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Rebellious Research

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1 WHAT IS REBELLIOUS RESEARCH?

When society slips its old moorings and we find ourselves adrift, and directionless, there is ample scope for assorted trendsetters, con artists and hucksters to come on the scene. In times of uncertainty, the currents of the global economy seem to sweep people and societies along uncontrollably. Issues of the environment, crises of democracy and the economy, war and peace, famine and poverty resonate with everyone. “Capitalism today is in the midst of layers of crises that intertwine economic, environmental and political crises as well as the crisis of societal renewal that results from a period of scarcity” (Kallinen et al. 2011). The answers needed from influential social research agendas and inquiry have grown so massively that many social scientists rightly feel powerless when confronted with these demands. They find it impossible to influence developments that threaten the environment and society, even by increasing everyone’s welfare and reducing the injustices they face.

If social scientists are going to do their job, the range of research methods and procedures they use, must be expanded by learning new ways to understand and carry out social research. In this book, we argue that in addition to writing and publishing, participation and collaboration – in other words rebellious research – have become the task of social scientists. Rebellious research is research that takes a stand, is action-oriented and involved. It joins in the struggle for equality and justice. Rebellious research presupposes cooperation and solidarity between people. Rebellious researchers have emphatically raised the issue of what research does and what it aims to do. Does research support oppressive, repressive and alienating structures, or can we use it to
work for social change and generate alternatives (e.g. Shukaitis & Graeber 2007a, 32)?

Rebellious research aims to change society so that it is more just and equal, and where researchers take risks other than in terms of academic competition. We use the concept ‘rebellious research’ to bring together various research traditions, discourses and methods that bind practice and theory into praxis for a better world. In this sense, rebellious research departs from the mainstream social sciences, which reinforce not only the introversion of the academic world but also the state’s narrow control of science policy, and the mad scramble for academic jobs and research funding. To survive in today’s universities, researchers have to churn out books and articles on increasingly trivial subjects purely for the sake being published. But social scientific research can be done differently, by being mindful of people and the problems we encounter in life and overcoming them. Rebellious research refers to research traditions and approaches in which we examine social reality and phenomena and change the world for the better together with others working in different fields.

This book is a contribution to the debate on what social scientific research should be if it is to be of real value in solving global social and ecological problems. Writing the book was guided by our belief in the need to bring together similar but quite scattered discussions on the role and importance of research to increase the equality-enhancing strengths of scholarship.

Rebellious research has been carried out and developed in such places as Latin America and in Spain, (e.g. Colectivo Situaciones 2003a; Malo 2004). The perspectives of rebellious research are also beginning to gain a foothold in the English-speaking world (e.g. Croteau et al. 2005; Hale 2008; Lisahunter, Emerald & Martin 2013; Shukaitis & Graeber 2007b). None of this discourse features in the conventional social sciences. Some suggest that social scientific knowledge has become an instrument for regulating and controlling society, and is not an instrument for human liberation. The Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos claims that in the wealthy West, in particular, the social sciences are no longer a source of creativity and societal renewal. Instead, ideas are coming from elsewhere: from the global South and outside the academy (Santos 1999, 33).

Rebellious research has different names in different contexts, including activist research and activist scholarship, militant research and research militancy (militancia de investigación), and radical research (see e.g. Colectivo Situaciones 2003a; 2003b; 2007; Hale 2008; Schostak & Schostak 2008; Sudbury & Okazawa- Rey 2005). We may also talk of engaged scholarship, research as praxis and action-oriented research, which refer either to the
rebelliousness of research or to ‘more traditional’ enquiry, which has an application or use value in such things as community development (e.g. Small & Uttal 2005).

Rebellious research is an everyday activity

Rebellious research presupposes that research activities should embody – create and reflect – the sort of society and social practices that are based on human equality. It is a socially committed activity, based on horizontal relations between actors. The researcher is a part of, or associated with, the people and the circumstances that the research activity is concerned with, in which it takes place and in which it aims to be effective. The social position of those participating in the effort is not important. The only thing that matters is what is achieved.

