

Resistance. Between Memory and Oblivion

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I.

Today, it is impossible to think about resistance without considering Michel Foucault's reflections on the subject. From this theoretical perspective, social space appears as a multi-colored framework of power relations: from exercising power on the one hand and, on the other, from the most diverse forms of resistance, like active forces which represent the other side of exercising power. Resistance is an essential part of power, being understood as a relationship of force, and it imprints movement and creativity upon the space in which it is played out.

Creative forces in a society find themselves inscribed in the acting ability of its subjects to resist in all areas, and to turn spaces into both war and production zones. Resistance appears as the superior force compared to the other implied ones since "under its effect, it obliges changes in power relations (...) The term *resistance*," Foucault affirms, "is the most important word, the *key word* in this dynamic."

If power is a two-way relation, it is essential to look at the other side: the subjects' capacity to confront it in order to re-use its forces, to escape its insidious action. Resistance is the response of subjects to

power being exercised on their bodies, emotions and sentiments, on their acts and actions. "Where there is power, there is resistance," Foucault writes, and the exercising of liberty is inscribed in it, transforming itself into the singular act of a subject resisting, as singular as being born or dying. Resistance appears as an intransitive and, at the same time, obstinate act on the part of the subject, who emerges as the resistant force. Resistance is always present in power relations: exercising power and resistance find themselves permanently united, implicated in a relationship of permanent provocation. It is impossible not to acknowledge the strictly relational character of power, resistance being one of its constituent elements, which doesn't mean it is merely a counterpart or a simple reversal of domination, the "always passive" element "destined to undefined defeat".

It is also impossible to imagine that there exists a unique and irreplaceable "site" from which *resistance* emerges once and for all as a focal point of rebellion, like the home for all uprisings. Rather, the "sites" are multiple, varied, unequally distributed as junctions in a network; they are moving points that interact in different ways according to how they assume the role of adversary, target, alliance, plan of attack. There is no "one" resistance but rather *resistances*, multiple and varied: possible, necessary or improbable; spontaneous, wild or coordinated and organized; solitary or gregarious; disguised, violent or pacific; irreconcilable or eager for negotiation; interested or sacrificial. They appear as an act in the present resulting from an illness registered in bodies, actions and thoughts, be they of individuals or groups, for we know that ways of life inspire ways of thinking, and modes of thought, in turn, create ways of living. The unique site from which resistances emerge does not exist, nor do they require permanence, stability or organization to be considered as such: they can be ephemeral or persist in time and space; they can also act in an intermittent way, so that those believed worn out or exhausted, appear anew to construct their history.

A "pure" form of resistance does not exist. Rather, resistance is knots, bonds made of articulated voices rising up until they transform into discourse and action, but they can also be composed of bellows yet to be articulated, in search of form; those resistances which, before

becoming discourse, are gestures that appear, making the illness evident and claiming the difference that constitutes them. One always resists from difference and in difference.

These resistant knots are tied and untied, emerging at times with unprecedented force, bursting into the social. They can achieve peak moments of expression, adhesion and contagiousness. Some achieve persistent forms, others are institutionalized and perhaps crystallize, then disappear as such; others desist, are lost and get diluted in the intricate tangle of the social.

Without exception, all forms of resistance are converted into the vital circulating energy of society, which makes its existence possible.

Without this force —and will for confronting it— societies would find their lives threatened by the reactive forces sought by conservatism and immobilization. All exercising of power is conservative. "If nothing balances it, it would give rise to a blocked society, similar to a bee-hive, an ant hole, a termite nest. There would no longer be anything human, that is, unforeseen, creative among humans," says Michel Tournier.

Societies crossed by multiple knots of resistance reveal a strong and sustained dynamism: alive societies are those with a plethora of force, intensity, and inventive capacity.

II.

Resistance acts, has materiality, becomes incarnate in bodies, in the physical and material footing of its subjects. The subject resists from the very moment he or she is hurled into the world: it is in resistance that one comes into his or her own as such, and therein constructs the time of his experience. The subject does not only resist the attacks from outside, opposing a contrary force in a similar way as that exercised upon him, but is also capable of using this force to stop its advancement and transform it into energy to be reverted back to the exterior. He is then not only affected but also affects the space surrounding him. In this struggle the subject is tested and exercised; in this struggle he or she memorizes by accumulating experience. It is also in this struggle that emotions and feelings, desire and pleasure are inscribed, at times marking groups or individuals in a definitive way, "igniting certain parts of the body, certain moments of one's life, certain

types of behavior." Power relations are charged with eroticism; resistance is traversed by enjoyment and pleasure. Resistance has yet another form: the relationship of the subject to him or herself. This force, which blocks exterior attacks and is capable of transforming itself into energy in order to affect its environment, finds the way to affect itself in a continuous confrontation, dialogue, pact, compromise and struggle between the elements constituting its interior. Here the struggle takes place between one and oneself in a divided interior, "the adversary that must fight itself does not represent some other ontologically foreign power (...) it is measuring oneself against oneself." As such and seen from the subject's point of view, resistance appears to be the key element of one's constitution; subjectivity assumes incarnate form in its resistant capacity, its capacity for life. "The most intense point of all lives, that point where its energy is concentrated," affirms Foucault, "is situated where these lives confront power, struggle with it, try to use its forces or escape its tricks."

