

Introduction

Coming to Terms—On the Aim and Scope of this Volume

Martin Butler, Paul Mecheril & Lea Brenningmeyer

In the field of physics, resistance is commonly defined as “a force preventing a process from starting, or once started from intensifying beyond a certain threshold” (Harré 5). Though it might be odd to begin this introduction with an excursus to the sciences, it could be worth picking up on that definition, as it helps carve out the understanding of resistance that this volume takes as a starting point for its reflections. To be precise, if we conceptualize resistance in the social sphere less in analogy to a physical phenomenon, i.e., less as an obstacle, hindrance, obstruction, or barrier, whose function is to channel the ‘flow’ of the social and to obstruct totalization, but rather as an intervention in the struggle for the universal or a very particular social order, then, one may well argue, we are dealing with resistance as a political phenomenon. A phenomenon which, it seems, has resurfaced as a viable option of political articulation and positioning in range of different contexts and, more often than not, is informed by a distinctly normative rationale: Whenever and wherever inequality is experienced and articulated as injustice, there is resistance. This normative stance, which is proliferated, e.g., through the rhetoric and actions of social, emancipatory movements and through discourses about the universality of human rights, and which, in a very fundamental way, rests on the assumption that constellations and relations of power are contingent and changeable, can indeed be said to both characterize and, at the same time, fuel acts of resistance against the experienced and articulated injustice of unequal social relations—no matter if these relations constitute one’s own situation or the situations of others and no matter if they are experienced as injustice from one’s own or from others’ perspectives.

If we, for the time being, allow ourselves to accept this notion of resistance as a mode of intervention based on a specifically normative rationale, through which the demand to overcome situations of disadvantaged and disregard is both legitimized and articulated, we are indeed able to spot a number of contexts in different parts of the world, in which both discourses and practices of resistance have resurged. In these different contexts, forms of resistance have taken different shapes, but are all more or less driven by either an intuitive or an explicit notion of injustice and justice: Whereas in western societies, it is indeed the (discourse on the) crisis of global capitalism, along with a general loss of trust in institutionalized politics, which is regularly held responsible for the recent emergence of new movements of protests and resistance, in regions such as Northern Africa, political uprisings have commonly been regarded as a reaction long overdue to totalitarian regimes and their infrastructures of oppression and control. The uprisings in Ukraine in 2014, Occupy Gezi in 2013, and the protests in Northern Africa known as the so-called Arab Spring starting in 2010, for instance, were considered to be (and fashioned themselves as) acts of resistance against structures of governmental dominance and control to an extent which seriously threatened and harmed the individual citizen's rights. With the disclosure of practices of surveillance through national secret services such as the NSA, by the way, or the most recent debates on the hacking of the US American election procedures by Russian activists, similar mechanisms of power have been made visible in western societies, which, in turn, are said to have enhanced tendencies towards civil disobedience and resistance.

Finally, the election of Donald Trump into the office of the American Presidency has so far not only fueled the debate on the rationale of democratic rule both in the US and in other parts of the world, but has also contributed to a more or less explicit turn towards nationalist and racist ideologies and politics across Europe—political debates and elections, e.g., in Austria, France, or the Netherlands give ample proof of this tendency. Moreover, it has also triggered movements of predominantly anti-capitalist opposition promoting social equality and/or environmental justice both in institutionalized politics and in less formal or informal ways and forms on the spot. In other words, resistance, it seems, has again become a viable option to confront a government, the formation and constitution of which has not seldom been referred to as an articulation of resistance in itself—i.e., against political corruption, against institutionalized politics

which had been accused of forgetting the needs and demands of the white working class men whom Trump has so ineloquently but efficiently sided with during his campaign. Both Trump's fashioning of himself as the leader of a movement that was born out of resistance against the political establishment, and the emergence of anti-Trump movements which set out to resist this resistance at the very same time, may be indicative of a more general concern, i.e., the mistrust in the workings of capitalist democracies. This mistrust, then, which can be traced both in so-called right-wing and in left-wing rhetoric, has perhaps been the breeding ground for Trump's landslide victory, and has equally contributed to the emergence of new forms of resistance in the recent past, such as the Occupy movement, the student protests revolving around the issue of 'safe space' at US American universities, or, more recently, and in direct opposition to Trump's agenda, the 'March of Science' or the 'Women's March on Washington.'