Rebellious research is practiced by committed research-activists in the interests of a socially and environmentally important cause. In the critical pedagogy originated by the educator and philosopher Paulo Freire this is called “the pedagogy of hope” (Freire 1994), and in another context a “methodology of the heart”: research acts are evaluated by their moral consequences (see Denzin 2006).

Once, a physician travelling around the Latin American continent witnessed extreme poverty, how the poor were being treated, and underwent a social awakening. He recorded his observations in a journal, which he later published. When he became aware that there was a group of rebels seeking to overthrow the power of the rich, he joined their ranks and fought with them until victory. Following the armed revolution, he participated in nation building on a new basis, and among other things drew up a literacy campaign. However, he was not content with having an armed revolution in just one country, and started assisting with revolutions in other countries, until he was killed. He wrote books about his experiences, which have been published in many languages and are still studied.

Another person studied social sciences and fieldwork methods at university, and did a PhD in anthropology while living abroad for a number of years. On returning home, he became interested in the application of fieldwork in the peaceful struggle against neoliberal globalization and for an alternative world. In addition to his successful career as a researcher, he began to do practical work as an activist in the movement for global justice by taking part in the organization of many mass events. Based on his experiences, he wrote articles and books on anarchist theory and practical activism.
A researcher who was interested in critical social and pedagogic theory had to decide whether to assist an asylum seeker facing deportation or whether to leave him to fend for himself. He hid the undocumented individual in an empty apartment, explained his country’s customs to him, and acquainted him with the city and some people. At the same time, he was busy on behalf of the asylum seeker, found out about many major and minor specifics to do with residence permits (for instance about the law and applying for a permit), sought help, and eventually managed to get the asylum seeker a study permit and, later, a permit to remain in the country permanently. To draw attention to the situation of other undocumented people and the problems they face, he published a book based on his notes about the events that had happened.

A woman who grew up in a communist family in the United States learnt at an early age the meaning of social activism. Espousing the ideas of a world famous mentor, according to whom it was possible to be an academic, activist, researcher, and revolutionary, she joined the communist party and as a result was fired from her university job. She nonetheless continued to write and have a social impact, especially on issues of women’s situation in society and the problems of the prison system (“the prison industrial complex”), managed to survive in university life, toured the world as a speaker until returning to the university from which she had been fired. As a full time university professor, she continued with her social activism and to lecture.

We could tell countless other similar stories from different parts of the world, past and present. Rebellious research is an everyday activity. These examples contain several common features that make them important specifically from the point of view of rebellious research. First, we should emphasize that the attitude and practice of rebellious research does not come about or happen as the result of the activity of one person, but due to multiple social happenings and interactions. Individuals have life histories that have contributed to moulding the trajectory of their thoughts and actions. They have lived in certain social circumstances that have aroused their social understanding and political consciousness. Throughout their lives, they have amassed perceptions and experiences that they have interpreted in relation to their life history and learning to date. They have met like-minded people with whom they have one way or another become aligned. The combined effect of all these things and events is to make them what they are, rebellious researchers.

In the cases we looked at, we encounter or see evidence of forms of social dysfunction (extreme poverty, the neoliberal economy, migration-related insecurity, the prison industry) and the awareness of the injustice associated with it. This awareness has led to a decision to start to reflect on and act to remedy the situation. Righting wrongs has most often meant utilising your
own knowledge and skills, investigating matters, and augmenting your understanding and abilities. Getting results has also required devising solutions and imagination (sometimes testing the limits of the law or even to overstep them), cooperation and forging alliances. We should especially emphasise this latter point: only rarely, if ever, is anyone a rebellious researcher on his or her own. Generally, you are part of an existing or emerging group or gathering, often part of a social movement or network. If not, you will have to focus on a group, social movement or network for initiating, continuing with and winning a struggle. What do we mean by a movement? Franco “Bifo” Berardi defines it as follows:

Movement is the process of recomposition of society: the cultural process that makes possible the political unity of the different social actors who are in conflict in public space. When the social actors find a common ground of understanding and act together for a common goal, I see a movement, the active and conscious side of the process of social transformation, and also of cultural evolution. Movement is the subjective (conscious and collective) side of the recomposition of the living social sphere against the domination of the dead (capital). (Berardi 2011, 96–97.)

