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Power, subtraction and social transformation: Canetti and Foucault on the notion of resistance

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Power, subtraction and social transformation: Canetti and Foucault on the notion of resistance

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Resistance is often understood as a practice that stands against change. The main characteristics of resistance are consequently identified in refusal and rejection. Even when it is acknowledged that change is in fact *imposed change* – so that resistance is actually resistance against *imposition* – the implicit premise is that resistance is centred upon inertia *vis-à-vis* some active force. In this way, resistance is framed as a practice essentially based on negation, or as the negative term in a dialectic of power. The aim of this paper is to propose a different conception of resistance which reveals its crucial links with creation and change. Resistance can be located within a network of resonating concepts for social theory which somehow sidestep classical sociological theories in that they draw on neither the analytic nor the critical tradition in social thought. Whereas the analytic tradition treats resistance as a residual, often suspect, category, the critical tradition accepts it, but only as an incomplete pre-revolutionary step, as the negative phase that exists before more robust forms of counterpower come into play. Inspiration for a new conception of resistance as transformation arises from a point of view in social thought such as the one developed by Elias Canetti. The paper builds on Canetti's theory to recognize resistance's independent value. Understanding resistance as a multidimensional, multiscale and pervasive phenomenon also suggests to displace the centrality of the strictly political dimension so that resistance is regarded as a far more general and encompassing category of human life through a series of social locations. A comparison between Foucault and Canetti reveals a new theoretical venue for a notion of resistance as an act that invokes the commonality of humans.

Keywords: Elias Canetti; Michel Foucault; resistance; struggle; subtraction; visibility

Non mi passa mai, non mi passa mai. (Anonymous)

Resistance is useless! ... Resistance is useless! ... Resistance is useless! (Vogon guard, in Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*)

'Prefer not to', echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. 'What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here – take it', and I thrust it towards him. (Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener*)

[...] the emergence of a very strange phenomenon in Greco-Roman civilisation, that is, the organisation of a link between total obedience, knowledge of oneself, and confession to someone else. (Michel Foucault, *Omnes et singulatim*)

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> Those who do not resign themselves are the spice of earth, the colour of life, they
> condemn themselves to unhappiness, but they are our happiness. (Elias Canetti,
> *Aufzeichnungen*)

Locating resistance in social theory

Elias Canetti and Michel Foucault are two authors rarely discussed together. *Et pour cause*, some might add. Indeed, Foucault is widely regarded as the great analyst of a historically modern model of power that is soft and positive, a type of power that seeks the collaboration of its subjects, shaping their intentions and placing them within a field of relations which is also a field of intelligibility. Canetti, by contrast, reads like a 'primordialist' author, who disregards historical specificities in order to point to an obscure and violent core of power. In this paper, I suggest that it can be enlightening to discuss and compare these two authors, specifically for the task of conceptualizing the act of resistance.

The notion of resistance is, for social science and social theory, an extremely complex one, arguably a notion which, despite the copious literature on empirical episodes, practices and histories of resistance, still remains insufficiently theorized. The two major traditions in conceptualizing resistance can be summarized as the materialist and the culturalist ones. The orthodox Marxist tradition typically heralded the former conception: for pre-Gramscian Marxist authors, resistance was a substantive, material action raised against or interfering with the functioning of the capitalist socio-economic system. By contrast, phenomenologically oriented authors have privileged a culturalist explanation of resistance as primarily a matter of symbolic challenge against domination.

Such a dichotomy between material and symbolic resistance has of course been challenged at least since authors such as Antonio Gramsci, who emphasized the presence of cultural dynamics at the very core and at the foundation of the economy. With Gramsci, culture itself becomes a field where domination is exercised. On his turn, Foucault pushed things even farther, insofar as he revealed the presence of power not only in the hegemonic sphere of cultural institutions, but in the process of subject formation itself, through the practices of self-mastery. While his subtle analysis of obedience as a constitutive practice of truth seems to reduce the scope for resistance, Foucault is also famous for contending that 'where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault 1998, 95). A similar position was also developed in sociology by Bourdieu with his theory of *habitus*, which seeks to genetically capture the emergence of certain attitudes towards authority. Positions in the social field, Boudieu argued, generate dispositions of action that lead actors to take certain positions *vis-à-vis* power. Despite divergences about the degree to which established power is actually capable of colonizing subordinate classes (see e.g. the famous critique of Gramsci advanced by Scott 1990), subsequent authors have explored the complex dynamic of resistance as essentially at the interplay between substantive opposition, maintenance of hegemonic appearances, and actual compliance.

Canetti seems to stand largely outside of these debates and reflexions. His view of power is sometimes regarded as crude, while his description of totalitarianism is deemed as itself totalitarian (Arnason 1996), since it seems to miss historical details and organizational analysis. Besides, his chief preoccupations seem to lie in the

apprehension of mythologies and ancient historical events. However, my argument is that Canetti's oeuvre can in fact prove useful to detect and expose a series of inherent limitations in many theorizations of resistance and, in particular, to challenge two widespread general characterizations about resistance. These two characterizations, which are sometimes articulated more explicitly, while at other times assumed more implicitly, are that, first, resistance is an act *against* something (against command, against exploitation, against imperialism, against power, etc.) and, second, an act *from below* (resistance is bottom-up rather than top-down). Regardless of the social status of the resistant actor,[1] resistance is seen as acting against the formal scheme of the organization or institution in question. From the combination of these two characteristics, the canonical opposition of domination and resistance follows: resistance is seen as counter-action, a type of action which reacts, in various guises, against a dominant arrangement or system.

This paper attempts to advance towards a conception of resistance as an act neither merely symbolic nor merely material and, simultaneously, an act which is not simply oppositional *vis-à-vis* power, but rather transformative. Canetti's (1973) take on power, I argue, offers the chance to advance a general conception of resistance as transformation. This is because Canetti envisages resistance not only as an – overtly or covertly – political act, but more generally as a human act. Of course, these two domains may be equivalent, in particular if we adopt an Arendtian view of politics as the making of the world in common among humans. Thus, resistance takes place in the totality of social space, not only in some recognized political arenas, as radical philosophers such as Brossat (2006) and Critchley (2007) have suggested. What Canetti adds to such understanding of human action, however, is something essential: the centrality of the body. Resistance is neither a discourse nor a political symbol, but rather something one does with one's own body, something one engages one's body into.

Resistant subjectivities

Resistance is one of those social-scientific concepts that occupy a crucial epistemological location. In the social and human sciences in general, the object of study is, in fact, another subject. Because agents have not only their own motivations but also their own theories of action, theories and explanations of social action are always faced with the problem of positioning themselves *vis-à-vis* their objects. Resistance inherently problematizes the positioning of the theorist *vis-à-vis* the object that s/he faces.

