Each strives by physical force to compel the other to submit to his will: each endeavours to throw his adversary, and thus render him incapable of further resistance.

Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832

Receive our truth in your dancing heart. Zapata lives, also and for always in these lands.

Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee ZNLA, ‘Votan-Zapata or Five Hundred Years of History’, 1994

2011 may well be remembered as the year of resistance.* The uprisings of the Arab Spring, the movement of *indignados* in Spain and Mexico, the *Aganaktismenoi* in Greece and the Occupy actions are all primarily movements of resistance. Even in the UK the term is acquiring political force: at the trade-union protests outside the Conservative Party conference at the beginning of October, Len McCluskey of Unite called for ‘a coalition of resistance, of trade unions, community groups, church organizations, and students and of our senior citizens, an amazing coalition of resistance to engage in every form of resistance, including co-ordinated industrial action.’ He did not mean every form of resistance, yet his use of the term to align the tactics of general strike and civil disobedience is testimony to its renewed significance. Resistance is on its way to becoming a word of power, emerging alongside the terms ‘revolution’ and ‘reform’ that Hegel saw defining the range of modern politics. Yet, while increasingly familiar, the significance and potential of the term are not fully recognized. This may be due to its equivocal character: resistance is at work in electromagnetism, fluid dynamics, immunology and psychoanalysis, as well as in politics and philosophy. But there is also something more and peculiarly resistant about this concept, if it is a concept.

The philosophical analysis of resistance during the past thirty years has been inconclusive – while recognizing its importance, attempts to make sense of what it is or does break off very quickly. Jacques Derrida, at the outset of his 1996 *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, speaks of resistance as

This word, which resonated in my desire and my imagination as the most beautiful word in the politics and history of this country, this word loaded with all the pathos of my nostalgia, as if, at any cost, I would like not to have missed blowing up trains, tanks, and headquarters between 1940 and 1945 – why and how did it come to attract, like a magnet, so many other meanings, virtues, semantic or disseminal chances.1

The Derridean dream of resistance is also the dream of resistance – the resistant dream – the unanalysable in which resistance stands as the limit at which analysis falters and breaks off. Even the ‘secret’ of his nostalgia for resistance, he explains, ‘resists analysis’, and the closest he can come to characterizing it is by likening it to ‘an auto-immune process’.

Some years earlier Foucault too placed resistance at the centre of his final conception of power. In one of his last interviews, in 1984 for *Advocate*, on the gay movement and the practices and pleasures of S/M, he responds to the citation from the *History of Sexuality* ‘There where there is power, there is resistance’, with the comment:

Look, if there was no resistance there would be no relations of power. Because everything would be simply a question of obedience. From the moment an individual is in the situation of not doing what they want, they must use relations of power. Resistance thus comes first, it remains above all the forces of the process, under its effect it obliges relations of power to change. I thus consider the term ‘resistance’ to be the most important word, the key word of this dynamic.2

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*This is the text of an Inaugural Professorial Lecture, in the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP), Kingston University London, delivered on 3 October 2011.
The term is identified as ‘an element of the strategic relation that is power’ and is recognized as ‘always relying on the situation that it combats’. Yet at this point the analysis of the term breaks off and Foucault was not to live long enough to take his work or resistance very much further.

Yet Foucault did leave some very suggestive clues about where his analysis was taking him. One of the most suggestive appears in an interview with B.-H. Lévy in Le Nouvel Observateur from March 1977 that picks up from an earlier (1975) interview with Lévy in L’imprévu with the Clausewitzian title ‘Politics is the Continuation of War by Other Means’. There, after some discussion of the strategy and tactics of power entailed by the claim ‘There where there is power, there is resistance’, Lévy complains: ‘power and resistance … tactics and strategy … why these background military metaphors? Are you thinking that power from now on should be thought under the form of war?’ Foucault appears to back off from the implied reproach of having an undue fascination with things military, but not really:

I know practically nothing about it at the moment. But one thing appears certain, it is that to analyse relations of power we only have at our disposal two models at the moment: that given us by law (power as law, prohibition, institution) and the military or strategic model in terms of relations of forces. The first has convincingly shown, I believe, its inadequacy: we know that law does not describe power.5