III.

"Life is neither an idea nor a thought, it is a composition of forces," different forces, head on, in constant tension, constant movement. Active and passive forces, forces of affirmation and negation, multiple, diverse and singular forces, forces of resistance and reaction. Resistance distances itself from all forms of reaction: it is never reactionary. It is an active force affirming its own difference, affirmation always coming first and foremost, and negation resulting as no more than a consequence. For their part, reactive forces oppose all they are not, seek to limit the other, and do not accept difference: assimilation or even extermination is recommended for difference or anomaly because negation comes first in reactive forces, and through negating they appear to affirm. Resistance, for its part, opens up to multiplicity in that reaction is entrenched in the unique, negating all diversity. Forces of reaction are always utilitarian, always forces of adaptation and limitation. Reaction looks to the past now converted into the eternal, into absolute memory: resistance sees in the past what has escaped memory, and forages into the forgotten. It does not claim an

irremovable eternalized past, but rather a force of the forgotten regarding its sign.

Resistance and reaction tend to be confused: reaction strives to be converted into resistance; forces of reaction seek to pass off their reactive actions as resistant actions. Reaction is not only located in the forces that power exercises, but can also anchor itself onto certain groups or individuals who suffer from it because, for them, to resist has another meaning: it is "to want power, to desire domination, to attribute to oneself or be attributed established values, money, honor, power."¹¹ Despite not pertaining to the forces exercising power, here resentment, not resistance, is played out: they want to locate them-selves on the other side; the uncontrollable desire to locate themselves in the area of domination pulsates in their bodies. And what's more, in certain nuclei of resistance, there sometimes exist confused aspirations. It is an extremely complex phenomena in that, at certain times, emancipating ideas and actions can be combined with retrograde and conservative pulsations of varying natures, be they nationalist, ethnic or religious. In such cases, reaction goes hand in hand with resistance. Thus, reaction can also dwell in forms of resistance. However, an enormous distance separates them, their qualities differ, they are qualitatively distinct and opposite forces, although in certain specific situations they walk in step and thus are indistinguishable.

IV. Resistance is, in itself, a form of intervention into the social and, as with all intervention, evokes a violent act disrupting established orders, that set of implanted norms, those acquired certainties. It is an untimely act, unexpected, inopportune, extrinsic to the continuity of habits and routines. As such, resistance plays with time, it becomes *non-actual*, a site out of site, time outside of time: it acts in the present for a time yet to come; it is a present act against the present and against all the forms eternalized in the past in favor of a future time.

Resistance goes against the present, against "this" time, and constructs in the present a time to come, which opens up in the very act of resistance, emerges as possibility, as dream and desire, as gesture that risks itself for a tomorrow.

There is no predictable or anticipated destiny in the resistant act. It operates by surprise, unaware, slipping in through doors left ajar, exercising violence from the unexpected. It is impossible to predict the results for it provokes multiple and multiplied occurrences, unrest and tremors; it arouses regroupings, marks and sculpts bodies, breaks routines, awakens hatred and passion, and unravels fears that impel reaction, turning back, return. Resistance is an act in the present, against the present, in favor of a future time. It is an act that ruptures continuity and also memory. It is, in turn, an advisory act of new visibilities, and of interpreting social actions regarding processes of creating meaning, and it is also, undoubtedly, a political act. In this way, resistance appears to be an act of rupture, of visibility, and of interpretation.

Act of Rupture

Resistance, with respect to a violent act, breaks and ruptures the continuity of order, the fantasized harmony of the social, the socially accepted forms of inequality and unbalance believed inseparable. It introduces, in its own emergency, an element of unrest, it reveals disgust, it seeks forms of expression for the accumulated sentiments that ignited the protest, and it elaborates and organizes sentiments. Also, it proposes new strategic games, invents new tactical action, and unleashes imagination and desire.