Two classical ways to solve the problem of theory-positioning might be termed the vertical strategy and the horizontal strategy. The vertical solution adopts an externalist, objectivist point of view which looks at actors 'from above their heads', so to speak. By contrast, the horizontal solution strives to grasp the internal, subjective point of view by looking at actors from in-between and even, as in social psychology, from within. These two conflicting strategies are better known as social physics and social phenomenology. As far as resistance is concerned, one can appreciate the problem: some actions are manifestly, outspokenly and self-declaredly resistant, but not all of them are. In general, in order to define an action as resistant, one needs to know the subjective attitude of the actor. However, in many cases this attitude is unobservable or inaccessible to the researcher. Consequently, speaking of resistance in these cases amounts to attributing a certain action with a specific

meaning that neither the actor nor, for that matter, its direct interactants might have meant.

In similar cases, are we really confronted by a real phenomenon of resistance? The ethnographers Campbell and Heyman (2007) have recently proposed adopting the term 'slantwise' to describe actions that fall somewhere along the continuum between acceptance and resistance. More importantly, these are actions that intersect the axis of the continuum from an oblique angle. According to Campbell and Heyman, situating actions simply along the resistance (refusal of domination)–naturalization (acceptance of domination) axis has distorted the empirically observed material in many studies, because it has induced ethnographic researchers to attribute resistant intentions to actors even though they are in fact unable to prove it.

As a result, a variety of types of action has been subsumed under the heading of resistance even when those actions were not really meant to be of defiant nature. For instance, working-class Mexicans and Chicanos who live in the *colonias* placed in desert and remote areas along the US–Mexico border adopt housing and living practices (e.g. irregular and informal housing patterns, continual modification of mobile homes and so on) that in many ways frustrate the attempts to control them deployed by the US Census; but they do not do that purposefully and, in many cases, not even consciously. The notion of 'slantwise', Campbell and Heyman argue, offers a solution to the theoretical bias of the lexicon of resistance, because it avoids unjustified assumptions about the actor's aims. Slantwise is not an emic term, but an etic one; in other words, it is not a category employed by actors, nor even a category that we might expect actors to recognize, rather, it is a category that admits the opaque space of motivations that guide action, without forcing the language of naturalization or resistance upon them. Slantwise, we might say with slightly different terms, is resistance as observed through a veil of ignorance.

Indeed, forms of romanticization are not uncommon among some critically oriented scholars. Romanticization turns actors into symbolic heroes, but actors are seen as heroes only insofar as they mirror the researcher's values. From this perspective, the concept of slantwise is certainly helpful because it preempts such possibility. But it is also, I believe, limited and maybe ultimately even self-defeating, in that it keeps the power–resistance *continuum* intact and confines itself to adding a variable which distances action from the major axis; it allows a degree of distance from the *continuum* by removing – or hiding – the motivational factors. All resistance is slantwise, because it always manifests itself transversally to power relations, at a certain distance from them, rather than doing so along the axis of the dominant interpretation of complying versus oppositional acts.

The unconvincing part of the story in Campbell and Heyman's proposal lies, to my mind, in the fact that the slantwise category is predicated on the idea of a bedrock upon which resistance is grounded, and if that bedrock cannot be identified, then resistant action must recede into slantwise action – behind the veil of ignorance, so to speak. However, the bedrock of resistance may not – and, I will argue, does not – exist. If, on the one hand, there is a risk of interpreting as 'resistant' actions which are not meant to be so, on the other hand there is also the risk of interpreting as resistant actions *just because* they are meant to be so.

One should always keep the practice of resistance distinct from the discourse on resistance. In this respect, the work of Albert Camus is a powerful reminder that the discourse of resistance can twist the act of resistance and transform it into an act of

power. Those who set themselves the task of resisting oppression may end up being the worst oppressors, just as those who claim to resist inhumanity may end up very close to becoming inhuman themselves. As Cioran (1960) bitterly remarked, tomorrow's tyrants are recruited among today's half-beheaded martyrs. For Camus (1961), in particular, *l'homme revolté*, the true rebel, must in the first place revolt against the discourse of resistance and its claim to truth. The revolt consist not in negation but in what Camus calls a special consent (*consentement*) to the world. Resistance is not a discourse, but an action whereby one transforms oneself and the world at the same time.

Certainly, resistance is a type of action which situates itself in relation to power; and, from this point of view, we cannot understand resistance without first clarifying the functioning of power. How to describe the specific type of relationship that resistance entertains with power? I propose to begin this exploration within a broad anthropological frame. One of the most controversial but powerful claims made by the great anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss is his hypothesis on the inevitability of ethnocentrism. Lévi-Strauss (1952) observed that the concept of humanity is a late creation in the history of mankind and that, even after its introduction, in most places on earth humanity ends at the borders of the tribe, of the ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. The essence of ethnocentrism is not simply, as often claimed, that one judges actions done by others according to one's code of values, but, more radically understood, that each human group has a strong, almost undefeatable, sense of its own intrinsic goodness and rightness. This foundational feeling of ethnocentrism can be described as the feeling of the goodness of being a majority, or, more precisely, of being 'oneself's majority'. Incidentally, this is precisely what Nietzsche stigmatized in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (§I, 14) as the assertion of: 'We good people – we are the just' (Nietzsche 1994, 28). Such an attitude does not exist only at the level of civilizations but lurks in every human group in its relations with others as well as its own members.

Even before constituting a quantitative, numerical fact, the notion of majority thus designates a point of view on society and the self. It was with this process in mind, I think, that Michel Foucault used to say that having defeated historical fascist regimes was a minor matter compared to the task of defeating the fascism we all have in our heads. In this sense, ethnocentrism represents the operation of becoming a majority and, above all, the majoritarian point of view that ensues. How does resistance relate to majorities? Resistance is, so to speak, a *residuum* of the basic ethnocentric operation: it is what remains outside the constitution of a group as the 'majority of itself'. Resistance is a type of action at odds with the great ethnocentric operation. As we shall see below, Canetti's notion of crowds and their position *vis-à-vis* power address precisely a situation of human commonality capable of defusing the majoritarian point of view.

At the same time, though, resistance differentiates itself from other types of anti-majoritarian endeavour. For instance, when an organized minority directly fights against a majority and eventually replaces it, we speak of revolution. But is revolution a form of resistance? The phenomenon of revolution shifts our attention to the level of large social aggregates. Resistance, on the contrary, cannot be properly understood unless we articulate is as a *molecular* phenomenon. This does not at all mean that resistance can be only a small-scale phenomenon, though. On the contrary, resistance can even reach the size of a mass movement; but even in that case we should avoid measuring it against its political outcomes or sanctioned

political gains. The molecular is not the individual, but an undulatory domain of undifferentiated differences, where phenomena like crowds and packs, rather than organized groups, occur; it is a state of thriving differences which do not submit themselves to any categorization, identification or totalization. As I will try to show, phenomena of resistance can be understood only if we specify the peculiar relationship they entertain with the basic majoritarian (or ethnocentric) operation.