Foucault was in fact already very well advanced in this project. His Collège de France lectures of 1973–74, Psychiatric Power, had already abandoned the juridical understanding of power, describing power relations in an asylum in terms of military strategy – ‘So what is organized in the asylum is actually a battlefield.’ But it is in the introduction to the 1975–76 lectures Society Must Be Defended that Foucault proposes the hypothesis that ‘Power is war, the continuation of war by other means’,6 inverting the definition of Clausewitz, cited by Mao in the Little Red Book that ‘war is the continuation of politics by other means’.7 Foucault hints at some of the implications of this turn to a ‘strategic model’ of analysis in the interview with Lévy, where he claims, regarding revolutionary politics: ‘It is necessary to invent another [politics] or something else that will substitute itself for it.’8 Foucault is silent as to what this substitute may be, but he is approaching the possibility that it may be resistance.

**Clausewitz**

Although he cites Clausewitz at the outset of his 1975–76 lectures, Foucault reassures his audience that his new strategy is in fact a ‘Nietzschean hypothesis’,9 thus diverting attention away from the direct inspiration of Clausewitz. This is a fairly routine manoeuvre given the distinctly satanic reputation that has attached itself to Clausewitz and his posthumous 1832 work On War. The Prussian general and almost exact contemporary of Hegel (1780–1831 – they died within a few days of each other in the same cholera epidemic) was held responsible by the British military historian Basil Liddell Hart for the exterminatory strategy that led to the deaths of millions of soldiers in the First World War, in which both French and German generals were readers of Clausewitz. Against this bleak view the French resistant Raymond Aron in his vast Penser la guerre, Clausewitz sees Clausewitz as the shared text of Soviet and American nuclear strategists, implying that the shared knowledge that the enemy too was reading Clausewitz contributed to deterring the outbreak of nuclear warfare. He also, along with Carl Schmitt, was among the first to insist that Clausewitz was above all a theorist of resistance.

The Prussian general appears in many unexpected contexts. He earned a place in the history of aesthetics for his understanding of the implications of Kant’s concept of genius as the capacity to invent rules of judgement. This was put to good use in On War, as were his reflections on the tact and art of judgement which structure his analyses of strategic and tactical decision in On War. Yet while Clausewitz’s proximity to Kant has been widely suspected, his importance as a post-critical philosopher remains unexplored. He was not only technically adept in the critical philosophy – a student of the leading Kantian exegete Kiesewetter, who taught the critical philosophy at the reformed Berlin military academy – but was also keenly aware of its radical implications.

The underestimation of Clausewitz as a post-Kantian thinker has consequences not only for understanding On War, but also for interpreting and curating the critical legacy. He is strikingly absent from the
description of the main lines of descent from Kant that still determine many contemporary philosophical positions. He has no place in the line of descent that privileges the idea of freedom. This line, moving from Kant through Fichte, Hegel and then Marx, remained obsessed with the problem of freedom and its aporias of autonomy, sovereignty and self-legislation. Other lines move from Kant’s philosophy of nature through Schelling and Helmholtz to what became experimental natural science, or from the critique of religion to the Young Hegelians, Kierkegaard and existentialism. Clausewitz’s On War is not just contemporary with these developments of the critical philosophy, but is an integral part of the post-critical landscape. Yet his place in it is hard to define. It is certainly not part of the development of Kant’s concept of freedom, a word which is rarely mentioned in On War. Clausewitz consciously abjures the rhetoric of freedom, autonomy and all the tired theatre of sovereignty and legislation that comes with it. He does not see freedom and its revolutionary travails as the main problem of modernity – for him it is its rhetorical surface; the real problem is managing the violence of the absolute, what he calls ‘absolute war’ or the enormous capacity for violence unleashed by and fuelling the modern political and technological revolutions.