It starts moving, and moves by moving the forces it confronts. At the same time, it provokes the emergence of new social characters appearing on the scene, who prepare in much the same way as actors as if it were a theatrical production requiring rehearsal and repetition. It produces, along with it, new discourses: a new word is uttered, finds form and style, inevitably provoking a response from the opposite pole, which must then develop another discourse in return. Round and round the discourses. Resistance unties the tongue.

If its affirmative and differential force continues to achieve greater potency with time, it can be capable of provoking contagiousness and adhesion of groups and individuals, establishing new forms of alliances, achieving unsuspected support which transforms it into the protagonist of the scene, unleashing expectations and, without a doubt,

reaction as well. Resistance is what maintains the forces in tension and provokes movement, for it seeks to break the confronted forces' intents at crystallization. It also plays a relevant role in the imaginary processes of society, for it sheds doubt on the authoritarian fantasy of continuity and harmony by making the conflict evident and by expressing discontent. That is to say, it puts daring to demand into action. Resistance is also an act of rupturing the instituted memory. There exist two notions of the past: a recorded-eternalized past with which we relate memory and history, a history based on harmony and achievement; but there also exists another past that is constructed in the shadows, made up of forgotten histories and memories. Starting from the recorded-eternalized past, the forgotten has the consistency of no more than a ghost, it is the emptiness of memory, its gap, its negative.

For resistance, the forgotten has another meaning: it does not appear as a lagoon or a gap, but rather as a force, a sign. It seeks to bring certain forgotten aspects to memory, locating them in their historical dimension, the objective being to construct another history starting from the forgotten: it establishes new beginnings, determines new origins so that the forgotten acquires new potency, is no longer empty, no longer a minus but rather is discovered as pure possibility. Memory, then, begins to carry out a new function, it must, according to Foucault: "unbury something which has been hidden, hidden not only due to negligence, but also because it was carefully, deliberately and maliciously disguised and masked".

One resists the impetus to forget the forgotten, its strategy consisting of retaining features and fragments of history looming in the shadows and bringing them out into the light, making them present. And this simple deed uncovers the authoritarian forms of an enslaved memory that seeks to forever condemn the shadows to the shade.

Act of Visibility and Interpretation

Michel Foucault states, throughout his work and in different ways, that all societies in any given era establish limits, not only regarding what can be said but also the way it should be said, they establish then, the *speakable*: that which can be articulated and the way it must be expressed to be comprehensible and acceptable in its time, a personal

way of relating words and, also, of describing phenomena. All that falls outside of the speakable is transformed into the *unthinkable* within the parameters of a given society. It establishes not only the limits of the speakable, but also the limits of the *visible*: it produces what we could call filters for gazing, through which we perceive things. It advocates, therefore, a type of visibility that distinguishes light from dark, opaque from transparent, seen from unseen; that is to say, it provokes a perceptive field that allows us to see certain objects, and denies the possibility of seeing others, giving way to a world of the evident. All that is and can be seen in society is converted into the evident: the seen and the imagined must fall within certain margins in order to be existent, evident and expected. At the same time, all that one says must be inscribed in what society interprets as logical and valid; that is to say, it must be integrated into common sense, that brutal and authoritarian sense of what is socially and culturally accepted as real and true. Society demands us to see, hear and speak in such a way that it subjects us to that particular time and space, and makes us subjects of that time and space. It traverses our subjectivities with qualities of spatial-temporal coordinates: it only allows us to speak of what is possible to speak about, in that form and in no other, and to see objects under a certain light, and only those upon which light is shed. All that falls outside this regime is rendered *impossible*. To achieve this, it does not use tactics of keeping secrets or concealing. Nothing is hidden in a society, neither the articulated nor the visible, although they may not be directly speakable or legible, or immediately visible. These fields are converted into the filter through which we see, hear, speak, think, perceive, and even feel.

If there are indeed no secrets and nothing is hidden, they enjoy a certain invisibility, that of the obvious and evident which, because it is right before our eyes, is not seen, heard or perceived. Neither sight nor hearing catch it. We have here the *invisibility of the visible*, its strength inscribed in the capacity for going unseen, for the simple reason that it is located clearly within sight, like the *stolen letter* by Edgar Allan Poe. In this way, the phenomena, situations, everyday acts are naturalized and, once transformed into irreversible, they lose visibility. Resistance bores through the invisibility of the visible, exposes confrontation,

bodily tension, battle fields, involved interests, strategic games, war tactics —it locates us in front of new objects to see, know, think about. Only from resistance is it possible to create new forms of speaking and seeing capable of breaking stereotypes, crystallized figures through which we access the world. Some forms of resistance in thinking and acting were able to dig down to the very roots of ways of thinking, seeing, and living. They emerge from the shadows, introduce a new light, enrich the angles from which today it is possible to understand the phenomena they fought for. A true invention, in no pejorative minor sense: the romantics invented a new formula for love and nature; the Bolshevik resistance invented a new sense of class, and "the diverse Freudian sects developed new ways of feeling and even of producing hysteria, infantile neurosis, psychosis, family conflict, reading of myths." Resistance has the grace to realize a new distribution of light and shadow, a new spotlight upon its appearance in the social, certain shadowy areas being illuminated for the first time, obliging subjects to turn their attention to them. We are inexorably attracted to this new luminosity and, at the same time, other colors and hues emerge, a new set of tints and tones.