Hegemony and hidden transcripts

The idea of resistance as opposition follows from the interpretation of resistance as a category of political action. For instance, despite their differences, and despite the latter's critique of the former, both Gramsci (1975) and Scott (1985, 1990) tend to frame resistance as a relationship which occurs essentially between distinct social classes. Through a comparative analysis of their positions, in the following paragraphs I aim to argue that resistance is much more than a component in a struggle between political antagonists.

Gramsci's (1975) concept of hegemony – as it emerges gradually and diachronically through various *loci* of his prison notebooks – is crucial to understanding the core debate in the literature on political resistance. For Gramsci, hegemony is not mere coercion, but also the expression of the intellectual and moral headship exercised by a dominant class, in a spontaneous, molecular and organic way, so as to generate a widely accepted and shared framework of consent in which even conflict and dissent can be accommodated. Hegemony determines the features of any specific historic bloc, in that it exists, in Gramscian terms, not only at the 'economic-corporative' level but also and especially at the 'ethic-political' one, in the long 'war of position' – as opposed to the classical revolutionary 'war of movement' – for conquest of the state.

In liberal-democratic parliamentary regimes, characterized by the 'modern prince' that is the political party, hegemony is exercised in 'normal forms', through the division of powers, the articulations of civil society, and the expression of public opinion. Intellectuals organic to the bourgeois class contribute to build and reproduce hegemony through institutions such as schooling and the mass media which transmit the organic ideological structure of the dominant class. Hegemony thus works through the cooptation of consensus around a set of values and a worldview, because the struggle for hegemony is a struggle of ideologies. Similarly, Barrington Moore (1978) referred to the 'conquest of inevitability' as the process by which the perspective of the dominant stratum is absorbed by the dominated and creates the sense that sufferings and pain associated with a differential distribution of goods and access to resources are unavoidable.

Because ideology spans the micro to the macro social levels, Gramsci certainly never contended that it functions monolithically (as it is sometimes wrongfully reproached to him). Like the divisions of a single army, the various social institutions and their ideological structures act on their own, and they can be said to converge in pursuit of some sort of larger overall mission which however is not mechanically transmitted to all. At the micro level, people pursue individual lives in specific local contexts which seem complete and meaningful on their own, but the texture of each of these apparently 'independent' local lives makes a substantial contribution to the constitution and continuation of the larger hegemonic pattern. The lower layers may not even be aware of the existence of the whole army for the latter to work properly.

Hegemony is thus also – maybe above all – made up of unwilling, and most of the time unconscious, contributions to the system. According to Scott's critique (1985, 1990, 2009), on the contrary, the official story of the relationship between dominants and dominated should be distinguished from the unofficial one. The official 'public transcript' of subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant one does not tell the whole story of the relationship, as there is also a 'hidden transcript' taking place offstage behind the scenes. Revolts and revolutions are characterized by bursts of collective outright defiance, but the absence of direct confrontation does not mean that hegemony goes unchallenged.

Resistance, for Scott, should rather be looked for in the everyday constellation of the 'weapons of the weak', which include dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, foot dragging, slander, arson and sabotage. Most of these actions are motivated by utilitarian aims – in Gramscian terms, they are located at the economic-corporative level, rather than at the ethic-political one – and they are unplanned and uncoordinated, tactical rather than strategic. However, the fact that they are externally compliant – or, when non-compliant, maintain a low profile and do not engage in any symbolic confrontation with the ideological bloc – does not mean at all that they are coopted into the cultural hegemony.

For subordinate people, the only effective resistance may be invisible resistance, because whenever resistance becomes visible it also provokes ferocious repression and retaliation from above. This idea of invisible resistance can be found, not by chance, in numerous anarchist treaties (see e.g. Comité invisible 2007), who theorize invisibility and avoidance of direct confrontation as an essentially strategy in the struggle against instituted order. This view also draws from classical Chinese military thought about strategy and Sun Tzu's famous assertion that one has to have already won before engaging in battle.

According to Scott, resistant hidden transcripts are developed mainly in places outside the dominant discourse's direct control, such as the alehouse, the pub, the tavern, the inn, the cabaret, the beer cellar, the gin mill – all sorts of shadow places that are opaque to the gaze of the state. Gramsci's notion of hegemony would then capture only the public transcript of the dominant–dominated relationship, behind which hidden transcripts and other mixed forms of action – such as the whole realm of folk culture with its rumours, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, codes, and euphemisms – de facto transform hegemony into the dominants' wishful thinking, into a self-portrait depicting dominant elites as they would like to be seen. Thus, Scott seeks to enlarge the theoretical field of political resistance, and he does so by flattening hegemony to the paper-thin dimension of the public transcript's appearances.

The idea that hegemony is not omnipotent and can be eroded from beneath by multifaceted forms of political resistance does not, however, really contradict what Gramsci maintained. Recall that for Gramsci each class and social group organically expresses its own ideology and defines its own philosophy. As a Marxist, Gramsci was a conflictualist. Consequently, he can hardly be accused of overlooking the existence of class confrontation. At the same time, Gramsci recognized that the struggle for hegemony is a struggle of ideologies, and even suggested that ideologies are different from one another in constitution, methods, and operational strategies. Nor can it be argued that Gramsci was unaware of the politics of visibility inherent to ideological confrontations, as his analysis of the mass media, inter alia, shows.

Rather, the point is that if hegemony were made up only or mostly of appearances, as Scott contends, one must still explain how and why these thin appearances are so pervasive and accurately preserved most of the time. And this is precisely what Gramsci aimed at doing with his concept of 'war of position' for political power. Critical theorists have derived from Gramsci and his philosophy of praxis a commitment to the development of counter-hegemony, i.e. of conscious and explicit political opposition, capable of facing domination not only in the hidden transcript but especially in the public one.

Contemporary counter-hegemony theorists have, in fact, extended the analysis of the dominants–dominated relationship from the national to the global scale. In the analytics proposed by Santos (1995), for instance, globalization is a composite plural phenomenon – to the point that Santos (2006) prefers to speak of 'globalizations' in the plural – comprising at least four different patterns: two hegemonic forms, which he calls globalized localisms and localized globalisms, and two counter-hegemonic forms, insurgent cosmopolitanism and the common heritage of humankind. Whereas the former two patterns give shape the neo-liberal hegemonic mechanism through the double move of universalization of local phenomena and their subsequent imperialist-like localization, the latter is substantiated in organized resistance against injustice produced or amplified by the two hegemonic forms. Resistance is as global as hegemony is: it acts on the same scale and through the same types of coalitions used by dominators. Santos contends that the classes and social groups which suffer the consequences of hegemonic globalization progressively join together in social movements and other types of subjects to carry forward transnational struggles against exclusion and subordinate inclusion, against political oppression and ecological destruction.