For research to be rebellious, we must learn research work by making systematic observations and linking individual instances to wider (historic, political, social, cultural) contexts of critical reflection, in other words to enable thorough assessment. Systematic observation and recording are also important for two other reasons: we can use them to judge what has been done and be able to revisit events in a documented manner. Research thereby helps in the process of recalling, remembering and reminding, and of course in communicating a single historical event more extensively. It is the task of the rebellious researcher not only to be involved and to keep a record of things, but also to make this event and knowledge public by teaching and writing as well as through discussion and speaking, and perhaps presentation (the arts offer a diverse resource). The era of the Internet and social media presents abundant opportunities for revealing and denouncing injustices, tackling them and making them known for larger public.

Overall, rebellious research often proceeds from the Freirean approach: to stop and watch closely, estimate what should and could be done for the problems we observe, and start acting to bring about change (see e.g. Kurki 2006b, 153-154). Sometimes, starting to act and action itself induce the desired goal (“a road is made by walking”). However, the starting point is that things can actually change by getting down to business. This does not mean action for its own sake or blind activism. Action should be contemplated purposefully, by which we mean reflectively. Conversely, rebellious research
needs to avoid verbalism, in Freire’s (2005, 96) words “the trite ramblings of an alienated and alienating rhetoric”, which is unable to question conditions of inequality. Whether the researcher’s role is to awaken the need for action or to initiate action, rebellious research is always in one way or another action-oriented.

The examples we gave at the beginning of this chapter bring together common values, such as radical equality, which holds that all people are equal from the outset, and they should always be considered and treated as such. People from North Africa arriving to southern parts of Europe are in the same boat as their hosts, the border guards, police and Frontex (the EU external border agency), as well as us ordinary citizens – all are human beings regardless of social position. Second, the examples involve solidarity, in which we enter “into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity; it is a radical posture” (Freire 2005, 50). In the chilling world of selfish and arrogant conservatism, this idea may seem strange, and one can shy away from it. It seems hard to realize, as I don’t see different people other than those on the street corners busking or begging: “They’re the so-called oppressed? The ones we are supposed to be helping? Them? Shouldn’t it be people from here first?”

Such questions are significant, as the degrees of subjugation and oppression vary from place to place. The exploitation of children for labour is a problem especially of poor countries in Asia, Africa and South America, but not so much in the wealthy global North, while human trafficking affects all countries. The distribution of hunger and disease caused by poverty is extremely uneven worldwide. We term high or absolute oppression those conditions in poor countries where the victims of global exploitation are forced to into work, for instance in sweatshops, cocoa plantations, mines, or the sex industry. Minor or relative oppression applies to the situation in rich countries where people suffer precarity, unemployment, and social exclusion or are otherwise without options, and are unable to cope in an IT society.

The examples we cite highlight the importance of specific acts. “To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.” (Freire 2005, 51). Specificity enables us to experience the “encounter solidarity” (Aranguren 1998), experience other people’s reality, and thereby gain understanding. This attaches no importance to where you are from and where you are heading.

The examples show cooperation and joint action, in other words the notion of a participatory worldview and people’s mutual interdependence, such that we live in a common world in which we need one another (e.g. Ledwith & Springett 2010). Associated with need is assistance, which does not mean the sorts of help we are used to in unequal societies, such as alms and charity, but
where we are specifically shoulder-to-shoulder with others, where me-ness, you-ness and us-ness come together (e.g. Sennett 2004).

People’s societal freedom is also evident in the examples. They show a shift from the regulated activity of the usual power coordinates of the kind of free world where existing power is challenged by concrete action. One of the conclusions of study of the birth of totalitarianism by the philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906 – 1975) is that facts alone do not convince people; rather it is the solidity of the system whose realities in part are considered “natural” (Arendt 1962). It is precisely the delusions and dysfunctions on which this solidity is based that rebellious research works against.

Overall, the case examples demonstrate the idea of the process quality of social reality. When we think and act according to the notion that reality “is not to be comprehended as a complex of readymade things, but as a complex of processes” (Engles 1886), we can take action and bring about change.

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8. RESIST!

