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Andrea Mubi Brighenti

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Andrea Mubi Brighenti

University of Trento, Italy

Abstract

The attempt by Arnason and Roberts to interpret Canetti's work in the context of social theory is taken here as the point of departure to investigate Canetti's view on the phenomenon of resistance. Resistance is explored in the context of Canetti's reflection on power and transformation. Further, it is argued that through his substantive concern for crowds (but also for packs, or small bands), an epistemological challenge emerges for social theory. Canetti gives us some precious insights on phenomena of ambiguous multiplicity, which are neither simple sums of separate individuals nor an ontologized Durkheimian collective. Not only this, he resolutely ventures towards the contingency at the foundation of social order, the 'just-thisness' of power, revealing its non-symbolic basis in gestures that impart affects. It is at this level that resistance can be best understood as a movement of liberation from the grip of power.

Keywords

Elias Canetti, power, resistance, struggle, subtraction, transformation

On being un-representative

The title of the present article takes as its starting point Johann Arnason's (1996) piece, originally appeared in *Thesis Eleven*, later to be developed in Arnason and Roberts' (2004) monograph on Elias Canetti, *Canetti and the Counter-Image of Society*. Arnason and Roberts have taken seriously the challenge that Canetti's thought poses to social theory and the social sciences. They have argued that the interpretation Canetti offers of crowd phenomena can be brought into a fruitful dialogue with social theory:

Corresponding author:

Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Faculty of Sociology, University of Trento, Italy
Email: andrea.brighenti@soc.unitn.it

Canetti's interpretation of the crowd is set out in apparent isolation from the broader context of social theory, but its implications cannot be fully appreciated without reference to other perspectives. (Arnason 1996: 98)

The attempt by Arnason to 'resituate' Canetti and recover his work as a neglected sociological classic is shared by other contemporary social theorists, such as, in particular, John McClelland (1989), Robert Elbaz (2003), Vincenzo Rutigliano (2007) and Christian Borch (2010). Canetti, it has been observed, has long been ignored by sociologists and social theorists because, in the first place, *he* ignored them.

As a scholar, Canetti was deterritorialized from the institutional academic world. Like other non-Zionist Jewish intellectuals born a few years before him, such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, he was asystematic and thoroughly transdisciplinary in his explorations. Joussef Ishaghpour (1990) sums up Canetti's condition as that of an intellectual 'not representative of any country, of any school, of any movement, nor any single genre of writing'. In short, Canetti was a private thinker rather than a public professor. He practised a range of genres from the novel, through the play, the aphorism, the essay, to the autobiography. Because of the inner multiplicity of his production and the disregard for conventional, orthodox views, to sever Canetti's oeuvre into disciplinary stockades amounts to distorting his thought and failing to meet his most powerful epistemological challenge.

The aim of this paper is to extend Arnason's interpretation of Canetti in order to investigate a phenomenon which, although never fully developed by Canetti, emerges throughout his whole reflection on power, namely *resistance*. Resistance was conceptualized by Canetti in terms of *transformation*, a subject which he grew more and more interested in, but did not succeed in transforming into a full book. Besides some chapters in *Crowds and Power*, there are also a number of important *loci* in the *Aufzeichnungen* where the development of a reflection on resistance can be found. Thus, I choose to focus on a concept that is less visible but, to my mind, equally important in Canetti's oeuvre as his concern for crowds.

My attempt is to look at how not simply Canetti's theory but, above all, his *style of enquiry* may suggest a new conception of resistance that is suitable for social theory and social research. Thus, the argument follows Arnason's invitation to appreciate Canetti as a social theorist. In particular, I completely agree with Arnason's critique of 'primordialist' interpretations of Canetti, such as the one offered by Honneth (1996), who in turn criticized Canetti for having offered an allegedly poor and unidimensional insight into human nature. We will get back to this critique below. At the same time, it seems to me that Arnason, too, is relatively less attentive to the issue of style in Canetti than he is towards the substantive issue of crowd. My argument, then, is more radical, insofar as I stress that Canetti's relevance for social theory is broader than the substantive topics he touches upon and resides in a series of precious epistemological insights that are all the more relevant today, specifically in the context of the humanist vs post-humanist debate (see e.g. Vandenberghe 2006) and, more generally, at a historical moment when a growing dissatisfaction with the alternatives between subjectivist and objectivist approaches, on the one hand, and between neo-positivist and interpretive approaches, on the other hand, is becoming apparent in social theory and the social sciences at large.