Several authors have interpreted the lifeworld as the site of resistance *par excellence*, in opposition to the structural-economic system. Michael Burawoy (1991), for instance, identified various possible outcomes of this tension between lifeworld and the system. In his model, resistance increases along a continuum which ranges from colonization (capitulation of the lifeworld to the system), through negotiation within institutional limits, the creation of alternatives, the carving out of spheres of self-organization, and the reshaping of the system's limits, to collective protest such as that mounted by social movements. Burawoy views active protest by organized social movements as the highest degree of resistance against domination.

Interestingly, contemporary critical thinkers tend at the same time to conceive resistance as an *incomplete stage* in the revolutionary project. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2003, 115 ff.) understand resistance as one of the three elements of 'counterpower', along with insurrection and constituent power. In their conception, counterpower is ultimately indistinguishable from power itself, as the two are perfectly symmetrical to one another. Thus, implicitly – and, probably, unwillingly – Hardt and Negri associate counterpower, rather than power, with reaction. In this conceptualization – as well as in Santos's – counterpower, rather than power, is 'reactionary' in the sense that counterpower is described as a reaction against power.

Consequently, resistance is represented as the negative term in the dialectic struggle for power: what resistance can do, as an organic part of the power chain, is at best oppose the stream of global power in order to prepare the terrain for action by the multitude. In this account, resistance is deemed to be important because it marks the inception of counterpower; yet it is also described as insufficient in itself

because it makes no constructive moves, but only reactive ones: in short, resistance is a necessary but *per se* insufficient moment – as the negative passage of the dialectic of power – in the revolutionary struggle for power. Reformists have, of course, a conception of power struggle different from that of the radicals. They nonetheless seem to converge on a similar conception of resistance. Light (2003), for instance, in his discussion of environmental restoration, opposes to 'resistance' an ideal of 'reengagement', thus implicitly suggesting that resistance is something that stops short of positive action, which, on the contrary, is the type of action involved in active engagement with environmental issues.

In conclusion, the contradictory notions of hegemony and hidden transcripts push us to question the role of visibility in the practices of resistance. In turn, as we shall see, visibility raises the issue of the social locations where we should expect resistance to appear.

Distinguishing struggle from resistance

As already hinted above, a theoretical enquiry into resistance must enlarge the field of analysis from the political to the social dimension in its integrality if it wants adequately to tackle the dissemination and the capillarity of resistance in everyday practices. A conspicuous interpretive tradition comprises Foucault and his treatment of 'power and resistance' within this enlarged field. In a way, the entire corpus of Foucault's works focuses on power issues. Although Foucault ultimately identified his core interest as being in processes of subjectification and the technologies of the Self, rather than in power *per se* – to the point of claiming to have refrained from using the word extensively in its bare form, and to have adopted a rigorous nominalistic attitude[2] towards its usage – his insights into the formation and the exercise of power relationships were highly original, and they fully deserve the attention that they received.

Here I shall focus on Foucault's later exploration, specifically as is presented in the 1982 afterword to Dreyfus and Rabinow's book. In the field of labour process theory, for instance, Knights and Vurdubakis (1994) adopt such late Foucauldian view as a fundamental corrective to the limitations and failures of conventional workplace studies in adequately explaining how power relations are subjectively experienced, reproduced, and challenged. They argue that Foucault's thesis, namely that power is diffused and disseminated and almost omnipresent in social life, does not preempt the possibility of resistance. Because all relationships are also power relationships, but not necessarily exclusively relationships of power, power is pervasive but not mutually exclusive with the agency of resistance. Thus, they conclude, 'acts of resistance are also exercises of power' (Knights and Vurdubakis 1994, 191).

This view is the exact contrary of the concept of resistance that I am proposing here. My argument draws from Canetti to show how resistance is irreducible to power: in fact, if resistance does anything at all, it shows the *otherwise* of power, that is, a way of composing human relations that is external to the logic and the action of power and is capable of leading towards a common world. In my hypothesis, what Foucault really distinguished in his famous afterword was not so much power from resistance as *power from struggle*. Foucault (1982) argues that power is different from both a function of consent, and a function of violence. Indeed, whereas the latter acts upon bodies and things, the former acts upon *actions*. Thus, for power to exist,

it requires an acting subject who remains 'other' and who positions him/herself in various ways in a predetermined 'field of responses'. The subject is subject to power but never wholly subsumed by it, never vanishes into it.

Consequently, power is a type of relationship which is neither 'victory' nor 'struggle': power and struggle, Foucault says, constitute a 'permanent limit' for each other and a 'point of possible reversal' of one other: 'It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape' (Foucault 1982, 225). However, by contending that power relations necessarily imply means of escape, Foucault remains ambivalent (better, 'trivalent') on whether these means of escape belong to the field of power, to that of struggle, or to neither of them.

In the next sections, we shall see how Canetti may help us solve this difficulty by imagining resistance as a third pole in the equation of power and struggle which is irreducible to the other two. Incidentally, Simmel (1950, 137) already provides elements with which to move beyond a conception of resistance as oppositional, for example distinguishing two types of personality: the strong individuality (*starke Individualität*), which he associated with opposition (*Widerstand*), and the decided individuality (*entschiedene Individualität*), which we may associate with a resistant attitude, although he does not use the word explicitly. The strong individuality, Simmel argues, is a *quantitative* one, as it finds its realization in contrasts and one-to-many relationships. On the other hand, the decided individuality, as a *qualitative* individuality, shuns situations where it may be confronted with majorities and prefers one-to-one relationships. Here, we already have a basis on which to differentiate resistance from opposition.

But resistance is also to be differentiated from reaction: if an action, a conduct or a stance is oppositional or is a merely reactive force, it becomes indistinguishable from power or opposition and, consequently, is not truly resistant. On the contrary, resistance always implies a *transformative* drive, which is the necessary pathway of any movement towards achieving liberation from a given power relationship, the path of the 'means of escape'. One cannot resist something without resisting its opposite at the same time. Resistance is a double movement: it is the double negation that produces an affirmation. In the temporal dimension, such a movement of resistance implies a liberation from the present in view of a future horizon of commonality.

Resistance between visibility and invisibility

After the Frankfurt School's classic critical theory and its somewhat apocalyptic view of the culture industry as 'Enlightenment turned into mass deception' that integrates the consumer from above (Horkheimer and Adorno 1979), it was pointed out that users are not passive recipients but active operators, although in a tactical rather than strategic way (de Certeau 1984). The mistaken idea of the user's passivity is due to the relative invisibility of everyday small-scale practices as well as to the mundaneness of the social locations where they take place. According to de Certeau, the 'ways of operating', or ways of using, are invisible if we look at them from the point of view of 'codification', i.e. of formal knowledge, but this does not at all mean that they do not exist. Quite the contrary. De Certeau accepts Foucault's thesis on the disciplinarization of society, but for this very reason he also urges scholars to study the ways in which society resists being

reduced to discipline, and to examine the domain of the everyday, made up of disseminated popular practices that, while apparently conforming to disciplinary norms, in fact evade them.