It is this resurgence of resistance, then, which has perhaps been the central motivation for this collection of essays, which takes these developments as a starting point to explore phenomena of resistance in different historical and contemporary contexts from an interdisciplinary and transcultural perspective. To be sure, in the recent past, there has been a lot of scholarly concern with resistance in a number of volumes (cf., e.g., Byrne; Critchley; Douzinas; Dutta; Skyes; Welzer), the publication of which, just like in our case, has most probably been motivated by forms and events of political opposition in different parts of the world. The essays in this collection set out to add to this ongoing discussions and reflections, as they not only shed light on different subjects, representations, aesthetics, and contexts of resistance, but also, and perhaps more importantly, add to a theoretical discussion of terms and concepts of resistance by—albeit, at times, more implicitly—addressing the following questions: 1. What is 'resistance'? 2. On which normative grounds do forms of resistance work, how are they legitimized? 3. How is resistance represented and/or mediated, and in how far can representations be considered to be resistant? 4. Who uses the term/concept of 'resistance'? When, where, and for what purposes? In order to approach these questions, the essays collected in this volume take different routes in their exploration of resistance. They approach resistance on a theoretical level, investigate into different conceptualizations of resistance in different historical settings, and/or work on a range of different case studies taken from a variety of contexts

and—through close contextualizing analyses—contribute to establishing a distinctly comparative view on the various notions of resistance in different disciplinary as well as social and/or cultural contexts.

Though not all of the contributions directly address terms and concepts of resistance on a theoretical level, we sense that they are nevertheless broadly informed by at least two different, if not opposing ideas of resistance: While one notion of resistance is based on the assumption of active agency, i.e., on the capabilities of individuals to interpret their environment and ‘act upon’ it deliberately through what is commonly referred to as appropriation (cf., e.g., Hall), the other one conceives of resistance as embedded in specific structures and relationships of power—in the latter sense, then, as Lawrence Grossberg puts it, “[t]he question of agency is [...] how access and investment or participation (as a structure of belonging) are distributed within particular structured terrains“ (“Identity” 100; cf. also Grossberg, “Cultural Studies”). To be sure, it does not seem to be too fruitful to rule out either one of these notions of resistance when examining the question of how changes of power relations in society are set into motion—and none of the contributions actually seems to be heading into just one direction. It is perhaps far more appropriate to argue that forms of resistance that stimulate change in hegemonic regimes instead of just validating and perpetuating these regimes are neither an act of individual heroism nor are they the outcome and expression of a self-referential structural logic only. For us, then, it seems to be more productive to explore the relationships *between* these two notions of resistance as well as their relationship to other concepts and approaches, and to also reflect on the normative presuppositions inscribed into each of these perspectives, though, at times, it seems that these very presuppositions are secretly at work even if we try hard to spot and suspend them.

The present volume sets out to enhance this very endeavor, as it is supposed to be a site on which different conceptualizations of resistance are drawn upon to elucidate different historical and cultural constellations. By putting a number of different disciplinary voices into a dialogue, its goal is to disclose the specific contextual preconditions, aesthetic forms, and political/ideological implications of both past and present forms of resistance. Through their context-specific approaches to historical and current phenomena and concepts of resistance, then, the essays in this collection also—and again, more or less explicitly—

contribute to uncovering the highly ethical dimension inscribed into public and scholarly debates on resistance on the one hand and into acts of resistance (or what is designated as acts of resistance, respectively) on the other. In this way, the volume might also help draw our attention to the normative references that lie at the heart of both practices and discourses of resistance, but which are only rarely made explicit. To different degrees and in different ways, the contributions to this volume reveal that scholarly debates are not only reflecting the normative-ethical dimension of the topic of resistance, but are also affected by normative stances and motivated by political demands. In other words, scholarly discourse on resistance cannot fully escape the political and ethical aura of resistance.