A substantive concern for crowds and other ambiguous multiplicities

In a sense, every object worthy of being studied transgresses disciplinary boundaries. For instance, both the *cordon sanitaire* and the procedures of *variolization* and *vaccination* analysed by Foucault (1975; 2004[1977–8]) are objects that lie precisely in between the domains of medicine, law, policy, statistics, urbanism, and sociology. Precisely in this intersectionality lies their most noteworthy aspect. Similar is the interest in crowd phenomena that led Canetti's exploration, which disregards the boundaries between philosophy, ethnology, art, psychology, and sociology, driven as it is by a number of problems and questions that are all the more urgent for the author (he himself describes them as an 'obsession').

In a certain sense, one has to have a problem in a very serious understanding of the word in order to begin a research. Problems concern and sometimes run all over experience. Before a problem, it is difficult to tell the cognitive from the moral, the cultural from the political. It is the problem that opens and leads the enquiry. This original problem should not be confused with the type of local puzzle that is generated and admitted within established paradigms and disciplines, which represents at best a way of domesticating the problem in order to cope with it. Crucially, the problem cannot be defined by a discipline. Disciplines can only hope to circumscribe problems in order to transform them into more manageable puzzles. Conversely, problems cannot be answered inside disciplines except with conventional strategies. It is in this sense that, for instance, Foucault (1997[1975-1976]) speaks of 'disciplinarization' of knowledge (*mise en discipline des savoirs*). Such is the problematic relationship between problems and disciplines.

Nonetheless, problems often prompt the birth of one or more disciplines. One such problem, if not the crucial one for the social sciences, is that of *collectives*. How should we describe, interpret, and explain assemblies, reunited groups, small bands, gatherings, and rebellious mobs? It is the problem that marks the heated debate on crowds in the last quarter of the 19th century, later to be developed by sociology, criminology, and social psychology. Crowd psychology can be taken as the illustration of a stage of transition. It is the transition from the enterprise to tackle the problem of collectives at large towards the formation of a specialized discipline (social psychology) charged with measuring social influence experimentally. It is an uncertain stage in which the breadth of the problem still dominates the discussion and methodological protocols are not yet well established.

In this context, Arnason has stressed Canetti's doubly 'eccentric' or doubly marginal position as a critic of crowd psychology, in the sense that he conducted a critique from outside the academic world of an academic enterprise which had itself become marginal for both psychologists and sociologists. However, avowedly, the transitional and ultimately old-fashioned status of crowd psychology does not detract from the actual importance of the object it tried to grasp. In modern history, crowds become the veritable 'raw material of all political institutions', as Le Bon famously put it. Taking Foucault onboard, the mass can be said to be the *biopolitical basic fact* of modernity. Masses are a highly visible and historically prominent phenomenon during the course of the 19th and

20th centuries. In an urban age, they represent the urban phenomenon *par excellence*, and they often appear as an ungovernable force.

For 19th-century conservative authors, the empirical problem with crowds was how to *reduce* them to something manageable. The anxiety with crowds was an anxiety with control, coupled with unescapable fear of unrest and revolution. The whole series of ‘moralist’ interpretations of the crowd from Thiers through Le Bon (see McClelland 1989; van Ginneken 1992) endlessly revolve around this point: the crowd is an atavistic phenomenon that belongs in a lower degree of the evolution of the race. Later, Freud (1921) interprets the crowd as the unconscious that lurks inside the ‘civilized’ individual and erupts whenever a breakdown of the ‘mature’ ego takes place (see also Moscovici 1985). The dominant image, then, is that whenever the individual joins the crowd it is as if his very psychic unity melts and he or she regresses to lower stadia of psychic evolution. On these assumptions, the despising of crowds diagnosed by Canetti and, later, by Sloterdijk (2000), can be easily understood.

Even 20th-century totalitarian movements that exploited crowds as a source of political strength for the taking of power – as first recognized by Reich (1946[1933]) – assumed that those crowds could be reduced at the right moment, and would in fact be reduced. This is evident, for instance, in the very structure of the crowds projected by fascist architects – such as Speer’s stadia – aimed at creating the crowd effect while granting control over the formation and subsequent dissolution of the crowd. On the contrary, Canetti understood and stressed the irreducible nature of crowds, to the point that he opposed to Freud’s libido another psychic drive, which he called the ‘crowd instinct’. But, the positivity of crowds is not so much *moral* as it is *epistemic*. Late Canetti states clearly that he has no moral judgement to give about crowds, his effort being ‘only’ to understand their nature.