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Institutional and politically active ethnography

One morning, Dorothy Smith was walking to work at the sociology department of the University of British Columbia, when she noticed a large hole where before there had been a building. The sight prompted her to think of the provenance of this hole in the midst of the university campus, starting a process that led to the birth of the research methodology known as institutional ethnography.

Dorothy Smith had been active in the women’s movement and had been involved in establishing women’s studies at university. She had also begun to demur at those basic sociological doctrines that had been thrust on her when she was at the University of California. Now that she was the single mother of two boys, she found herself living in two separate worlds, two social realities. On the one hand, there was the world of the home, where as a mother, with the tasks and awareness that go with that social position, she shared the elements of the domestic milieu – looking after and running the home, food, bills, hobbies – with her children, friends and neighbours. On the other hand, she had a paid job and working life, which she shared with her colleagues.
teaching and researching sociology, doing administrative work. (D. Smith 2005, 11.)

Smith had learned from women’s studies that with sociological research you had to begin from your own experiences and the spheres of experience to which you belong. So from these bases she started comparing her own experience of these two social realities, home and work, which her subjectivity creates and encompasses. Comparison reveals radical differences between the worlds of home and work. The home order includes children’s actual physicality, along with different physical needs, children’s expressions, movements voices, the small of their hair, intermittent weeping and gnashing of teeth, play and chatter, various daily routine actions, teeth brushing and bed time stories before sleeping, morning chores and leaving for school, preparing meals. (Ibid. 12.) The countless repetitions of these recurrent everyday things, lacking much variation, make one forget the moment such as significant incidents and details.

Within the world of work Smith encountered a different reality – bookish and for the most part to do with the names of dead people. The university world consists of fragments. In one of them, we are with students, in another with texts, and in a third with colleagues and administration. The academy is a structure where hardly anyone has a complete knowledge of all its components, where no one is in charge of the whole entity. Most of the work carried out concerns reading, assessing, commenting on and writing texts. (Ibid. 12)

When the university was approached by walking from the subjective vantage point of the home, one noticed different things: the hilly topography of the campus, and looming up further to the north the snowy mountains. And then on the left, among the buildings, that gaping hole and pit, where before there had been a university building. In the mode of the everyday, things had an understandable connection, where one thing always linked with another and together they were a part of some thing or a thematic entity of the domestic architecture. But in the university world it was impossible to know to what totality and organisation of things the demolition of the building was linked with. Maybe this was why the matter raised additional questions.

If you were to trace the origins of that hole, you would have to climb up into an order and you would notice how the university is organised, what sort of hierarchy dominates its social relations. Who looks after the finances and who determines them? Who took the decision to demolish the building, and why? From your own observation and experience, it would therefore be possible to figure out the organisation of the ruling social relations and how you are part of that social order. (D. Smith 2006, 13.) This is the basic idea of institutional
ethnography: using the method of your own and others’ experience and wisdom as target reveals the ruling social regime, its arrangement and authority.

Dorothy Smith’s compatriot, the sociologist George Smith (1935 – 1994) was active in the gay rights movement, and took part in campaigns in Toronto for the right of gay men to privacy and access to AIDS treatment. To Smith, political activism was a research tool: “I have used political confrontation as an ethnographic resource” (G. Smith 2006, 44). He embraced Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography as the starting point for his sociological intervention and participatory research. Here, the focus of research are people’s life practices as they live them, how they think of them and interpret them, as well as the structures and institutions, laws and regulations that “surround” them and have a supra-individual power influencing them.

Institutional ethnography means the study of people’s experiences to discover how dominant relations both rely on and determine people’s everyday activities. Methodologically this is a matter of using people’s knowledge of experience, in other words investigating what they do and how they do it, what they think about and how they feel when alone and with others. (D. Smith 2005, 44, 151.)

Institutional ethnography deals with identifying the differences in the dominant world interpretative models and their relation to marginal interpretations. At the same time, it rejects belief in a comprehensive and objective account and explanation of social reality that are based on the (often bewilderingly biased) perspectives of those in power. Instead, it aims to distinguish different social realities and the interpretative models associated with them.

Institutional ethnography has no prior interpretive commitments, such those that draw on concepts of global domination and resistance. It aims to find answers to questions of how people's everyday experiences and daily doings link them to more general, invisible networks of social relations, and how people come to participate in them. (Ibid., 36.)