In this case, resistance is meaningfully intertwined with visibility. Visibility can be imagined as a field that contributes to defining and shaping the relations among sites, subjects and their actions (Brighenti 2010a). Visibility is an effect of the relative positionings of actors and actions, and, in its turn, it produces effects that shape these relationships. Visibility is a relational and strategic field, but it is also a processual one, because, even though visibility effects tend to 'crystallize' and to be perceived instantly, in fact they extend in time. By doing so, they prolong what is an otherwise situated, contingent effect into more stable arrangements, contributing to a natural history of visibility regimes. Visibility inheres in a series of strategic and tactical features of social relationships and interaction, but also, more deeply, in the onto-social constitution of nomotropic subjects (i.e. subjects that position themselves *vis-à-vis* a normative universe, even if they may choose to transgress and disobey).

Visibility constitutively oscillates between a fundamentally enabling pole, recognition, and a fundamentally constraining one, control: one needs to be seen in order to be recognized and accepted by a Meadian 'significant other'; but, at the same time, being seen entails being controllable, subjectable to discipline. Canetti (1973, 253) reminds us that spying on the prey, i.e. seeing it without being seen, is a form of secrecy, and the secret lies at the heart of power.

Consequently, there is no linear correlation between visibility and resistance. Resistance may be helped by invisibility, which furnishes a place to hide from domination, but it may also be harmed by the same invisibility, which makes it impossible to find supporters and allies and to gain recognition. In this context, de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic is relevant. Strategy is the dominant model in the political, economic, and scientific realms. It is essentially a territorial form exercised upon proprietary bounded loci, and articulated into discourses. Outsiders are subordinates or adversaries. By contrast, tactic is deterritorialized, because those who practise it have no territory of their own and have to act on a territory that belongs to others. It is not articulated into discourses, but into practical ways of operating, and it does not recognize outsiders (this would be impossible, because it has no bounded territory that enables identification of people as insiders or outsiders), but only allies. Whereas strategy is self-centred, territorial, and spatially bounded, tactic is fragmentary, deterritorialized, and temporally linked.

Tactic, by contrast, has no cumulative character, it cannot capitalize on victories, nor achieve any overall coherence; it can only combine heterogeneous elements and constantly try to turn events into opportunities. In this sense, resistance has a tactical nature. Its social locations do not correspond to any institutionalized field of knowledge, but rather to the realms of the informal, the implicit and even the trivial. Resistance is the acknowledgement that one cannot win on the enemy's field, but this acknowledgement does not stops short of the attempt to *create constantly new fields* for the game. Scott observed that open resistance is rare in comparison to hidden resistance. Yet, at times, the need to make resistance visible may likewise become crucial. The fine collection of articles in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons Anthology* edited by Bob Gaucher (2002) reminds us that writing is a practice of resistance for invisible subjects forced into an invisible place. Writing provides a way out of jail, albeit a non-physical one: most of all, it provides access to social visibility and recognition.

For many anarchists, the choice of invisibility is due to the fact that they are not interested in being recognized by a system, or even a civilization, that they despise. However, the very task of expanding and disseminating the foyers of resistance requires an intervisibility that is necessary to meet and to recognize common affinities.

In the case of the factory, worker resistance revolves around creating and performing a regime of informal work organization whose visibility features are always shifting. Hodson (1995) has advanced an analytical interpretation of four basic agendas of worker resistance: first, at the interpersonal level, resistance focuses on deflecting abuse; second, at the technical level, resistance aims at regulating the amount of work; third, at the bureaucratic level, resistance attempts to defend worker autonomy; and fourth, at the participatory level, resistance represents a way to expand worker control over production.

The complex configuration of visibility thresholds influences the effectiveness of these four patterns of resistance, as they require distinctive combinations of invisible and visible action, such as, in respect to the former, duplicity towards the employer's forces and, in respect to the latter, the need to gain social support from other workers. Even a specific case such as sabotage (Sprouse 1992), which only imperfectly can be fitted into Hodson's technical level, reveals the distinctive nature of visibility: sabotage must produce visible effects, obstructing the normal working rhythm, but the intentionality of this obstruction – or, at the very least, the name of the agent – must remain covert.

When we move further back to the overtly politicized field of contemporary social movements, we see that insurgent cosmopolitanism (Santos 2006), or resistance against neo-liberalism, is concerned with reclaiming the visibility of public issues, such as those concerning the social and environmental effects of economic globalization, which otherwise would recede into invisibility and fall outside the domain of public deliberation.

Visibility of resistance, however, is a topic that is not confined in the official political realm. Consider the case of linguistic diversity. Even apart from the worrying problem of 'linguicide' – the linguistic counterpart of genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) – one could just consider cultural imperialism. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) have polemically described as 'imperialist reason' the globalization of Anglo-American lexis and lemmas at the academic as well as at the wider societal level. The authors contend that cultural imperialism is grounded in the universalization and diffusion on a planetary scale of cultural particularisms and cultural products that hide their own contingent historical background and present themselves as genuinely universal. The domination of the English language leads to the ubiquitous diffusion of terms that, while apparently of merely technical nature, subsume a whole worldview. This inscribed worldview is difficult to resist because it is even difficult to perceive and to be aware of it. In other words, it is invisible.

Where is resistance to be found in this broad scenario of cultural domination? One answer may be in *accents*. Whereas the strategy of critical theorists such as Bourdieu and Wacquant is a strategy of visibility, which consists in denouncing the perils of the imperialist reason, other forms of invisible resistance may already be in place. Accent is neither an irrelevant phenomenon nor a derivative one. On the contrary, local accents push the matter of expression itself through a creole linguistic territory of pidgin hybridity, which constitutes a direct form of resistance. Resistance is a force that works through official languages and institutions by perverting them,

defusing their power not through direct confrontation with their sanctioning symbolism, but through an active flight from them that sets their very normative standards in motion. This way, flight leads to transformation. An active flight is not a mere displacement but a reconfiguration of the established relations between meanings, subjectivites and institutions. So, Bourdieu and Wacquant are right when they argue that there is a difference of nature between invisible and visible resistance; but they are wrong when they assume that the only effective resistance is the visible, symbolic one.

Two non-symbolic conceptions of power and resistance

Both Foucault and Canetti locate the basic ground of power and resistance in the body. Specifically, the 'avoidance of the concrete', in which most theories of power and theories of society indulge, is described by Canetti as one of the most 'sinister phenomena in intellectual history' (Canetti 1979, §2). Canetti was disillusioned with theories that begin their explanations with general principles or with abstract schemes. In his turn, Foucault devoted large part of his research programme to shifting attention away from theories of sovereignty in order to narrate genealogically the story of how knowledges reach and operate upon concrete bodies, and in particular those absolutely central bodies of the ill, the inmate and the foolish.