Arguably, then, his critique of the moralist condemnations of crowds was only a necessary step to overcome a series of inherent distortions created by interpretations that made a true understanding impossible. Positivity means in the first place *irreducibility*: crowds cannot be either understood or explained as the sum of individual actions. Resorting to the individual level to explain crowds presupposes what in fact must be explained. For Canetti, it is a *hysteron proton*, because the individual is a type of entity that exists not before but rather *after* the crowd. Differently from Durkheim, though, crowds cannot be explained on the basis of some ontologized aggregate such as the group. Collectives are not simply a ‘social fact’. The specific level of the aggregate crowd is not that of an ontologized thing but is a much more complex phenomenon.

Before venturing into a more accurate explanation of this, it should be kept in mind that Canetti’s concern was not limited to crowds alone. In fact, there is another figure that is at the centre of Canetti’s reflection, namely the *pack* or the small band. The image of the pack is clearly linked to Canetti’s fascination with Australian Aboriginal peoples and Mongolian hunters. However, the pack cannot be simply understood as the ancestor of the modern crowd, as it has sometimes been claimed. It is not simply a matter of tracing a historical genealogy from ancient packs to modern crowds. True as it is that the modern age confronts us with crowds of an unprecedented dimension, ancient societies conjured up their crowds in various ways – including religious rituals – and packs do not disappear at all in modern times.

So, there cannot be a stage theory here. The most notable fact for us is that both crowds and packs represent crucial objects from an *epistemological* point of view: they call into question the separation not only between sociology and psychology (Moscovici 1985; Arnason 1996: 89), but also – more radically – between the social sciences, the natural sciences (including ethology and territoriality; Brighenti 2010), and the arts (literature, but also painting, etc.), insofar as they are all concerned with ‘ambiguous multiplicities’. My point is that the phenomenon of resistance must be understood precisely in connection with these ambiguous multiplicities.

Methodological shortcomings to epistemological challenges

Arnason (1996: 86–7) has suggested that Canetti represents an alternative to social sciences’ methodological nationalism, but has also argued there are inherent limitations in Canetti’s alternative methodology. As to the first point, Canetti deliberately chose to enquire about objects that have the potential of questioning many taken-for-granted assumptions about social integration, rationality and subjectivity. He exploited at best such potentiality developing a narrative that could not be more distant from rationalist, integrationist, and systemic social scientific theories.

If one really wants to ‘seize the weak point of power’, Canetti seems to suggest, one cannot indulge in idealized descriptions. On the contrary, one has to face what Canetti (1979[1976]: 14) calls *the concrete*, given that ‘the avoidance of the concrete’ is ‘among the most sinister phenomena in intellectual history’. To speak of ‘the concrete’, however, does not mean to become (neo-) positivists, rushing to accumulate sets of quantitative data and fitting them into neatly defined formal models. Rather, Canetti resolutely ventures towards the *contingency* that is at the root of social order, the ‘just-thisness’ of order and social power, so to speak. This entails conceptualizing power in its relation to the body and the ambiguous multiplicities formed by assembled bodies. It is a complicated, non-linear path, which bears resemblances with the experience of ‘necessity’ in a writer like Kafka, or with ‘the Fact’ in a painter like Bacon.

As far as the second point is concerned, in the attempt to explain why Canetti was never fully accepted – if not virtually ignored – by social theorists, Arnason also identifies a series of methodological shortcomings in Canetti’s enterprise. Not only is *Crowds and Power* an incomplete and insufficiently systematic book, but the very core notions used by Canetti suffer from a lack of clarity: ‘The disregard for received rules of concept formation goes so far that it may sometimes seem more appropriate to speak of theory-laden images’ (Arnason 1996: 92).

My argument is that this diagnosis is certainly correct, but instead of seeing it as a failure, I read it as a sign of the radicality of Canetti’s endeavour and, consequently, I welcome it as a challenge which should be located not simply at the level of methodological correctness – i.e. clarity, exhaustiveness and accuracy – but at a more fundamental epistemological level. To my mind, the real point is not that Canetti provides us with images without concepts. Rather, he provides us with *concepts without theory*. His way of theorizing is different from the ordinary scholarly one, where the concepts are only the building blocks, cut out for the theory that is supposed to join them together. Here, it is almost the opposite, insofar as concepts are so powerful, so intensive, that

what we might call 'theory' is but the exploration of a field of forces designed by the concepts themselves. Concepts are not abstract entities, they are not at all the opposite of images and movement. Their visuality and mobility is never schematic. Canetti does not proceed through hypotheses, laws, and corollaries. He sometimes mentions instincts and drives, but this has more to do with the presence of compelling, contingent forces in the social as well as in the conceptual field than with any principle that rules a comprehensive theory (like, for instance, Freud's). This type of 'energetic' view means that one concept cannot enter into a relationship with another without a mutual influence of the one on the other.