Institutional ethnography takes a stand: its most characteristic and important attribute is the perspective of ordinary people, which transcend the world models and interpretations of different matters provided by those in power. Examples of such perspectives include the situation of women in patriarchal society, of gays and lesbians in heterosexual society, of ethnic minorities in racist societies or of workers in class society. (G. Smith 2006, 51.)
Taking a stand requires precise empirical and material research and study: writing down people’s accounts but also taking into account the viewpoints of those in power. In George Smith’s research on the discriminatory treatment of gay men, this involved two approaches. There were the familiar details of discrimination and police raids, while, on the other hand, he had to know how to analyse the legislation on which the discrimination exercised by the police was based. Only in this way was it possible both to expose the “legal” bases of the viewpoint of those in power and to change them.

In addition to the difference of viewpoint of the powerful and the powerless and accurate empirical work, there is a third approach in institutional, politically active ethnography. This holds that research should not depart from readily formed general sociological theories or theoretical abstractions, but to put them to one side to be able to see and hear how people live and what they have to say (ibid., 56). The method does not purport to achieve a truer grasp of social life than a theory-driven one, rather one that enables us to detect a social problem, enhance its solution, and optimally further the realisation of people’s own aims over and above the viewpoints of those in power.

To support his argument, George Smith provided a perceptive reading of Marx’s First Thesis on Feuerbach, recalling its emphasis on the materialist basis for understanding human activity. The familiar thesis states:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively.

In proceeding from this observation, George Smith writes that the new politically conscious sociology does not attempt to produce objective descriptions and accounts that are alienated from their subject, or to start from political or sociological theory. Instead, activist ethnography must, in addition to people’s own accounts, study and describe the perspective of those in power and the administrative organisation by which people in the modern nation state are herded and controlled (G. Smith, 57).

To take account of diverging viewpoints and conducting empirical work devoid of ready, overarched and heavy-duty theory does not however mean that the researcher does not or should not in practice draw on concepts that give direction to his or her thinking and investigations. One such concept we find in politically active ethnography, as in many other micro-sociological approaches, is that of social relations. This means both people’s genuine interactional practices – what they talk about and do together – and the textual practices that create and determine social reality.
The second of George Smith’s directional thinking concepts is that of the political régime, which he uses to refer to the customs, practices and texts by which the organisation of people is realised. The régime generally comprises two parts: the political system and bureaucracy. In the framework of the former, matters are discussed and decided on; in the latter, decisions are put into action and their implementation monitored. In George Smith’s first study of the rights of gay men to privacy, the régime embodies the laws on homosexuality, the police and the courts. In terms of AIDS treatment, the régime includes private general practitioners, public health care, palliative rather than accelerated care in hospices and clinical research units, in all of which medically trained professionals laboured on their official mission of controlling the AIDS epidemic.

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9. ELEVEN THESIS ON REBELLIOUS RESEARCH

Eleven theses

So far, we have introduced a whole range of different research traditions that contain numerous common features and practices. The point has been to show the variety of rebellious research and bring together a number of approaches and trends in research that largely speak the same language and work in the same manner. This way we are perhaps able to increase the strength and effectiveness of rebellious research. Next, we will set out the key propositions in rebellious research methodology.

Rebellious research

• is a research activity in accordance with so-called emancipatory, or liberational knowledge, in which initially – or for that matter throughout the whole process – researchers and those involved in the research deliberate on the following questions (Denzin 2005, 945): What kind of research task do we want to do? For whom is it intended? What difference does it make? Who will do it? How do we want to do it? How do we know that it is worthwhile? Who “owns” it? Who benefits from it?

• is ethically conscious by including consideration of the aims of the study and activity and hence who you work with and what side you are on. Rebellious research is committed to radical equality principles (the emphasis on the equality of everyone from the outset) and aims for social equality, solidarity and ecological sustainability.
• an activity that gets to grips with social practices, and in particular social problems with the aim of making them visible or solving them. It is also research that identifies and studies the world's intolerable and hopeless issues, in particular phenomena that would otherwise go unnoticed. Rebellious research operates with the “voiceless”, those whose spontaneous freedom of expression is suppressed. In other words, we judge the impact and usefulness of research by how it has helped people in their practical problems or how it has improved awareness of what life is about socially and societally.