Although he is rarely appreciated in these terms, Clausewitz is a powerful, systematic and ultimately disquieting post-Kantian philosopher whose impact has been diverted by means of complex displacements and substitutions. His Cold War prominence in applications of game theory to nuclear strategy obscured the fundamentally Kantian ethos of his thinking. The nuclear Clausewitz was correctly associated with the term ‘escalation’, but the origins of escalation in Kant’s warning against moving too quickly from the world of appearances to that of absolutes was entirely overlooked. Another Kantian gesture may be discerned in the point of departure of critical philosophy extends crucially to Kant’s point of departure is scepticism concerning secure possession, then this means that a sense of danger or insecurity precedes and always accompanies them. Consequently, should not philosophy depart from the analysis of danger rather than possession? Clausewitz’s thinking thus departs from the condition of insecurity and threat, a condition that for him has two salient features: enmity and chance. A corollary of this point of departure is scepticism concerning secure subjectivity; the latter cannot be called to underlie the consistency of appearances as the ‘transcendental unity of apperception’ guaranteeing secure possession, but should be seen as a tactical response to a condition of insecurity. In the second half of the first book of On War Clausewitz provides a compelling anthropology of insecure subjectivity, an analytic of the resort to subjectivity as a way of managing insecurity. It is only in adverse conditions that Kant’s Enlightenment sapere aude, ‘have the courage to know’, makes any sense; it is only when an undertaking or possession is threatened by enmity and/or bad luck that the virtue of courage has any meaning.

Clausewitz’s scepticism concerning the point of departure of critical philosophy extends crucially to the concept of freedom and its role in Kant’s table of the categories. Kant proposed four groups of categories or ways of structuring spatio-temporal appearances – quantity, quality, relation and modality – of which the fourth group had a special status as the relation Kantian in his view that such a project – thinking or rather living the absolute – is replete with danger. Kant warned against the consequences of moving from appearances to the world of absolutes such as God, the World and the Soul, while recognizing that it was in the nature of human reason to make this passage, and to suffer the consequences – error, oppression and even madness. Clausewitz’s logic of escalation is set in the same scenario – it warns of the violent consequences of moving out of the spatio-temporally defined and limited exercise of violence – ‘armed observation’ – to absolute war in which enemies mutually and irrevocably devote increasing resources to the annihilation of the other’s capacity to resist. This is not a dialectical conflict that somehow delivers a result, but a logic tending to mutual destruction if not contained, if not held within the limits of space and time.

Clausewitz is at once Kantian and anti-Kantian in his procedures and point of departure. Kant’s point of departure is normative – he begins with an apparently legally constituted and peaceful order – where the main problem consists in how to justify the possession of the means to know appearances. Clausewitz responds by observing that if we need to secure – de jure – our possessions, then this means that a sense of danger or insecurity precedes and always accompanies them. Consequently, should not philosophy depart from the analysis of danger rather than possession? Clausewitz’s thinking thus departs from the condition of insecurity and threat, a condition that for him has two salient features: enmity and chance. A corollary of this point of departure is scepticism concerning secure subjectivity; the latter cannot be called to underlie the consistency of appearances as the ‘transcendental unity of apperception’ guaranteeing secure possession, but should be seen as a tactical response to a condition of insecurity. In the second half of the first book of On War Clausewitz provides a compelling anthropology of insecure subjectivity, an analytic of the resort to subjectivity as a way of managing insecurity. It is only in adverse conditions that Kant’s Enlightenment sapere aude, ‘have the courage to know’, makes any sense; it is only when an undertaking or possession is threatened by enmity and/or bad luck that the virtue of courage has any meaning.

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of appearances to a subject. The modal categories underwrite the other three, asking whether the relation of a subject to appearances is possible, actual or necessary. The first generation of post-Kantians focused on the modal categories and especially the category of possibility. If appearances stand in a relation of possibility with respect to a subject, then other relations to appearances are possible, the subject is free. Fichte would make this one of his main points of departure, and the relation of possibility to freedom persisted in Hegel through Kierkegaard, Marx and beyond. This emphasis on freedom is unavailable to the modal category of necessity, and very problematic for the modal category of actuality or Wirklichkeit. This is the category of modality that most interested Clausewitz and his entire thinking of actuality as energy – that which makes something happen, that which provokes events (sometimes described as Aktus) – is dedicated to this. It is essential for him that things do not happen just because they are possible or that someone willed them to happen – events depend as much on enmity and chance as on the free will of a subject. In Clausewitz’s example of Napoleon’s campaign to invade Russia (in which he controversially participated as a military adviser to the Russian army), Napoleon played freely with possibilities: he put down his cards, engaged the campaign but could not actualize an event – his Aktus was diverted from victory by the calculations of the enemy and the workings of chance. Events for Clausewitz are acts and not the outcome of possibilities – they are singular conjunctures in which chance and enmity are salient: his point of departure is the predicament of risk and not the expression of freedom.