Thus, it is certainly true that the categories and the concepts Canetti adopts often have 'uncertain contours' (Arnason 1996: 93). Indeed, the author himself was well aware of such 'uncertainty'. In an aphorism from *The Human Province*, he claims that the *uncertain* is the true domain of thought (Canetti 1973 [1944]). In my view, then, the lack of methodological correctness for which he is reproached is precisely the reason that makes him all the more interesting for social theory. When one reads *Crowds and Power* side by side with the *Aufzeichnungen*, one clearly sees that the structure of the essay is not argumentative but itself aphoristic. Remarkably, praising the uncertain does not at all mean endorsing vagueness, as postmodernism in social research has often indulged in. Canetti's style is anything but vague or complacent. Style, in its uniqueness, forms an integral part of the substantive claims about phenomena. It is not a bizarre *détour*, an obstacle to overcome before Canetti makes sense in social and sociological theory. Quite the opposite. The most formidable aspect here is that style *is* theory-making.

Style raises the epistemological stake of the whole Canettian enquiry. As mentioned above, in conventional social science it is commonly assumed that concept formation is merely the introductory stage to the development of theory, which is deemed to be fully attained when concepts are operationalized as variables. Canetti proceeds in a very different way. He describes, and sometimes evokes, the affects of crowds and packs beginning with some apparently commonsensical terms and, *without* defining them, employs them to draw a whole series of new conceptual connections, to the point that the reader not only explores the phenomenological complexity of, say, the flight crowd, but must ultimately face the very question: what is a flight? Arguably, Canetti is interested in building concepts, not a single comprehensive theory because theory – understood as a complete system of hypotheses and claims about the correlations between variables – is already a form of power, which ends up crushing the objects it describes. In this sense, the paradox of the observer is not a logical puzzle but a much more concrete power issue.

The most interesting and original aspect of Canetti as a social theorist, or Canetti employed for social theorizing, does not lie in his interest in crowds per se, but rather in the epistemological challenge its oeuvre poses to conventional social and sociological theory. He does not want to lose sight of the problem, and for that reason he does not fit into any discipline. In the social sciences, we are at a moment when a growing dissatisfaction not only with the classical functionalist view but also with postmodernism, critical theory, and systems theory has been leading to the emergence of a new wave of theories. In different ways, analytical sociology, actor network theory, pragmatic sociology, and cultural sociology are all attempts at reformulating the basic sociological concepts of the actor and

of action in order to deal with the problem of ambiguous multiplicities. It is in the light of this type of discussion, i.e. inside the horizon of a re-opening of the question of the social and the political (Wagner and Karagiannis 2008), as well as of the social and the technical, that the contribution from Canetti can be appreciated – an epistemological contribution, true, yet nothing more empirical than epistemology, insofar as epistemological problems are the real empirical problems before disciplinary operations restrain them conventionally in order to turn them into local puzzles.

The case of resistance will serve as the subject of the remaining part of this article. But before venturing into that, another caveat must be entered on a second way of failing to meet Canetti's insights. If we take them at face value, some remarks by Canetti fall somewhere between the absolutely idiosyncratic and the truly preposterous. Axel Honneth (1996) has rejected Canetti *in toto* because he has stopped his analysis at that level. He has found that Canetti maintains a unilateral and largely arbitrary theory of human nature, flattened on the compulsive image of killing and survival. My major point is precisely that one should *not* stop at that level of interpretation.

Honneth's critique incurs a fundamental misunderstanding of Canetti's endeavour. To begin with, only a very partial reading will induce one to believe that *Crowds and Power* advances a comprehensive theory of the human being. Although Canetti proudly claims he has 'grasped the century by the throat', he never claims to have reached a theory of the human being. Indeed, what is most interesting in Canetti – again, to be precise, Canetti for social theorizing – is not to be found at the level of some ultimate general view on the human but, again, in the way his style of analysis leads to brilliant insights into complex and multifaceted phenomena without reducing their complexity.

Leaving aside the emotional examples proposed by Honneth concerning the relationship between the living and the dead in graveyards, let me consider very quickly the example of coins and inflation. 'People like to think of coins as individuals', Canetti (1960) begins his reflection, apparently in the most linear way. Now, I do not have a statistical survey at my disposal, and I wonder whether something like that has ever been attempted, but the reader may easily concede that *most likely only very few* people believe that coins have individual personalities. However, I contend, it would be a mistake to disqualify what Canetti is trying to elaborate in this example as nonsensical, stopping at the undoubtedly odd point of departure.

