Press (Original work published 1984).

Hill, A. (2013, February). Whistleblowers to be protected from harassment from co-workers. *The Guardian*, P. 21.

Hoffman, W. M., & McNulty, R. E. (2011). A business ethics of whistleblowing. In M. Arsuzulowicz & W. Gasparski (Eds.), *Whistleblowing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Hunton, J. E., & Rose, J. M. (2011). Effects of anonymous whistleblowing and perceived reputation threats on investigations of reputation threats by audit committee members. *Journal of Management Studies*, *48*, 75-98.

Irigaray, L. (1985). *Speculum of the other women*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

James, C. (2011). Whistleblowing, risk and regulation. In D. Lewis & W. Vandekerckhove (Eds.), *Whistleblowing and democratic values* (pp. 115-26). International Whistleblowing Research Network. Available at https://www.academia.edu/1348441/Whistleblowing_and_Democratic_Values_free_ebook_

Jones, C., Parker, M., & Ten Bos, R. (2005). *For business ethics*. London, England: Routledge.

Jos, P., Tompkins, M., & Hayes, S. (1989). In praise of difficult people: A portrait of the committed whistleblower. *Public Administration Review*. 552-561.

Koehn, D. (2002). Whistleblowing and trust. In L. P. Hartman (Ed.), *Perspectives in business ethics* (2nd ed., pp. 456-64). NY: McGraw-Hill.

KPMG. (2007). *Profile of a fraudster survey 2007*. Switzerland: KPMG Forensic. Available at http://thoughtbydesign.com/kpmg3/

Lacan, J., (1996). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan 1959-1960: The ethics of psychoanalysis* (Vol. Book VII). New york, NY: W.W.Norton.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. London, England: Verso.

Lagopoulos, I. (2009). *Sophocles's "Antigone" theatrical play*. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:nzfnZolfsaMJ:www.eben.gr/site/PDF/22nd%2520EBEN%2520AC%25202009,%2520Antigone%2520Implications.pdf+&hl=en&gl=uk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiQq40GpPf60ubDlZ18g90qvH5bGAhnqnlQOXccBoNmA5j0Hb9gJvoogHcqqJqkGjnTwtq43p2eZG3E_9iCV17XrYmimqXLxXX77Sv2IIrap8O2cPPh35JcpfdjoY49nW-x9_Bn&sig=AHIEtbTWjej0Pg_AA1H3BL2pxuYF1jlt3A&pli=1

Leonard, M. (2005). *Athens in Paris*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, D. (2001). *Whistleblowig at work*. London, England: The Athlone Press.

Linstead, S. (Ed.). (2003). *Text/work: Representing organization and organizing representation*. London, England: Routledge.

Mansbach, A. (2009). Keeping democracy vibrant. *Constellations*, *16*, 363-374.

Mansbach, A. (2011). Whistleblowing as fearless speech. In D. Lewis & W. Vandekerckhove (Eds.), *Whistleblowing and democratic values* (pp. 12-26). International Whistleblowing Research Network. Available at https://www.academia.edu/1348441/Whistleblowing_and_Democratic_Values_free_ebook_

Miceli, M. P., & Near, J. P. (1984). The relationship among beliefs, organizational position and whistleblowing status. *Academy of Management Journal*, *27*, 687-705.

Miceli, M. P., & Near, J. P. (2002). What makes whistleblowers effective? *Human Relations*, *55*, 455-479.

Miceli, M. P., Near, J. P., & Dworkin, T. M. (2008). *Whistleblowing in organizations*. New york, NY: Routledge.

MMiller, J. A. (2004, Winter). Σ(x) (D. Collins, trans., Issue 5). Retrieved from http://www.lacan.com/sigmaxf.htm

Morrison, W. E. (2009). Marcia P. Miceli, Janet P. Near, and Terry Morehead Dworkin: Whistleblowing in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*, 344-346.

Nader, R., Petkas, P., & Blackwell, K. (1972). *Whistleblowing*. NY: Bantam Books.

Nam, D., & Lemak, D. J. (2007). The whistleblowing zone: Applying Barnard's insights to a modern ethical dilemma. *Journal of Management History*, *13*, 33-42.

Near, J. P., Dowrkin, T. M., & Miceli, M. P. (1993). Explaining the whistleblowing process. *Organization Science*, *4*, 393-411.

Near, J. P., & Miceli, M. P. (1995). Effective whistleblowing. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*, 679-708.