This is very far from Hegel’s dominant version of post-Kantian philosophy where enmity and chance and the unpredictable quality of events are swept up into a speculative unity driven by the realization of the idea of freedom. Yet surprisingly there have been attempts to reconcile the two, the most consequential being that of Lenin. In the Autumn of 1914 after the declaration of the First World War – at the same time Kafka was writing The Trial, In the Penal Colony and The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma in Prague – Lenin was reading Hegel and Clausewitz (and later Aristotle’s Metaphysics) in Bern. He regarded Clausewitz as Hegel’s disciple and refers to ‘Hegel–Clausewitz’ in his notes and commentary on Of War (excluded from Volume 38 of his Collected Works – the so-called philosophical notebooks). But it was the combination of Clausewitz and Hegel (along with Nietzsche, whom Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal has shown in her New Myth, New World, From Nietzsche to Stalinism was Bolshevism’s preferred philosopher – Kollontai, Bogdanov, Bukharin and also Lenin may be understood as proponents of Nietzschean grosse politik) that reconfigured Lenin’s thought and set him on course for the October Revolution. It may be said that when Lenin writes in the famous aphorism that theorists of the Second International didn’t read Hegel and therefore didn’t understand Marx, he was thinking of Hegel–Clausewitz.

Lenin’s assumption that Clausewitz was Hegel’s student was incorrect: although contemporaries and living in the same place at the same time – Berlin in the 1820s – neither of these post-Kantians seemed aware of the other’s work. There is, however, a faint trace of a possible meeting at the house of Karl von Mensebach in Berlin during the late 1820s. Peter Paret notes in his Clausewitz and the State that Hoffmann von Fallersleben in his 1868 memoir Mein Leben describes seeing both at von Mensebach’s and that Hegel would conclude the evening playing cards. Rather disappointing, until we remember that Clausewitz writes in section 21 or Book 1 of Vom Kriege that the human activity closest to war is a game of cards and that he described Napoleon at Waterloo as a reckless card player… But what was it about Clausewitz’s work that allowed it to play such an important role in the development of Lenin’s thought and action, and subsequently that of Mao Zedong and even Carl Schmitt in his 1960s’ Maoist phase? Schmitt’s call for a new ‘law of the earth’ is well known; what is less appreciated is that he saw the figure of its legislator in Mao Zedong.

The answer to Clausewitz’s prominence in the revolutionary tradition lies in his theory of resistance and the attempts by the Marxist tradition to adjust it to a theory of revolution. Far more than a theorist of war between nation-states, Clausewitz was the thinker of the people’s war of resistance: Volkskrieg. As a Prussian soldier, Clausewitz was interested above all in the question of how to defeat Napoleon. Why were Napoleon and the revolutionary armies so devastatingly successful, and how was it possible to resist them? Clausewitz studied carefully the emergent attempts to resist Napoleon, above all the Spanish resistance and its invention of a new kind of war – the ‘little war’ or guerrilla. To account for this change in the character of warfare, Clausewitz proposed a redefinition of war. In section 2 of Book 1, ‘Definition’, he defines the end or Zweck of war as to ‘render the enemy incapable of further resistance’. So resistance is absolutely central to war – war addresses the enemy’s capacity to resist.
This focus is new in the theory of war, but consistent with Clausewitz’s interest in Volkskrieg or peoples’ war. He understands the capacity (Fähigkeit) to mount resistance in terms of Aktus or energy and divides it according to material and moral force. The capacity to resist depends on the enemy’s material resources (what George Bush in piratical vein habitually described as ‘treasure’) – soldiers, arms, wealth – but also morale (a term invented by Clausewitz). The guerrilla mainly attacks the latter – conducting a war against the enemy’s moral capacity to resist – a new form of warfare captured visually by Goya in the engravings of the Disasters of War drawn from his observations of the same Spanish resistance that was theorized by Clausewitz. The nascent war of resistance informs the entire architecture of On War, especially Book VI, on Defence, where Clausewitz makes the otherwise puzzling claim that defence, or, as he describes it, ‘resistance’, Widerstand, is the ‘highest form of war’. For him modern war is above all a war of resistance, and we must recall that for him ‘war is the mere continuation of politics by other means’ – making politics too the politics of resistance, of maintaining the capacity to resist while avoiding any imprudent escalation of violence that might compromise it.

