

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

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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

is in fact raising the problem of opposites, which in turn means responding to the problem of conflict.

If we begin with the recognition that opposition does indeed exist —a recognition that denies all attempts at neutralizing opposites, which would be typical of ideological construction, either political or aesthetic-, we must recognize that, faced with society's growing complex processes, opposition can no longer be thought of in traditional terms, nor according to past perspectives. This means that it can no longer be contemplated according to classical logic related to the concepts of identity, which does not recognize the existence of the other, the heterogeneous, and the distinct. But neither can it be considered from the dialectic logic still dominating in the twentieth century, which was based on the concept of contradiction: the battle of opposites would lead to overcoming conflict through dialectical contraposition between positive and negative.

So, if the logic of identity and dialectic logic are now excluded, and even the logic of so-called polarity in which opposites are considered entities presupposing and sustaining each other reciprocally, four other fundamental perspectives, each distinct and irreconcilable, can be characterized, all proposing ways of contemplating opposition, and presenting a few other theoretical answers to the problem of opposites. In summary, the first position contemplates the problem of opposites by reducing conflict, by pacifying and harmonizing opponents. This is the typical solution of the aesthetic tradition, which always seeks to reconcile opposites, overcome all conflict, and which is found today in discourses proposing the rediscovery and rehabilitation of notions of beauty and harmony. The second position, on the contrary, proposes making opposites radical and conflict extreme. In the aesthetic field, it is manifested by appealing to notions of the sublime, giving rise to what we could call a kind of aesthetics of terror. The third position, on the other hand, moves towards relativizing and problematizing of opposites, towards a presentation of the terms of conflict based on irony and masking. This is the course considered ((postmodern" by many, which has distinct exponents and representatives all over the world. Finally, the fourth position is one that could be based on the notion of difference, which contemplates opposites in a non-symmetrical, non-

dialectical, non-polar way, through the concepts of acuteness and provocation.

Without entering into the individual merits of these situations, each having its own virtues and defects, the only one which, to say it briefly, appears open to an effective experience of conflict, is that which allows for contemplating opposites, and therefore resistance, as the articulation of difference.

But what does it mean to understand resistance as the articulation of difference? Above all else, resistance goes in the opposite direction of aesthetic conciliation: it moves towards an experience of conflict larger than dialectic contradiction, towards the exploration of opposition between terms not symmetrically polar to each other. Hence, resistance pre-supposes a logic of difference understood as non-identity, as dissimilarity larger than the logical concept of diversity and the dialectic of distinction. So then, as we know, it has been characteristic of post-structuralist and postmodern thought to add the question of difference to the agenda of theoretical and political debate. The topic of difference is one of the most important results we have inherited from these thought experiences, and which we can still apply today in the arena of contemporary reflection.

In its best theorization —and here I think of Lyotard (1979,1983)— one must recognize that postmodernism has left us with the tendency of attuning our sensibility to differences, honing our capacity to accept the undetermined, the shapeless, the immense. It has accustomed us to resist simplification, the banal, the univocal, instilling in us the pleasure of incessant search, of continued shifting of horizons of hope —in short, it has opened up to us the channels of plurality, multiplicity, difference. Thanks to post modernity, we have learned to mistrust everything from indubitable certainties, absolute principles, essentialist and totalizing visions, to univocal and comforting answers. Understood as siding oneself with a distinct logic of thought, no longer monolithic but rather plural, following transversal paths, non-linear and discontinuous, we must then recognize that postmodernity from now on, with its logic of difference and plurality, represents an unrefutable cultural conquest.

But today, with a new millennium already under way, it appears we are escorting something paradoxical: on the one hand we have an inflation of the Other and, consequently on the other hand, a reification of its concept. For example, within the framework of the political, as seen from the European geographical standpoint, the right-wingers of xenophobic tendencies assume their role as carriers of ideas of difference by celebrating their diversity, specificity, and exalting them excessively, never negating them. Take the case of the massive diffusion of the so-called Front National in France, and in my country, Italy, the success of the Lega Nord, a party that now even forms part of the government. In both cases —although we could add others— we are obviously dealing with reactionary positions, resulting in a process of essentializing difference. Differences of identity are rendered absolute by connecting them to the exaltation of national, regional, provincial, and local parameters, to the vindication of petty individualist, egotistic, and partial interests. We find ourselves, hence, face to face with ideas of difference that are absolutely ideological, determinist, discriminatory and intrinsically xenophobic as well as carriers of exclusion and division on all levels.

Therefore, confronted with this essentialist idea of difference, and the temptation of resuming the old idea of identity, of uniqueness —not shades but rather pure, clear, and distinct— is insinuated. However, we must resist this temptation and still bet in favor of difference, which can be reduced to neither a deliberate nor generic invitation with respect to and in tolerance of diversity. The idea of difference is truly too important to leave in the hands of the new ideologues circulating today, or in those of so many old diehards of various forms of supremacy (white, Occidental, male...).