As a starting point, Micha Brumlik's contribution investigates the overall question of "what can be understood as 'resistance'" and, more specifically, as 'political resistance.' By drawing on the examples of Carl von Ossietzky, Albert Leo Schlageter, and Mahatma Gandhi, he argues that the evaluation of resistance is dependent on what it is directed against. In so doing, Brumlik unfolds the normativity of the concept of 'resistance,' which is closely connected to moral, ethical, and political questions, and also investigates into its relevance for processes of subjectivization. Though resistance is commonly valued positively, the value of resistance, Brumlik explicates, depends upon which kind of 'evil' it is directed against.

Alex Demirović adds another perspective on the concept of resistance and its dependency on the 'target' it is directed against. In his contribution on "More than Resistance," he asks what resistance can turn into. Drawing on Foucault, his contribution argues that resistance is intrinsically tied to power and, thus, does itself not develop enough momentum to change what it is directed against—at least not to an extent that further resistance becomes unnecessary. By shifting the focus from forms of resistance that happened in the past to the requirements of a theory of subversion and resistance, he calls for something 'beyond resistance,' which, in a double movement, disarticulates the rejected practices of power and "strives for a new universality and universalization."

Kaspar Maase's contribution traces past and present discourses on the resistant potential of popular culture, shedding light on the theoretical and ideological presuppositions of the different concepts of resistance at work in these discourses. His journey through different conceptualizations of the status and value of popular culture takes a historical and systematic perspective, which not only illustrates that and how ideas on the relationship

between popular culture and resistance are shaped by the specific socio-cultural contexts in which they emerge; it also provides the ground for identifying a number of desiderata for investigating into phenomena of resistance in the field of “empirical popular culture research.”

Based on and referring to Herbert Marcuse’s critical theory, Rainer Winter focuses on the idea of ‘one-dimensionality.’ Arguing for the still prevalent importance of this approach—especially when dealing with questions of the meaning and the role of resistance—he discusses “the relationship between liberation and one-dimensionality” in Marcuse’s work and points out one-dimensionality’s influence on social life. Referring to Habermas, Winter suggests to maintain a dialectical perspective in order to criticize one-dimensionality and strive for social change. Referring to examples of, e.g., the Occupy movement, he discusses “how one-dimensionality can be challenged and overcome by different forms of resistance” and suggests to return to Marcuse’s critical theory.

Sabine Hess also discusses the relationship between resistance and power by examining forms of borderland resistance. Starting from the observation that the ‘border paradigm’ is still prevalent, she illustrates how the ‘autonomy of migration’-approach allows for change of perspective on borders and, consequently, provides the option of conceiving of migration *as* resistance. Showing that “the border regime can be understood as a site of constant encounter, tension, conflict, and contestation,” she manages to “re-conceptualize borderlands as well as migration itself as ways of resistance,” thereby turning migration from an object of scholarly discussion to a resistant practice which questions established orders of knowledge.

Kemal İnal and Ulaş Başar Gezin focus on the agents and subjects as well as on different forms of urban resistance and set out to explore the specific contextual parameters that have contributed to their emergence. Asking who ‘reclaims the cities,’ in what ways, and for what particular purposes, they focus primarily on “massive popular resistances in Arab regions and in some other Western countries.” Based on the argument that this form of resistance is primarily directed against capitalism, they are calling for ‘the people’ to organize in commons, rebuild a democratic and socially produced and productive city, and find new ways of resistance in urban environments.

Jens Martin Gurr examines urban practices of resistance, urban activism, and ‘right to the city’ movements in another cultural and

political context and from a different perspective: Focusing on the self-reflexivity and theory-consciousness of movements against gentrification, he also problematizes the role and responsibility of scholarly research on resistance. In so doing, he distinguishes between different aims, demands, targets, constellations, and networks of, and commitments to resistance. With this critical examination of the principles of ‘critical urban studies,’ Gurr contextualizes his analysis of the rhetoric of the “Mission Yuppie Eradication Project” and Christoph Schäfer’s activist pictorial essay *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik/ The City is our Factory*.