Resistance does not only address the impossibility of seeing when a set of lights are introduced that confound vision and modify the scenery, the stage and the decor, making the invisibility of the visible evident; rather, it allows itself to address the unthinkable, all that which the regime of the speakable makes impossible to think of, and it also adds to the scenery the accumulation of "the-not-thought-of" that constructs our thinking, of which we are unaware or do not directly criticize — that immense set of given sentences that speak for us without us realizing it. "In every era and society, the people's way of reflecting, the ways of writing, judging, speaking, the trivial and daily conversations, and even the way in which individuals experience things, the reactions of their sensitivity, their entire conduct is governed by a structure, by a system that changes with the times and the societies, but which is present in all the eras.' This system is composed of a set of articulations that we use every day without being conscious of it. These constitute "the-not-thought-of" that structure our thinking, since "we think within an anonymous and compulsory larger thought that is the thought of

an era and a language (...) it is the background on which our 'free' thought shines and emerges for an instant."¹

Resistance is able to introduce fractures in the system, reveal "the-not-thought-of" that structures our thinking, puts into relief the accumulation of given sentences which we speak everyday, which make us say what we would never have said if we had been conscious of it, and which are always present, conditioning thought and life. Some resistances risk even more, making it possible to think the unthinkable, that which has not yet been thought of because it falls completely outside the arena of the speakable, which is also the area of that which is possible to be thought or imagined. Resistance in this case is disruption, and meanwhile becomes a happening charged with the value of a sign: it does not require grandeur or fuss; rather, in an almost silent manner, it continues to constitute a spectacle, letting loose the enthusiasm of those who are but spectators. It radiates enthusiasm that catches on by contagiousness and starts to unleash a new interpretation of the present, and to do so, it recovers forgotten past events now made present in the proposed scene. Resistance acts in the present against this present, equipped with as sign and symbol of the past's forgotten moments, and works for a future time that opens up into the present in its very resistant act.

As such, resistance is non-actual, non-actual with regards to the disruption of history: disruption of the past for it makes the forgotten and the fissure present. For the same reason, instituted memory is revealed as incomplete, interested and deceptive, a disruption of the present which requires new actors, scenes and decor the invention of characters, new ways of seeing and thinking, new ways of living. And it disrupts the future in that it opens up a future time here in the present. Resistance, being the memory of the forgotten, strives to contract the past in the present so as to make this time a counter-action, and counter-event, a future act.

¹ Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault, une interview: sexe, pouvoir et la politique d'identité", in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, Paris, nrf Gallimard, 1994.

² Michel Tournier, "Escribir de pie", in *Medianoche de amor*, Madrid, Alfaguara Literaturas, 1991, 144.

³ Michel Foucault, *Historia de la sexualidad. Toma I: La voluntad de saber*, Mexico City, Siglo XXI, 1977, 117.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Historia de la sexualidad. Toma 1: El uso de los placeres*, Mexico City, Siglo XXI, 1986, 66.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *La vida de los hombres infames*, Madrid, La Piqueta, 182.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Barcelona, Paidós Studio, 1987, 159.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, Madrid, Arena Libros, 2000, 35.

⁸ See Raymundo Mier, "El acto antropológico: is intervención como extrañeza", in *Tramas. Subjetividad y procesos sociales*, Journal of the Department of Education and Communication, DSCH, UAM-Xochimilco, Numbers 18 and 19, June/September 2002, Mexico City.

⁹ Michel Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société", Cours au Collège de France, 1976, Paris, Hautes Études-Gallimard-Seuil, 1997, 63.

¹⁰ Felix Guattari, *Caosmosis*, Buenos Aires, Manantial, 1996.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, Interview by Madelaine Chapsal, in *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, Number 5, May 1966, Paris, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Resistance As (the art of) Difference

Giuseppe Patella

What do we mean when we talk about resistance? Considering resistance means, above all else, finding the right words and concepts for doing so. Thus, when we speak of resistance, the question we must ask ourselves is how to contemplate opposition? Mentioning resistance