Near, J. P., & Miceli, M. P. (1996). Whistleblowing: Myth and reality. *Journal of Management*. *22*, 507-526.

O'Toole, J. (2008). Speaking truth to power. In W. Bennis, D. Goleman, & J. O'Toole (Eds.), *Transparency: How leaders create a culture of candor* (pp. 45-92). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Parmelee, M. A., Near, J. P., & Jensen, T. C. (1982). Correlates of whistleblowers perceptions of organizational retaliation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *27*, 17-34.

Perry, N. (1998). Indecent exposures: Theorizing whistleblowing. *Organization Studies*, *19* (2), 235-257.

Phillips, N. (1995). Telling organizational tales. *Organization Studies*, *16*, 625-649.

Randall, D. (1987). Commitment and the organization: The organization man revisited. *The Academy of Management Review*, *12*, 460-471.

Regh, M. T., Miceli, M. P., Near, J. P., & Van Scotter, J. R. (2008). Antecedents and outcomes of retaliations against whistleblowers. *Organization Science*, *19*, 221-240.

Rhodes, C. (2009). After reflexivity: Ethics, freedom and the writing of organization studies. *Organization Studies*, *30*, 653-672.

Rothschild, J., & Miethe, T. D. (1994). *Whistleblowing as resistance*. In J. M. Jermier, D. Knights, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Resistance and power in organizations* (pp. 322-47). London, England: Routledge.

Shoot the messenger: How NHS whistleblowers are silenced and sacked. (2011, July). *Private Eye*, n.1292.

Sjöholm, C. (2004). *The Antigone complex*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Skivenes, M., & Trygstad, S. C. (2010). When whistleblowing works: The norwegian case. *Human Relations*, *63*, 1071-1097.

Sliwa, M., & Cairns, J. (2007). The novel as a vehicle for organizational inquiry. *Ephemera*, *7*, 309-325.

Söderbäck, F. (2010). Why Antigone today? In F. Söderbäck (Ed.), *Feminist readings of Antigone* (pp. 1-14). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Stavrakakis, Y. (2008). *The Lacanian left*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Steiner, G. (1984). *Antigones*. New Haven, NY: Oxford University Press.

Sucher, S. (2007). *The moral leader: Challenges, insights, and tools*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Taylor, D., & Vintges, K. (2004). *Feminism and the final foucault*. Urbana:University of Illinois Press.

Tindemans, K. (2010). Antigone and the law. In S.E. Wilmer & A. Žukauskaitė (Eds.), *Interrogating Antigone in postmodern philosophy and criticism* (pp. 185-96). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Tsahuridu, E., & Vandekerckhove, W. (2008). Organisational whistleblowing policies. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *82*, 107-118.

Vandekerckhove, W. (2006). *Whistleblowing and organizational social responsibility*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Van Haute, P. (1998). *Death and sublimation in Lacan's reading of Antigone*. In S. Harasym (Ed.), *Levinas and Lacan: The missed encounter* (pp. 102-120). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Walters, K. D. (1975, July-August). Your employee's right to blow the whistle. *Harvard Business Review*, *53*, 26-34.

Wee, H. (2002, January 30). The right way to blow the whistle. *Business Week*. Retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2002-01-29/the-right-way-to-blow-the-whistle

Weiskopf, R., & Willmott, H. (2013). Ethics as critical practice. *Organization Studies*, *34*, 469-493.

Westin, A. (Ed.). (1981). *Whistleblowing*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Wilmer, S. E. & Žukauskaitė, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Interrogating Antigone in postmodern philosophy and criticism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Zald, M. (1996). More fragmentation? Unfinished business in linking the social sciences and the humanities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *41*, 251-261.

Author Biography

Alessia Contu is an associate professor at Warwick Business School. She previously worked at Lancaster University Management School and UMIST, Manchester, UK. From January 2014 she will be an associate professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She is a psychologist by training. She is interested in psychoanalysis and political philosophy and ethics and their significance for understanding and explaining contemporary organizational, managerial, and working practices. Her work on management discourse, communities of practice, and organizational resistance and control in MNCs, SMEs, and NGOs has been published in a variety of journals including *Organization Science, Ephemera, Human Relations, Management Communication Quarterly*, and *Organization Studies*. Currently, her empirical projects include investigating the role and politics of partnerships in international development and sustainability issues with a special focus on Africa.