Clausewitz proposes a Kantian minority report on modernity and its prospects, intimating a politics directed not to the realization of freedom but to the preservation of the capacity to resist. The implications of this become clearer if we look at one of the central claims of the Hegelian majority report that focuses on sovereignty and the state. The state’s claim to the monopoly of legitimate violence – articulated by Max Weber and historically excavated by Norbert Elias – is in Clausewitzian terms an overt declaration of war by the state on society. It involves the ambition to monopolize violence or, in other words, to reduce society’s capacity to resist. For Clausewitz this is a warlike posture – for other theorists ‘legitimate’ is understood to mean that the state has been freely and consensually granted the monopoly of violence by its citizens seeking security. Yet Clausewitz draws our attention to an asymmetry in the relation of state and civil society left unmentioned by Hegel: the state is prepared with very little provocation to initiate the logic of escalation; to meet threats to its monopoly of violence (the development of the absolute capacity to resist society) by escalating violence to the point of civil war. On the other hand, it is a very heavy decision for members of society to initiate the logic of escalation and commence war on ‘their’ state – society is thus intrinsically Kantian in avoiding the passage to the absolute, while the state by contrast is intrinsically prone to speculative excess and to start the movement towards absolute violence. It is the knowledge that the state will escalate violence if it deems that we resist too much and not ‘legitimacy’ or ‘consent’ that is the more likely explanation for why we are such obedient subjects.

The primacy of resistant subjectivity

The emphasis on energy and capacity to resist in Clausewitz’s thought distances it from revolutionary and reformist projects of realizing or conserving freedom. It can and historically has cohabited with such projects, but always obliquely. The friend or enemy’s capacity to resist becomes the object of war, and has two important consequences. One is an emphasis on the primacy of resistant subjectivity, implying that the preservation of the capacity to resist demands a particular form of subjectivity. This has been understood ascetically and violently in the Maoist doctrine of the violent resistant and non-violently in the case of Gandhian satyagraha. In both cases, the resistant is vowed to resist, and in the last instance the Aktus of resistance has precedence over life. Yet this is not a sacrificial doctrine, since the preservation of the capacity to resist – and thus resistant life – is paramount. This leads to the second consequence, which involves the temporality of resistance. The strategy of the weaker – whether guerrilla or satyagraha – is a strategy of time; the preservation of the capacity to resist involves a refusal to enter the augmenting cycle of violence that is escalation. This refusal means declining the invitation of the state to escalate violence in its pursuit of what Clausewitz called the ‘decisive blow’ and instead to threaten the state’s own capacity to resist by temporal distension, by what Mao in 1937 theorized as the ‘prolonged war of resistance’. The war of resistance is above all a war for time – with one enemy proposing escalation and
the concentration of struggle in a moment, the other responding by prolonging resistance indefinitely.

At which late point I should probably address the title of this article: ‘Also Sprach Zapata’. Nietzsche chose the near mythological figure of the Persian Zoroaster as the mouthpiece for his plea in Also Sprach Zarathustra to live dangerously and to embrace enmity and chance. His ethical recommendation to live each moment as if it would return eternally can be read as a formula for the constitution of resistant subjectivity. It is also the test of the character of such subjectivity – a test of the ability to accept the insecurity implied by the formula as either the greatest burden or liberation. The German Communist revolutionary Levine declared to a court martial when on trial for his life in 1919 that ‘communists are the dead on leave’ – that to be resistant is to consider yourself already dead, to have renounced life. But the other side of the Nietzschean formula is to consider yourself already dead, to have renounced life. But the other side of the Nietzschean formula is the view that resistance is an intensification of life. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Jean Cassou, two leading French resisters, describe in their memoirs the life of resistance as the most intense, full and even real life in Cassou’s case. Their descriptions of the life of resistance are closely related to the first French Resistance prior to 1943 – the phase of the development of the capacity to resist, the resistance of networks, movements, invisible committees, actions and clandestine publications. They are distant from the second resistance of the 1943 Gaullist Conseil Nationale de la Résistance – the adaptation of resistance to the state form – with which Stéphane Hessel, the author of the influential Indignez Vous, was closely associated.