In light of the challenges of our time, faced with predominating forms of singular thought, of a new global order extending from economics to politics, from religion to society, confronted above all with communication imposing itself as an informative ideal in every sector of social and cultural life as manifested in the tendency to conform with the model of the publicity message, with the attitude of simplifying and lightening content, of confirming and flattening all levels of mediocrity and vulgarity thus revealing the true oppressive

and mystifying nature of communication, it remains indispensable to affirm the principle of difference, activate forms of resistance, and develop strategies of opposition.

It would be, however, absurd to oppose these currently prevailing tendencies—which for many constitute the unobtainable horizon towards the future—in favor of forms of conservation or nostalgia for a now unrecoverable past. This resistance can not simply be expressed in terms of negativity, much less of universality; rather, it would have a specific, determined function, it would be at once different, plural, contingent, and propositional. Its differential movement must not mean nostalgia, rejection or resignation, but rather transformation and transfer. In this way, resistance does not mean inertia, or defending the status quo; it is a slower and quasi-imperceptible, but continuous and insistent, movement of transformation, of differentiation between levels and reality.

With respect to a purely transgressive or nihilistic vision of resistance—typical of not only the vitality of the seventies, but also of negative thought—which thinks only in terms of negativity and head-on contraposition, or with respect to a prophetic vision which focuses its attention on the future and thus renounces the moment in question, we lack an insistence on active and present forms of resistance, multiple and differentiated, always concentrated in the present, in the personal place of the contender, and renouncing all totalizing will of authority and violence.

The resistance we are thinking about rejects taking an apocalyptic or visionary position, but at the same time avoids being watered down to the level of conceding to the society of spectacle and generalized communication in which we live. Resistance can not fall into the naivete of head-on confrontation with the enemy, in which "the illness of the chains" as Nietzsche called it, is perpetuated. We can not be naïve to the point of believing that we can defeat the adversary so easily, much less conciliate or even think of changing places with him. It is no longer a time of exalted mystics or prophets of misfortune, but of courageous thinkers who know how to differentiate between conservation and transfer, between immobilization and transformation, tactics and effectiveness.

What is lacking is a solid but subtle thinking, fluid but resistant, ingenious but not absentminded. A thinking in the present, that is capable of submerging us into the flow of the current, while at the same time always distinguishing between levels, transferring essentially distinct, different messages. To this end, it would perhaps be convenient to remember the teachings of Walter Benjamin who, although believing himself deprived of illusions with respect to his era, spoke unreservedly about it. The attitude the modern resistant should have is therefore that of a remote interest, a kind of trusting disenchantment, of skeptical admiration, which puts it in direct contact with the present, with its transformations, without otherwise leaving us frightened, much less dazzled.

However, contemplated far from the logic of identity and contradiction, difference is not understood as an absolute foreignness, like radical transgression which frequently, as alternative and speculative behavior, is functional to the very system and ends up re-enforcing it. Lacan and Derrida have taught us otherwise: we can never truly find the other, the different, without domesticating it, incorporating it, reducing it in some way to the same. The work of difference is really a differential movement which incites us to deconstruct the illusion of a pure theory of alterity and of difference, and instead to contemplate a kind of foreign familiarity, an ambivalence that inextricably unites identity and alterity, the inherent and the foreign.

The model for this foreign familiarity could come from the field of psychoanalysis and be traced, for example, back to so-called "formations of commitment" of which Freud speaks. In fact, Freud refers to the aesthetic category of Witz, or acuteness, as the formation or establishment of commitment between terms strongly opposing one another due to the true difference existing between them. Acuteness is thus the aesthetic mode for contemplating difference, and it makes room for cultural productions endowed with great fineness in which opposites are contemplated in a non-symmetrical way: they are recognized and maintained in their alterity without being conciliated, annulled, assimilated or converted one into the other. For this reason

difference is an art, it is the product of the subtle capacity for contemplating formations with great fineness and acuteness. In the context of an Occidental aesthetic, together with the idea of beauty as harmony, symmetry and conciliation—that is, the classic idea of beauty—there has, as well, always existed a diverse, alternative idea: that is, a strategic idea of beauty, thought of as experience of opposites and as challenges. The aesthetic of difference finds its very roots sunk in Antiquity and the Baroque. Think of on the one hand, Heraclitus, who even in Antiquity proposed the idea of the fight between opponents as the principle governing all things. And, on the other hand, think of Baltasar Gracian who, in the seventeenth century—the Golden Century of Spanish culture— theorized about the notion of acuteness, understanding it to be a "decoding" attitude penetrating the depths of the real to subvert natural order, therefore discovering acute and efficient, strategic and refined forms of beauty. These ideas meet up again later in some theories of twentieth-century avant-garde movements, such as the Surrealists who proclaimed not to know how to handle the idea of beauty contemplated as balance and harmony, and for this reason they proposed that "beauty will be convulsive or it will not be" (Breton). In light of these considerations, the idea of resistance as difference can not but assume the traces of an experience of challenge and provocation.

But what is understood by these terms?

At the heart of the theory of challenge is, over and above all else, the abandonment of an organic and totalizing idea of society, as well as all theory of social equilibrium. Society, even more so today, is not something static or monolithic; what makes it move is not the harmonious desire of pacification and consensus, but instead conflict, that is, an incessant fight for individual and collective recognition. A few recent critical philosophical theories lucidly make evident these very aspects (Honneth).