Kathrin Peters’ contribution analyzes images of protest and asks “how to conceive visual testimony ... in view of the contemporary flood of digital images,” particularly focusing on the “Woman in the Blue Bra”-video and its various forms of distribution, adaptation, modification, appropriation, and reception. Starting from a differentiation between center and periphery on two levels—both on the level of the camera’s perspective (being informed by specific media reporting conventions and a specific postcolonial constellation) and on the level of the clip’s dissemination via predominantly peripheral channels—Peters follows the journey of the footage, sheds light on the forms and functions of its repetitive use in different contexts, and, in so doing, adds to the critical discussion on the role of (social, digital, and analog) media in contexts of protest and resistance.

Stephanie Wodianka focuses on mythologization and memories of resistance in different case studies, in which she identifies “the characteristics that constitute European memory cultures of Resistance during the Second World War.” Her contribution distinguishes between mythical and historical modes of remembering resistance, elucidates the development of resistance as French and Italian narratives of origin, examines “the stability and durability of the myth of Resistance,” and analyzes narratives of collective resistance and collective innocence. For these analyses, Wodianka selects literary and filmographic fiction about resistance published after 1945, which represent memory cultures in France and Italy.

As a manifesto, the final contribution of this volume picks up several of the topics mentioned in the previous contributions, e.g., gentrification, capitalism, and political resistance, and calls for critical pedagogy as a revolutionary praxis and an approach to transform the world. Using the current political situation in the US as a starting point, Peter McLaren

asks what he calls the final question: “Where should critical pedagogy take us and where should we take critical pedagogy?” In his response, he makes a case for a socialist society and against capitalism and state power.

The contributions to this volume are based on a selection of papers given at an international and interdisciplinary conference on resistance held in Oldenburg in November 2014 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Carl von Ossietzky University, not least to honor its patron and namesake. Though some time has passed until the final editing of the book, practices and discourses of resistance have not ceased to be significant factors in reflecting and shaping the world. Still, or again, we seem to experience new forms of resistance in different settings and on a global scale, so this book—necessarily so—only deals with a highly random choice of cases and contexts. It has been a pleasure to put all of the perspectives gathered here into what we consider to have been a very fruitful dialogue at the conference, and we very much hope that the dialogue continues in this volume (and beyond). And, to be sure, this dialogue would not have been possible without the support of so many individuals and institutions: To be precise, we are grateful to the German Research Foundation, the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony, and the Universitätsgesellschaft of the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg for their generous financial support. Moreover, we would like to express our gratitude to the many assistants that have supported us in the organization of the conference and the editing process: Katharina Bieloch, Britta Kölle, Birgit Manz, Laura Nini, and Katharina Sufryd. We would also like to thank the Center for Migration, Education and Cultural Studies as well as the Institute for English and American Studies at the University of Oldenburg for its organizational and infrastructural support. Moreover, we are grateful to the Kulturzentrum PFL in Oldenburg, which turned out to be an excellent venue for the 2014 conference. Last but definitely not least, we would like to thank the participants of the conference for initiating a most lively conversation as well as the contributors to this volume, who were patient enough with the editors, willingly accepting suggestions to their papers—we very much hope that you think that it was worth it. We do.

WORKS CITED

- Byrne, Janet, editor. *Occupy Handbook*. Back Bay Books, 2012.
- Critchley, Simon. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. Verso, 2008.
- Douzinas, Costas. *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe*. Politiy P, 2013.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Identity and Cultural Studies—Is That All There Is?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, Sage, 1996, pp. 87-107.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Cultural Studies in/and New Worlds." *What's Going on? Cultural Studies und Popularkultur*, by Grossberg, Turia+Kant, 2000, pp. 194-230.
- Hall, Stuart. "Kodieren/Dekodieren." *Cultural Studies: Grundlagentexte zur Einführung*, edited by Roger Bromley, Udo Göttlich, and Carsten Winter, zu Klampen, 1999, pp. 92-110.
- Harré, Rom. "Resistance as a Concept in Physics." *Resistance and the Practice of Rationality*, edited by Martin W. Bauer, Rom Harré, and Carl Jensen, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 2-10.
- Dutta, Mohan J. *Voices of Resistance: Communication and Social Change*. Purdue University P, 2012.
- Sykes, Frank. *After Occupy: What Next for the World?* Trafford Publishing, 2013.
- Welzer, Harald. *Selbst denken: Eine Anleitung zum Widerstand*. S. Fischer, 2013.