A powerful version of this joyful resistance is to be found in some of the declarations that issued from the Zapatista resistance of the FZLN in Chiapas, Southern Mexico, between the initiation of armed struggle against the Mexican state in 1994 with the signing of NAFTA and the march on Mexico City in 2001. Articulating an ethos that anticipated the global neoliberalism of the ‘indignados’ and Occupy (which have moved far beyond the initial inspiration of Hessel’s call for a ‘peaceful insurrection’) the FZLN affirmed the liberatory quality of resistant life. The words emerging from the Zapatista’s resistance to global neoliberalism are striking for their joyful affirmation of a life of resistance. One of the leading voices, the iconically masked Subcomandante Marcos, used the Internet and global media to speak across a range of genres – stories, proclamations, appeals, jokes – that deflated the hierarchy of military command and its limited conceptions of enmity and friendship. These proclamations energized the capacity to resist by fusing myth, memory and hauntology, as in the evocation of the Mexican revolutionary ‘Votán Zapata in the 10 April 1994 Proclamation ‘Votán-Zapata or Five Hundred Years of History’. This call weaves together the religious imagery of the Popul Vuh and the revolutionary imagery of the Mexican Revolution in an Aktus of resistance. In a hymn that echoes Nietzsche’s Zarathustra – Also Sprach Zapata/Viva Zarathustra – the voice speaks in the name of a haunted, resistant subjectivity, voicing a political theology of resistance:

That is the truth, brothers and sisters. You should know it, he will not die again in our life, in our death he lives already and forever. Votán, guardian and heart of the people. Without a name he is named, the faceless face, all and no-one, one and all, alive in death.1

In an October 1999 broadcast to a round table on underground culture and the culture of resistance with the title ‘Why We Use the Weapon of Resistance’, Subcomandante Marcos after a few jokes said: ‘I know that you are all anxious to know what in the hell I am going to talk about then’, and answers ‘So, it is best that I talk to you about weapons. Specifically, I’m going to talk to you about the weapon of resistance.’12 There follows a discourse on resistance that plays with the audience’s expectations about weapons of resistance – AK47s? – only to perform the idea that resistance is the weapon, a play with the double negative ‘weapon of resistance’. What is the weapon that has allowed the Zapatistas to ‘have resisted more than 60,000 soldiers, war tanks, bomber aircraft, artillery, helicopters, cannons, machine guns, bullets, and grenades’? It is the ‘weapon of resistance’ in the strictly Clausewitzian sense of the capacity to resist – resistance is the fight for the enhancement of the capacity to resist – it is the Aktus of resistance, not a concept but a differential, an enmity without hatred or desire for revenge, an affirmative resistance. ‘There are indigenous, there are workers, there are women, there are gays, there are lesbians, there are students, there are young people’13 – the Subcomandante’s Aktus (not coalition) of resistance spans global geopolitical and intimate psychological struggle:

When we say we are fighting for respect for our ‘different’ and ‘other’ selves, that includes fighting for respect for those who are ‘other’ and ‘different’ and who are not like ourselves. And it is here where this entire resistance movement – called ‘underground’ or ‘subterranean’, because it takes place among those below and underneath institutional movements – meets Zapatismo.14
This affirmative resistance is an end in itself, not a means to an end, it is the expression of a life of resistance, with all the corollaries of the double genitive: life as resistance that Nietzsche expressed in the persona of Zarathustra. As an Aktus – energy, Wirklichkeit or actuality – it is independent of the realm of possibility that is expressed in the projects of revolution and reform: it can join with but is not exhausted by them.

Notes
3. Ibid., pp. 1559–60.
4. Ibid., p. 267.
5. Ibid., p. 268.
9. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 166.
13. Ibid., p. 168.