The real issue of the example is neither psychological realism (how do certain psychic processes lead someone to represent human beings in a certain way?) nor a comprehensive theory of human nature (do human beings look at other human beings as coins, or things?). Instead, I think the most interesting insight here concerns the issue of the boundaries and the thresholds of the individual. It is the process of individuation in both social theory and social reality that Canetti invites us to reflect upon. And the process becomes all the more visible when quantities get out of control: inflation means essentially a swift impossibility to identify individually, a sudden occurrence of a mass state in its purest condition. In fact, the state of inflation marks the breakdown of the possibility of individuating, a phenomenon that spans the economic and the social at large. Thus, the value of the anecdote consists in revealing a process that cuts across apparently unrelated domains (people and coins) to produce unexpected chains of events (ultimately, making possible the extermination programme itself).

In some ways, one might think, 'facing the concrete' resembles what, in the field of the social sciences, anthropologists and ethnographers have tried to do for quite a long time. However, Arnason observes: 'When Canetti says that he prefers to read about primitives, rather than meeting them face to face, he is obviously expressing doubts about the orthodox conception of fieldwork as essential to understanding of primitive cultures and societies' (Arnason 1996: 94). In Arnason's interpretation, then, 'facing the concrete' would be an expression that has more of a critical than a literal value. This account is consistent with the fact that Canetti himself never engaged in fieldwork – except, perhaps, in the peculiar travel notes *The Voices of Marrakech*. Yet I think that Canetti was quite serious in his call for 'facing the concrete'.

At the same time, what he is doing with his statement is drawing an essential distinction between an ethnographer and a writer (*Dichter*). Ethnographers need to *be there*, they must become direct observers of human practices. Instead, the writer, although she can occasionally be an ethnographer of events, constitutively cannot *be there*. From this point of view, the writer is a lonely creature (cf. Kafka), but that is not a problem insofar as *writing* is the company of the universe. In other words, the writer does not stand at all in isolation, but develops a different way to join humans and face the concreteness of the human condition: she does not aim at *being there* but rather at *becoming that*. Here lies the most challenging aspect of Canetti's reflection: the writer (or poet, artist, intellectual, etc.) is the *keeper of transformations*, she is the one who resists power, retaining, exercising, expanding, and joining the human talent for becoming. Observation is far from unimportant, but as a means to go straight to the heart of humanity, often touching its most exposed nerves.

There is of course a danger in the writer's lonesome position, which Canetti mercilessly caricatured in the sinologist Peter Kien, the 'head without the world'. The real writer does not live in complacent solitude; distance must be filled with becoming, which is a general human capability, not a private gift: 'only all together can human beings liberate themselves'. The *Dichter* has no special private truth to disclose but guards the common heritage. 'My dreams', says Werner Herzog in *The Burden of Dreams*, 'are your dreams, and the only difference between you and me is that I can articulate them'. Articulating the common dreams, becoming that: guarding the transformation, refusing death's dominion. In the following sections I am going to show how all of this is of the utmost importance for a conception of resistance.

Being there, being seized

The necessity of 'facing the concrete' leads Canetti to investigate how the usual face of ordinary society is superimposed to other, less familiar layers. Below or even apart from systems, classifications, representations, symbols, and functions, we encounter the immanence of social order which is grounded in the materiality of the body, and the speeds and affects of bodies coming into relation with each other. To Canetti, even action, as conceptualized by the social theories of action, is too much of an abstraction. The concrete is not action but the act, or, even better, the *gesture*. We should not overlook the extraordinary analysis of gestures Canetti elaborates in *Crowds and Power*.

Gestures are corporeal compositions of speeds and affects. To study them, one needs a dromology (the study of speeds, but also of accelerations, decelerations, trajectories and vectors) and an affectology (the study of energies and the relative transformations imparted by bodies on other bodies). Further, if one considers that every alternation of acceleration and deceleration determines a rhythm, one will also need a rhythm analysis of gestures. The grip, for instance, is the point of convergence of two relative speeds into the moment of contact of two bodies, in which one seizes the other and affects it according to a degree of intensity, which culminates in crushing and, eventually, killing. Force – and specifically, haptic force, or violence (*Gewalt*) – is thus the foundational moment of power. In its turn, power (*Macht*) is an amplification of force beyond immediate contact, as it entails the projection of a capacity to affect beyond the state of ratio 1 between differential speeds. As elements of power, gestures impart, impulse, and command *at a distance*. In a sense, power is an amplification of touch; and technology is an investigation of the reach and possibilities of such amplification.