• believes in everyone’s equality, right to humane life and ability to change the world. The marginalized or oppressed are not wretches who need saving or aid recipients, though they are often treated as such. They are important individuals with minds of their own and who are capable of changing reality (e.g. Fine & Weis 1998, 31). The rebellious researchers’ guiding principle is to be on an equal footing with those taking part in the research and not to put themselves on specialist pedestal.

• unites researchers and other actors into a collective acting in such a way that their roles and the division of labour are loose: researchers act (aid and help in practical work) and actors research (make observations, write them up, interview people). Rebellious research is particularly powerful when researchers band together, such as in emancipatory politics: “For this reason, a new emancipatory politics will stem no longer from a particular social agent, but from an explosive combination of different agents. (Žižek 2009, 92).

• is thoroughly political. Even the act of choosing a study topic or a point of view is a political act, as is designating what kinds of actors are to take part in a study. Rebellious research does not seek to conceal its normative starting point and commitment behind a cloak of neutrality and objectivity. Rebellious researchers are not among those custodians of the existing social order, who straightforwardly trust in research methods. They do not shy away from normative positions or social dissent. They seek change, emphasise the study of and support for civil society, independent communities and social activism, and the chronicling of self-organised and dynamic “autonomous areas” in society.

• uses the kinds of concepts that are sidelined by mainstream research, such as the working class, capitalism, oppression and power elite. They play an important role, palpably inspiring alarm when they are used, talked and written about (Foucault 1983). Using conceptual means, we can interrogate states of affairs that are taken for granted and naturalised, undermine dominant concepts, bring up the obstacles to equality and justice, question and encourage questioning, sharpen sensitivity to what is happening around us – the ability to observe and translate observations into relevant research problems, influential and agitational research (see Biesta 2011, 43-44).

• is open and reflexive and introduces critical questions, including for the rebellious research and its instigator. Rebellious researchers are self-critical and self-reflective. They reflect upon their own values, their criteria and
changes, and they support fellow researchers and others involved with the research in their own and the joint awareness process. They are most aware of their place and position in the world and society, and as a part of the research objective. They ponder, question and interrogate, and are prepared to change themselves.

- is grounded in the experience of the researcher and others who are involved. The point is always about using the life experience of the participants, actually their life histories as the research fuel. Researchers put themselves on the line in terms of life history as well as functionally.
- is, due to its practicality, experientiality and interoperability, educational, instructive and educative, which means that all participants become competent in thinking and doing. Everyone involved is on an as equal a footing as everyone else. Everyone can equally learn and instruct, by turns receiving and giving, according to their ability and needs.
- expands the overall horizons of what research is, what it could be and what can be done with it. It challenges the traditional discipline-subject division “to disorient the reigning maps, to transform the dominant cartographies” (Holmes 2007, 41), and to turn upside down the usual tenets and certainties of research work. “The world is a political battlefield where social science must also choose its side: whether to work with your head in the sand and imagine that you are neutral, fight on one side, or try to mediate in the conflict, reconcile and be on the side of humanity. The individual researcher may say science, that you should stay put, to understand and mediate, but I will choose my side and charge into battle.” (Eskola 2009, 206.)

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[pages 345–349 and 351]

12 “WE ARE THE ONES WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR”

Just as rebellious researchers have scant hope of achieving rapid solutions to the world’s problems, they are equally unsure about the kind of society we will be living in tomorrow. The nation state has long been the framework in which the lives of people in the West have been organised and controlled. The parliamentary steering mechanism, the basic form of its representative decision-making, is nevertheless estranged from the social movements of free civil society and their global networks (we can measure this simply in terms of the decline in voter turnouts or the atrophying of party and civil society activity).