From this perspective, both authors arrive at what we may call an anti-symbolic conception of power, which preludes to the possibility of a new conceptualization of resistance. This is so, I think, despite the fact that they sometimes resort to the terminology of symbolism. But, substantively, symbolism works by establishing a relation between some contingent material item at hand and some abstract (remote, not at hand) notion which exists at a different order of generality. Thus, in symbolism, the material is employed to evoke – to make present, to 'presentify' – the immaterial. This establishes a vertical relation of transcendence which subordinates the contingent to something powerful which acts from afar and to which the contingent is subordinated.

Now, for Foucault the symbols of sovereignty in fact hide the diagram of the government, while for Canetti postures and gestures do not symbolize power, but rather power is the power to adopt postures and make gestures. It is true that Canetti writes about the 'symbols of power'; but, as soon as we examine what he means by that phrase, we find that for him power is as material as the gestures that are supposed to 'symbolize' it. Such a coincidence entails a radically immanentist perspective that practically destroys the very dispositif of transcendence upon which symbolism lies.

In light of their shared attention to the body and their anti-symbolic view of power, it may be interesting to see how Canetti and Foucault arrive at – or, at least, following their insights and their methodologies we may arrive at – two different conceptions of resistance. This is due to the fact that, whereas Foucault advances an essentially discontinuist thesis on power – indeed, his whole Nietzsche-inspired genealogical methodology is discontinuist; see Foucault (1971) – Canetti elaborated a deeply continuist thesis – probably not by chance Canetti had serious reservations on Nietzsche.

When Foucault (1975, 1976, 2004) describes the transition from sovereign power to disciplinary power, he speaks in terms of 'replacement', 'substitution', and

'profound transformation'. This profound transformation consists in a passage from repressive to productive power, from a power that imposes to a power that disposes, from the power to take life or to let live to the power to foster life or disallow it to death. Yet, death occupies a distinctive place in Foucault's explanation, because power needs its subjects, and consequently it needs to keep them alive. Death is a limit to power. Since power is no longer interested in crushing its subjects, it becomes *docile*: it shifts from killing to fostering and administering life and bodies. The body is the place of inscription of power, and classificatory *savoirs* – such as for instance the *regard médicale* – operate essentially on the body, or on stocks of bodies, i.e. on populations. In his analysis of pastoral power, Foucault (1982) explains that not so much we are subjects who learn to obey, rather, obedience constitutes us as subjects: it is through obedience that we come to exist as individual subjects. So total obedience does not crush the subject; on the contrary, power needs to preserve subjectivity. In fact, what happens is that subjects are always required to position themselves in the field of power: even when they are recalcitrant, they are always inside the field of power.

According to Canetti, by contrast, every type of power is essentially an extension or amplification of the primal act of seizing. Canetti (1973, §5) finds that there is a continuum ranging from the prehensile organs of the hand, to the digestive organs of the mouth, the throat and the entrails. This whole apparatus for gripping and eating, for incorporating and expelling, is replicated from the most primordial forms in the exercise of power to the most institutionalized and least contingent ones. Even the most sophisticated forms of power are still extensions of the clutch of the hand.

But Canetti also introduces a distinction between violence (*Gewalt*) and power (*Macht*). By connecting the word *Macht* to the Gothic root *magan*, being able to, rather than to the German verb *machen*, to do, and by describing at length the example of the cat and the mouse, Canetti suggests that power is not directly an action, but rather a capacity or possibility to act. Thus, the 'extension' that characterizes power in comparison to violence seems to correspond to the difference between the actual and the virtual as described by Deleuze. The virtual is what is real without being actual. Power always tends to become larger and larger, it extends itself in space and time, it proceeds from one support to another – e.g. from the material to the psychic – but it does not change in nature, it always needs closure.

Most strikingly, the corporeal prolongs itself into other not-simply-corporeal domains, as for instance in the case of the individual prolonging into the crowd,[3] or of the activity of climbing prolonging into commerce, of jaws prolonging into prison, and excrement prolonging into morality. Canetti evokes images of an ongoing mixing among fields kept carefully distinct in traditional social-scientific epistemology. He describes phenomena that cut across the domains of the physical, the psychic, the social, and even the cosmological. Arguably, this is the most original dimension of his work. The ultimate stage of seizing is killing, and power is always intimately bound up with death (Canetti 1973, §6). While, strictly speaking, the dead are outside the relation of power,[4] Canetti draws attention not simply to the alternative between life and death, but, more subtly, to the moment of survival: not a dual relationship but a triadic one, a wholly social one. Survival confronts an individual with, not another individual but a crowd, or better a number of crowds, the crowds of the living and the dead.

When we compare Canetti's conception to the *prima facie* more sophisticated view elaborated by Foucault, it retains its strength. First, Foucault's discontinuist thesis on disciplinary power – insofar as it is framed as 'replacement'[5] – fails to explain why the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been, in absolute terms, the bloodiest in the history of humankind. It is rather difficult from a strict disciplinary perspective to explain the persistence of the power of death, and in fact Foucault never studied war, totalitarianism, crowds and genocide. These are, on the contrary, precisely the type of phenomena that drive Canetti's enquiry.

One should turn to what Foucault wrote in the late 1970s concerning the biopolitical government of the population (Foucault 1991, 2004) to find issues such as mass murder addressed, along with implicit acknowledgement that the power to seize hold on life has not been superseded and it is not simply a residual 'counterpart' of disciplinary power – and even here, Canetti's analysis of the relationship between man and insects can bring novel inspiration into Foucault's concept of population. Eventually, Foucault distanced himself again from issues concerning the power of death when, in his late period, he turned to studying the 'technologies of the Self'. Second, even when we move into the disciplinary field, Canetti enables Foucault's productive power to be reinterpreted as a form of clenching the body. Disciplinary institutional enclosure and even governmental dispositions are effective only if they ultimately gain a grip on bodies.

These modes of power direct bodies at a distance – e.g. by classifying crimes according to an ideal of 'optimal specification', or projecting the architectonic spaces in which bodies will be enabled to move – yet they still act through a type of constraint which is 'territorial' in the most profound meaning of the word, i.e. based on a degree of amplification of the original power to command. The fact that there is a virtuality of power beyond its mere actuality – what Foucault expressed through the concept of 'field of positionings' – can likewise be explained by Canetti with his *Gewalt/Macht* distinction. From this point of view, the distance between the two authors may not be as wide as seems at first sight.