The notion of distance is crucial in Canetti and, interestingly, his discussion of the management of distances recalls later Goffman's analysis of the 'territories of the Self' (Goffman 1971). The powerful, says Canetti, create distances around themselves which correspond to the visual measure of their haptic force, i.e. their power. Power is an essentially quantitative phenomenon, as there is a direct relation between the amount of power and the size of one's territory. Yet not only the powerful but in fact almost everybody is concerned by what Canetti calls 'the fear of being touched by the unknown'. As interaction sociology concurs on revealing for everyday settings, managing distances is an activity that engages human beings almost constantly.

It is not simply that human beings avoid being touched in the absolute, as Honneth interprets. On the contrary, human beings *do* touch each other on a number of occasions and to express a number of crucially important meanings. Intimate relationships are touch-based; some professions explicitly deal with bodies by touching them; greetings do involve ritual contact of body parts. But who can touch whom? In which way? For how long? Which parts of the body can be touched? These questions are always there and often generate critical moments. Besides, one should not absolutize touch per se: what counts is the capacity to impart affects, touch being just the most direct means to do so. The moments of fear, anxiety, embarrassment, or shame related to incongruencies with touch as affection reveal that distances are essential to ensure the boundaries of the individual. Turning it the other way around, the individual is created by distances. At all sensorial levels, gestures modify distances and, by doing so, compose speeds and affects in specific ways.

A position, or posture – such as standing (Canetti 1979[1976]: §II) – is but the figure of a gesture. Although Canetti sometimes speaks of symbols, e.g. crowd symbols, his analysis always retains the materiality of bodies and/in space at the centre. It is a deeply immanentist view, which avoids any symbolic transcendence. In fact, with his attentiveness to the here-and-now of power, Canetti displaces the symbolic element in favour of the 'energetic' – dromologic and affective – element.

Despite their deep diversity, which we are going to detail below, both Michel Foucault and Elias Canetti arrive at what we may call an anti-symbolic conception of power. Foucault investigates the disciplinary and governmental techniques that lie beneath the symbols of sovereignty. He aims to build a 'concrete analysis of power relations', an analysis

that explores the techniques and the discourses of power. In his turn, Canetti seems to say that gestures, far from being symbols of power, are in fact power itself in action. Whereas the symbolic entails an abstract mediation between the material and the immaterial poles of the symbol, in Canetti and Foucault we find receptiveness to the immediacy of the process of power, to its immanent, concrete genesis and exercise.

Avoiding all abstract symbolic mediations, Canetti advances a view of the relation between the material and the immaterial that is grounded on something we may call 'prolongations'. Thus, the crowd – as well as the pack – is not simply the opposite of the individual; rather, it represents a prolongation of the individual into an ambiguous multiplicity. Vice versa, the individual is but a prolongation of the multiplicity into a sort of dead-end: following Simondon (2007[1989]), the individual is in fact an *individuation process*. Other examples of prolongations described by Canetti include the activity of climbing prolonging into commerce, jaws prolonging into prison, and excrement prolonging into morality. In all these cases we see the role of the corporeal in the composition of social relations. The body, its postures and gestures, do not simply symbolize or stand for social institutions. On the contrary, they constitute the point of convergence of a series of heterogeneous elements and activities. Each prolongation reveals the two sides or faces of the social, the material and the immaterial, as always coexistent and imbricated.

Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, power in Canetti is not simply brute, coercive force. The gesture of seizing is actually the basic, haptic fact of power (the 'concrete'), yet power also prolongs into all types of seizing acts. Prolongations change the aspect of power without altering its fundamentally univocal nature, which consists of the moment of closure (grip and grasp). What really makes a difference within power is its posology, its quantities: the degrees of amplification and exerted pressure. Having set this enlarged background of enquiry, we can now move on to the image of resistance. In particular, we should consider the place of resistance vis-à-vis power and the role crowds and other ambiguous multiplicities play in the acts of resistance.

In Canetti, power and resistance entertain a relationship that could be termed 'dissymmetry'. A dissymmetry is not merely an asymmetry, but rather a double or 'displaced' asymmetry. The concept can be retrieved in Nietzsche's discussion of the relationship between Apollo and Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*: Apollo opposes Dionysus, but Dionysus only opposes himself. Different from a simple opposition, a dissymmetry generates a zone of indeterminacy between the two poles; and, different from a simple asymmetry, it retains a strong tension between the two constitutive elements.