Furthermore, distinct from transgression—which presents itself as a moment of rejection, of deviation from the norm, thus maintaining a dialectic relation with the very thing it tries to distance itself from—challenge moves in a different terrain and entails another appreciation

of its contenders and its own role with respect to the symmetry between them.

In the wake of the "sensation" artists, what is presented today as an example in the field of contemporary art appears perfectly inserted in the environment of searching for transgression, in the ditch of the already-spent transgression of the avant-gardes. Apart from this, this now canonized and fashionable art is born of specific commissions from media and publicity worlds seeking only to propagate their own ideology. This art does nothing more than form a functional expression of the system, perfectly integrated in the logic of the dominant market. In it, there is no true challenge, no real provocation. In addition, the challenge alone is no longer sufficient, for it still requires the conflict to be understood as a kind of duel between opposite and symmetrical entities, and it demands, furthermore, appeal to a new system of norms for regulating future competition. Only with provocation do we situate ourselves, from the very beginning, in a terrain different from that of the adversary: between us and the adversary a radical asymmetry is established, a difference, like that which exists, for example, between conscience and unconsciousness. In this provocation, what is important is the perturbing effect of "uncanniness" (*Unheimlichkeit*) obtained when appealing to something that has remained latent in the adversary, and which he or she can not manifest without its force appearing to be destroyed.

In this dimension, when we consider the ideas of challenge and provocation, we can not help but think of the way the two are interpreted in Dandyism, for example, on the condition, however, that all trace be eliminated from this phenomenon that would make it simply an expression of a decadent sensibility or a form of aestheticism.

Before, however, the environment in which the dandy moved was that of the world, the terrain of everyday life, what Baudelaire called *la vie moderne*, in which he immediately situated himself in an alter-native manner, valorizing those strategies of behavior and action different and foreign from the dominant logic. He can not keep this up if there is no

measure of challenge. His entire existence is nothing but a continuous challenging of constituted order. His essential provocation is his distancing, his absolute exteriority, his converting himself into nothing and no one in order to adhere fully to his time and to the reality of things. The dandy therefore bets on difference and the unpredictability of historic process. In this sense there follows a strategic paradox, a kind of politics of the impossible which is supported by the unpredictable, by collision, by the hidden complicities it can arouse. The result is not guaranteed but, what's more, this is not essential. It is not the conquest for power or riches that impels it; its result is reached to the extent it succeeds in provoking reaction and igniting imagination, in virtue of its ability to resuscitate stupor and admiration. If life is nothing but battle and conflict, what moves its action is a constant sense of challenge, of examination, understood as a dangerous experience to which we must continually expose ourselves.

Challenges, provocations and examinations do nothing now but delineate a strategy of resistance understood as the practice of difference, which is before all else a cultural practice, a practice, then, of contemplation that vindicates once and for all an effective dimension of knowing. So that what appears to impose itself with force is a new figure of the intellectual, certainly not in the traditional meaning of the organic intellectual, but rather in the more fluid and blatant sense of the term.

I believe that today there is no reason to be embarrassed by this word; on the contrary, we must reaffirm the centrality of its presence, claim its autonomy with strength. Its meaning, today, should be such that he who presents a challenge to society, to the world, finds grounds in everyday life and carries forward a contrasting idea of culture, maintaining alive the knowledge-power bond inherent in all theory. The conditions for this to happen are, none the less, that intellectuals keep their distance from both the conformity and academism of institutional thinkers—whose maximum aspiration is a well-ordered academic career—as well as from the sectarianism and extremism of outsiders, who aspire to the formation of a sect. Generally, what the former lack is the emotional energy, and the latter the realistic perception of cultural dynamics.

In fact, today it so happens that, on the one hand, knowledge has become bureaucratized to such an extent that it has systematized so much into a guaranteed order, making it almost impossible to give recognition to anyone not organic to this same logic. On the other hand, organization of culture and the regimentation of public meaning have become so strong and ramified as to make even dissent irrelevant. This situation, nevertheless, could be overcome if we would only realize that today, more than ever, we find ourselves before a common enemy, represented by the hegemony of the market and by the predomination of the one and only logic of profit. Thus, facing a common enemy, we must develop a common front: both institutional thinkers as well as outsiders must understand they are producers of goods—cultural and symbolic goods—that pertain to an economy distinct from the dominant one, and it is in the interest of both to safe-guard the autonomy of this environment.

In his final works, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 2001) strongly maintains that, in this time of the worst economic globalization, we should oppose the denationalized internationalism of men and women in culture by resisting kitsch products of globalization in the name of values connected with exercising free, autonomous, disinterested activity. Consequently, this implies freely and seriously developing one's own intellectual work by rigorously analyzing what surrounds us, and how each of us can contribute to unmasking dominant ideology and resist its triumph over us. Here, we are dealing with the operation of throwing a "grain of sand in the well-greased cogwheels of resigned complicities" (Bourdieu 2001).

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