Subtracting the body from the grip of power

Yet an important difference between Foucault and Canetti still remains. Foucault's view conveys the rather pessimistic idea that there is no outside to power: for even struggle, recalcitrance and resistance are constituent parts of power. This view also contains some optimism, because it admits that resistance, albeit within power, is in principle always possible. By contrast, Canetti believes that *there is an outside* of power. On a Canetti-inspired view, resistance is precisely this movement *towards* the outside. The challenge advanced by Canetti is the idea that there can be human relations outside power.

Contrary to Foucault, for Canetti power is not omnipresent. Humans are of course deeply engrained within power and imbued in it. As individuals, they are sad creatures tragically awaiting commands as if they were a liberation. When power has fully grasped individual bodies and they are soaked, they can but stand still seeking being commanded. But there is a different dimension of humanity: its capacity to set relations in motion, its talent for transformation, its capacity to mingle with the heterogeneity of the world, its mimetic potential, its becoming. Resistance is not part of a struggle for power, it is part of a movement of liberation from power. It implies

the search for a way out: a movement of liberation from the grasp of the hand in all its different versions.

Resistance takes place whenever humans seek to avoid being crushed. For his part, Moore (1978, 125) observed that throughout the centuries the most common reaction to oppression has been flight. Resistance is a type of flight: the flight from command. Canetti has developed one of the most original accounts of commands (see Brighenti 2006; Elbaz 2003) which highlights the distinctively 'dissymmetric' relationship[6] between command and flight.

On the one hand, the oldest command is a death sentence which compels the victim to flee (Canetti 1973, §8, 304); on the other, flight is also the origin of subtraction from the order of command, and, as such, it marks the inception of all resistance. Such is, for instance, the nature of flight crowds which, Canetti specifies, are completely different from the phenomenon of panic: while in panic the crowd breaks down because each individual's safety implies another's death, flight crowds indicate a state in which command loses its grip. In general, command either grips and sinks deep into the flesh or is lost forever. Wherever a distance, a space for manoeuvre is created, infallibility is no longer granted, and command may fail to its target; this opening of a space of manoeuvre is precisely the accomplishment of resistance.

In this light, one could even venture to say that resistance is the anti-command. Recall the odd, oblique recalcitrance of Bartlebly's 'I would prefer not to'.[7] Commands slip upon Bartleby, they do not have a grip on him. No doubt about it, Bartleby is an idiot. And, as Deleuze (1989; see also Deleuze and Guattari 1991) suggested, the idiot is the conceptual character of resistance. The idiot hampers the others' work, he resists what everybody else accepts and what everybody else sees no reason to reject (resistance is thus set against the fundamental social law of imitation so well described by Gabriel Tarde). Nobody understands what the idiot is thinking about. His passivity is dull and unnerving, he is an unpleasant, if not sinister, presence, he causes only trouble. Simply, the idiot does not resign himself to what is true. Perhaps unwillingly – but this is very hard to say: who can seriously claim to know something about it? – the idiot challenges the taken-for-granted, the consensual hegemonic definition of the situation. That is how Bartleby induces the Wall Street lawyer to ask himself a number of questions that he has never asked before.

But it is also important to differentiate resistance from disobedience. Not all disobedience – however noble and necessary it may be under oppressive regimes – is resistant. Resistance begins when one faces power with one's own body in a type of facing that is different from struggle. Bakhtin's concept of laughter helps illustrate some features of resistance *vis-à-vis* disobedience. In the satirical and masquerading mood of the carnival, in its grotesque realism focused on the body and its functions, in its intensity made possible by its pre-delimited span in time, laughter enacts a specific type of flight from the established social order.

Laughter transforms the social frame of power, not by opposing or attacking the King, but rather by multiplying the number of kings. The King becomes just one among the many. This essentially anti-platonic action blurs the distinctions between the original and the copies. Laughter introduces a dethroning centrifugal element (Bakhtin 1981, 23 ff.) which enables a type of resistance to authority through the pluralization of the centres of authority. It is clear that carnivalesque laughter is a flight which cannot be interpreted as disobedience. Rather, it entails a suspension of the hierarchies on which obedience and disobedience depend.

There is another element of resistance emerging in Carnival's laughter that cannot be reduced to disobedience. It is the use of the mask. According to Bakhtin, the use of the mask is inherently transformative, as it is 'related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries' (Bakhtin 1984, 40).[8] Thanks its transformative capacity, festive folk laughter is a form of resistance not only against supernatural awe, the sacred and death, 'it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts' (Bakhtin 1984, 92). In the next section, we shall return to the fundamental significance of metamorphosis for human existence, and for resistance in particular.

Another way of looking at resistance from a perspective that distances it from disobedience is to juxtapose resistance with the Weberian ideal-type of goal-rational action. If there is a resistant literary genre it is the novel – as Bakhtin proved convincingly. Irreducible to any single theory (unless it is already a theory camouflaged as novel), the novel reveals the way resistance remains outside a means–ends schema. From this point of view, Douglas Adam's Vogon guard is perfectly right: 'resistance is useless', and often so. This too is the discourse of power, and power is right to stress the uselessness, even the futility, of resistance when measured in terms of cumulative calculations of achieved goals, or when compared to the imperatives of production and the market.

Power adheres to itself; even while changing its shape, it does not permit transformations, it does not allow the others to transform, it is always concerned with preventing them from doing so. Not by chance, the Vogon guard can only go on repeating that 'resistance is useless': there are only minor variations on this theme. From the point of view of power, even opposition may be more profitable than resistance. But opposition, as we have seen, remains within the field of power, whereas resistance is exactly resistance *to* the field of power. This is clearly the case of Kafka, possibly the purest type of writer ever – and surely the only 'Chinese writer' that the West can claim (Canetti 1979, §6).

Kafka dreams of becoming 'infinitely small' in order to escape from the clutch of power, for even engagement and marriage are like arrest and execution to him. But there are also writers who are prosecutors instead of runaways. They are peculiar types of prosecutors, though. Canetti (1979, §3) describes Kraus' 'dictatorship' as a 'school of resistance' for his own intellectual formation, since every writer can discover what she/he is and liberate him/herself only through the experience of being initially 'dominated' and 'paralysed' by a model. He then refers to Broch (1979, §1) as a hound who restlessly hunts the world of his times. Finally, the case of Stendhal (1979, §4; 1973, §6) demonstrates that art defines a type of survival completely different from power, a survival which renounces killing and embraces life in its pure positivity.

Art is not an individual survival. On the contrary, it is a type of survival that begins when individuals – in primis, the writer or the artist – have already passed away. It is a shared survival, because it brings into immortality not a single human being but the largest possible number of human beings together. Through its profound link to non-individual survival, art appeals to a whole peoplehood; it preludes to a transformation of human relations beyond the horizon of power. The resistant subject is a creator, and the work of art cannot but address a commonality among humans, a fraternity to be established outside of power. Thus, the subject of resistance is not a single individual, such as the isolate genius of the romantic artist; quite the contrary, the subject of resistance is scattered in a plurality

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of foyers, moments, compositions and openings. We can thus turn to the final question: how is it that resistance can be creative, instead of merely reactive like opposition?