Dissymmetries should be studied from the point of view of the breakpoints that emerge (or disappear) in the zone of indeterminacy. Some of Canetti's fundamental insights – although he does not conceptualize it explicitly, and would certainly not endorse Nietzsche as a reference – are of a dissymmetric type: man fears being touched, but the way to overcome this fear lies precisely in being touched *ad abundantiam*. The command compels the victim to flee, yet flight is the fundamental way to resist the power of command.

When we proceed to consider the crowd, we find a similar dissymmetry. On the one hand, the crowd is the culminating point of presence: it exists *where the action is*, so to speak. Everyone who ever joined a mass of whatever type knows that to be a crowd is to 'be there'. The crowd is momentous, it marks an *event*. At the same time, however, the crowd is perhaps paradoxically also a moment of non-presence: it is the non-presence of

the individual as subjected to distances, grasped and isolated by power. Thus, the crowd *can* be a place – and, even better, a *time*, a period – of resistance, insofar as it creates moments when something that is only possible, the ‘otherwise’ of the present state of affairs – including, of course, historical states of affairs – opens up, revealing a set of forgotten or hidden alternatives.

There is no necessary link between the crowd and political resistance: crowds can be politically conservative, too, and the outcome of their action can be contradictory. But the spontaneous experience of the crowd is inherently an experience of liberation, equality, and relief. Perhaps we should not overlook the similarity between such relief and the ‘breath’ Canetti attributes to a writer like Hermann Broch. In the crowd – and, to some extent, in the pack, too – the formal relationships based on abstract schemes give way to the concrete. It is in its aspect of alternative to both the individual and the group that the crowd retains the possibility of being an ‘alternative to power’. This introduces us to the close connection that exists between resistance and *transformation*.

The image and the gesture of resistance

Two crucial characteristics of Canetti’s counter-image of resistance can be identified. First, resistance begins in the concrete. Resistance is neither a discourse nor a political symbol but something that one does with one’s own body, something one engages one’s body in. It is not a matter of opinions, doctrines, or ideologies. It is a corporeal act which, like all other gestures, can be observed through a dromology, an affectology, and a rhythm analysis. Second, resistance is different from opposition because the relation it entertains with power is dissymmetric. Understanding resistance through the lens of transformation means stressing its non-oppositional nature. The specific relation between resistance and power is not resistance as a struggle *against* power, but resistance as a movement of subtraction *from* power. It is with some bitterness, and a lot of skepticism, that Canetti observes he hardly knew of anyone writing against power who did not in fact want power for himself (here, gendered language is by the author). Whereas critical theorists often conceive 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 as ‘diavolution’ (Brighenti 2008).

We have seen the concurrence of Foucault and Canetti on an anti-symbolic notion of power. However, the two authors are fundamentally different with respect to almost any other point of their analysis. Foucault (1971; 1975; 1976; 1982; 1991[1978]; 1997[1975–6]; 2004[1977–8]) advances an essentially discontinuist thesis on power. He looks for the historic breakpoints where a new type of power appears. Further, he is rigorously nominalistic about power, power being nothing in itself but a way of looking at certain phenomena. He wants to debunk the juridical and economicist image of power as measurable stacks or quantities. Consequently, he is interested in the archipelago of different technologies of power that are historically deployed to configure human relations, and it is within such irreducible plurality that he draws his quadripartite analytics of power composed of the technologies of sovereignty, discipline, security, and the Self.

For the same reason, power in Foucault is boundless. There is no outside of power, the only exteriority being death itself. Power is coextensive with life. Its most general

diagram is not coercion but positioning. Power exists insofar as the subject is not entirely subsumed but positioned in a field of relations. In other words, power consists in creating and managing the field out of which subjects – notably, true, ‘free’ subjects – emerge. In this picture, resistance appears as a movement that is inherent to power itself. Resistance is not outside power for, as said, no such outside exists; rather, it occurs as forms of localized ‘insurrections’ that regularly accompany the working of power. Consequently, for Foucault, resistance is a movement that remains inside the field of power.

Canetti’s view is quite different. In the first place, he presents a deeply continuist thesis about power. As we have seen, every type of power is essentially an amplification and prolongation of the primal act of seizing. He describes the 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 forms. Even the most sophisticated form of power is but a prolongation of the clutch of the hand.

Thus, power is essentially about quantities: it increases quantitatively, it extends in space and time – technology being all about these degrees of inscription, projection and amplification – but does not change in nature. In itself, power is obsessional, flat, monodimensional, fixed upon itself. Therefore, there is not much else to understand about power, apart from measuring it. For this reason, Canetti is also a realist, rather than a nominalist like Foucault: he takes power to be, quite regrettably, an actually existing thing. More precisely, power always exists in the concrete, it is something quite real. Canetti radicalizes what Foucault would call the economicist view of power, revealing not only its quantitative nature but also the intimate link between such nature and death.