Conclusions

What precisely is it that resistance resists? As we have seen, resistance is not resistance to change, but rather, as Deleuze (1987) suggested, resistance to a present which confronts us with endless hardship. To resist, means to exist. Work songs and laments are acts of resistance millions of anonymous slaves and workers in the history of humanity have exercised. But, enabling us to pass through the present, resistance does not resist change; quite the contrary, it is on the side of change. Resistance opens the present to becoming. Above, we paralleled resistance with the double negation that produces an affirmation. We can now specify what it negates and what it affirms: resistance is the 'no' to power, which in its turn is a 'no' to life.

The present that is resisted is the present of power, and power is always 'in the present' form, as well as grounded in death. From this point of view, Canetti criticized history for breeding an in-built cult of power. History records only the present, the effectuated. Resistance is instead an anti-reductionist experience; it looks into the ineffectuated to find ways to create newness out of experience – often out of bitter experience. Resistance is whatever distances itself from the 'seduction' and the 'false greatness' of death. Whereas the critical perspective conceives resistance as a struggle and as a moment of power conflict – eventually conflict in the political domain, such as revolution – Canetti suggests a perspective that conceives resistance, not as revolution but – if I may say – as 'diavolution'. Indeed, if in revolution the point is being an avant-garde, in diavolution the point is being the avant-garde *of oneself*.

This concept is similar to Deleuze's *devenir-minoritaire*. The movement of subtraction from power so fundamental in Canetti's view of resistance is termed *ligne de fuite* by Deleuze, who regards it as the starting point of becoming. When questioning what constitutes an act of creation, Deleuze discovers a fundamental similarity between the work of art and the act of resistance. There is not much to say about creation in itself, he writes, because it is *through* creation that one has something to say to others; and he goes on to claim that creation is a necessity, and not at all a pastime for the creator. Therefore, creation highlights two basic aspects of humanity: address to others, and the sense of necessity. This is what happens with resistance, as well: humanity and art (the necessity of creation and the necessity to address others) are both 'revealed' in the act of resistance. To say that resistance reveals humanity and art is to recognize that resistance is not something that occurs *ad interim*, for lack of better solutions. Resistance *is* the best solution of each moment – i.e. contingently – insofar as it subtracts each moment from power's clutch of the present. While tactical, resistance is not reactive; rather, it implies an assertion which does not aim at constituting itself into a new power (i.e. a strategy).

Resisting means transforming what is into what could be. It is a movement from being, not towards power, but towards 'potency'. Canetti's concept of transformation, or metamorphosis (Canetti 1973, §9), which Arnason (1996, 109) deems to be 'tantalizingly underdeveloped but central to his whole intellectual project', addresses precisely the issue of potency. In this paper I have suggested that resistance and transformation can both be better understood if their closeness is thematized. For Canetti, transformation refers to something different from the transformative power

of man over nature: it is, in the first place, the transformation of the human being itself, which signifies her/his openness to becoming. The 'talent for transformation' is possessed by everyone, although it can – and, indeed, does – become easily atrophied. Atrophy of the talent for transformation depends on the fact that power constantly imposes new prohibitions on metamorphoses. Caste systems and slavery are the starkest examples of such prohibitions discussed by Canetti.

By contrast, the crowd retains the capacity to be a transformative moment because it represents the unstable state of undifferentiated differences, the unrestrained thriving of differences. The relationship between crowds and power is, for Canetti, largely oppositional. However, the twentieth century is replete with crowds subjugated by power. This may be the reason why, ultimately, Canetti (1979, §15) assigned to the writer (*Dichter*: *lato sensu* the artist, the thinker), and his/her 'irrational claim to bear responsibilities', the task of being the 'keeper of transformations' (*Hüter der Verwandlungen*) – a task which he articulated into two essential parts: on the one hand, saving all the stories of the world, rescuing them from both oblivion and falsification; on the other hand, becoming everyone, literally, retaining the capacity of transformation.

Only if the writer remains open to the presence and the voices of the figures that have crossed and continually cross him or her can he or she become the true keeper of all the acts of resistance. So, the subject of resistance is in fact not an individual one. Resistance always opens to a collective insofar as it summons the common humanity. However, an instituted social group cannot be resistant as such, insofar as it is taken within the horizon of its own ethnocentric operation described by Lévi-Strauss. Classes and instituted political actors find themselves in a similar situation.

By contrast, for Canetti the crowd is a figure of resistance because it entails a deterritorialization of individuals: the crowd literally opens the individual, but the crowd itself ceases to exist when it closes itself into a social group. So, resistance is the human act that invokes the common, the commonality of humans. Re-opening all the closures and clutches of power is what all movements of resistance need to learn in the first place. So, one cannot resist alone but resistance cannot be exercised by a social group. Neither individual nor collective, the act of resistance is the name of a relationship, the promise of a world in common to come.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. See, for instance, LaNuez and Jermier (1994) on the rarely discussed phenomenon of resistance enacted by managers and technocrats against the imperatives of production.
2. This is a point often overlooked by the most fervent Foucauldians. A nominalistic viewpoint entails not only that 'power' should be taken as shorthand for 'power relationships', but above all the recognition that power has no agency on its own: power is merely a way to describe relations among subjects; it is no more than an angle from which, or a filter through which, one can make sense of those relationships.

3. I have attempted to deal with the complex relationship between the individual and the crowd in Canetti in Brighenti (2010b).
4. Although, of course, the dead are not always outside the relation of power, especially in their group identity as part of the double crowd of the living versus the dead. Thus, dead ancestors as symbolic reference for clans are integral to the functioning of power.
5. It should be borne in mind, however, that elsewhere Foucault moderated the replacement thesis:

> We need to see things not in terms of a replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty–discipline–government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanisms the apparatuses of security. (Foucault 1991, 102)

6. A dissymmetry is not merely an asymmetry, but rather, as the following argument shows, a double or 'displaced' asymmetry. The concept of dissymmetry can be retrieved in Nietzsche's discussion of the relationship between Apollo and Dionysus in *The Birth of the Tragedy* (1999, in particular §2).
7. The choice of literary examples instead of sociological cases here is not random. To my mind, writers of fiction have been so far able to present us and describe instances of resistance much better than sociologists. Thus, fiction can help us to visibilize resistance. Not unimportantly, Canetti himself was a writer and a literary essayist.
8. Canetti provides an almost opposite explanation of the mask (1973, §9); but, arguably, Bakhtin was referring to a larger complex of activities which include the wearing and changing of masks. Admittedly, the issue is complex and cannot be tackled adequately here.

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