Power is always bound up with death and survival. Survival is a social relationship in which the survivor stands over the dead. It is a one-against-many relationship. The act of survival, as a moment of power, creates the individual itself by severing it from the ambiguous multiplicities in which it is originally ‘muddled up’. By doing so, the individual is she who faces the crowds of the dead and triumphs over them – a ‘dangerous and insatiable passion’, Canetti (1978[1960]: 230) comments.

Whereas Foucault holds that resistance is always possible but doomed to remain inside the field of power, Canetti believes that there is an outside of power and that resistance is precisely the movement towards such an outside. Resistance is a liberation from the grasp, a flight from commands. As such, it is radically different from opposition: resistance is the uncharted, unquantifiable territory of human existence as social existence beyond the strictures and the predicaments of power. Notably, Canetti develops these reflections thinking about the *Dichter* – such as Kafka, possibly the purest type of writer ever, and surely the only ‘Chinese writer’ that the West can claim (Canetti 1979[1976]: §VI). 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 – peculiar types of prosecutors, though. Canetti (1979[1976]: §III) describes Kraus’ ‘dictatorship’ as a ‘school of resistance’ for his own intellectual formation, since every writer can discover what she is and liberate herself only through the experience of being initially ‘dominated’ and

'paralysed' by a model. Broch is to Canetti (1979[1976]: §I) a hound who restlessly hunts the world of his times. And Stendhal (Canetti 1979[1976]: §IV; 1978[1960]: §VI) indicates a type of survival completely different from power, a survival which renounces killing and embraces life in its pure positivity. In general, art is a unique type of survival that begins when single individuals – *in primis*, the writer or the artist, whose work is thus essentially a human testimony – have already passed away. It is a collective survival that brings into immortality not a single human being but the largest possible number of human beings together, the world in common that they have been capable to create. Being almost the negation of survival as a one on many relation, art appeals to a whole peoplehood.

Canetti's (1979[1976]) essays on writers complete the drawing of a counter-image of resistance, in which two elements come to the foreground: humanity – the necessity to join an open multiplicity without totalization – and art – the necessity to create, to open up the possible against all the closures of power. Resistance is creative, transformational, and all the more human. Resistance is not resistance to change but rather, as Deleuze (1987) suggested, resistance to *the present*. Deleuze and Canetti agree that, contrary to what is widely believed, resistance does not resist change; rather, it is on the side of change. Resistance is on the side of becoming. The present that is resisted is the present of power: power is always 'in the present' tense, and, at the same time – as we have seen – grounded in death and survival. Canetti criticizes history for breeding an in-built cult of power; indeed, history records only the present, it glorifies the effectuated. Resistance is instead an anti-reductionist experience which looks into the ineffectuated to find ways to create newness out of experience – often out of bitter experience. Resistance is a gesture distancing itself from the 'seduction' and the 'false greatness' of death.

Resistance is a form of research. At the beginning of this article, we observed that research is always impelled by a problem, a concrete and overarching problem that runs all through one's experience. In a sense, problems constitute the first attempt to confront power. This is why resistance unmistakably begins in a condition of invasion, a state of dispossession (Scott 1990). The gesture of resistance can only be initiated by those who do not have a territory, those who are invaded, occupied, and dispossessed. The writer often finds herself in such a condition. From her 'irrational claim to bear responsibilities' her task follows: being the 'keeper of transformations' – which means saving all the stories of the world, rescuing them from oblivion and falsification. In facing the monolithic reaffirmation of power, the *Dichter* opts for a movement that liberates the grasped social multiplicities and lets the diversity of human experience flourish.

However, since resistance is a concrete act and gesture, and not a *mise en scène*, the true writer is not one who merely represents others' stories. Even though, or precisely because, the writer cannot 'be there', she has to literally *become* everyone, rescuing the common human capacity for transformation. For Canetti, everyone is endowed with the 'talent for transformation' and, if such a capacity is atrophied, it is because power constantly blocks and bans true transformations. The individual is often filled with power and the stings of past commands that have gripped the body. In many cases, resistance is the last chance before one 'become[s] so completely riddled with them [stings] that he has no interest left for anything else and, except for them, can feel nothing' (Canetti 1978[1960]: 322).

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Biographical note

Andrea Mubi Brighenti is contract professor of Social Theory at the Faculty of Sociology, University of Trento, Italy. He researches both empirically and theoretically into space and power. His most recent book is *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).