The basis of state power often goes unnoticed. It seeks to anchor itself through compliant citizen obedience offset by promises of secure social and health benefits and basic education, and a generally safe and smooth ride despite all
the turmoil in the world. State power also contributes to bolstering party political populism and fanatical religious and right wing movements. They generate obedience (and amass support) by a process of simplification, for instance by using racist statements to condemn certain groups of people, which the pioneering sociologist and peace researcher Johan Galtung (2013) calls the new fascism. We see increasing methods of surveillance deployed in the name of security, and fears being stoked using various threat scenarios about the economy and violence. The hope is to intimidate people to desist from “extra-parliamentary” direct action to exert their influence, and perhaps generally from being socially aware, thinking and cooperating. We should bear in mind that with rebellious research, the real issue in public debate (political debate included) and the social sciences is interpretive hegemony and its ownership. Those with interpretive hegemony over “the facts” have the edge in people’s social tutelage and understanding, or, more crudely, their manipulation and indoctrination.

In essence, though, the state is as Max Weber defined it “a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” (Weber 2009, 71, the italics are Weber’s). And further: “Like the political institutions historically preceding it, the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence. If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be.” (ibid., 71, the italics are Weber’s). Following this is a definition of politics, which “for us means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state.” (ibid.). The most recent form of domination is neo-liberalism, a belief system according to which “individual freedoms, private property rights and free markets represent what is good, while all 20th century collective ideas represent what is evil” (Patomäki 2007, 10).

These days, the task of rebellious research is to struggle against neo-liberalism’s well-documented destructive impacts, while bolstering people’s efforts for liberation, cooperation and learning. From this angle, promoting social change denotes two interrelated, dialectical tasks: the first a new conscientised and cooperative human development and secondly the transformation of the relations of production and ownership (Balibar 2013, 18). Rebellious researchers with their instruments of struggle must act according to those multiple projects and movements that reinforce people’s scope to act independently of capitalism, within or outside the social reality it creates. Numerous social theorists have pointed out that the nation state, its political channels of influence and welfare structures, needs to be fundamentally rethought. One of them was Tony Judt (1948-2010), who in his acerbically titled book Ill fares the land focuses on the reform of social
democratic and welfare ideology. Judt had faith in people’s general educational level, claiming that people are “intuitively familiar with issues of injustice, unfairness, inequality and immorality” even though they may have forgotten their political idiom (Judt 2011, 232). The Dutch born journalist Joos Wassenaar argues that party political and NGO activity is overly formulaic and ceremonial in place of bold action and activity. Representative democracy has to be accompanied by people’s free association: “We have to have the courage to see that power is not generated by representation, because it becomes depleted. (...) People have to take the initiative themselves, including on the streets and at different happenings.” (Ruusunen 2103.)

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There is an old Jewish story about how in order to build a new world you don’t have to destroy everything and start again. You just have to move this rock or that cup a fraction, and everything else in the same manner. But, the story continues, making that “fraction” of change and understanding its extent is so difficult that the powers of one person are insufficient. So, more people are needed, the mass strength of solidarity, or in the Freirean dialect: I cannot exist without you, I need you in order to develop and know more (see Allman 2001, 181).

The Hopi American Indians have a proverb: “We are the ones we have been waiting for.” This roughly means that we shouldn’t wait for heavenly saviours any more than secular prophets to liberate us from social oppression or create a world of equality and justice. Žižek (2009,154) borrows the saying in writing to those on the political left who habitually direct their seditious gaze somewhere other than at their own actions, circumstances or actual situation in their search for the “subjects”, or protagonists, of revolution. He fears that this constant hankering for a new revolutionary agent from elsewhere – whether from the “new proletariat” living in shantytowns on the outskirts of metropolises or from this or that social movement – may in reality imply the opposite: a watering down of revolutionary action, words becoming music or poetry aesthetic sludge, an outright fear of seditious action.

The idea of “historical necessity” does would appear to denote a fair and equal world for everyone working for it, on the contrary (ibid.), and it is this that makes rebellious research all the more relevant. Because the certainty or support known as historical necessity is non-existent, we have to rely on others and ourselves.

“There is only one correct answer to those Leftist intellectuals who desperately await the arrival of a new revolutionary agent capable of instigating the long-expected radical social transformation. It takes the form of the old Hopi
saying, with a wonderful Hegelian twist from substance to subject: ‘We are the ones we have been waiting for.’ (...) It does not mean we have to discover how it is we are the agent predestined by fate (historical necessity) to perform the task—it means quite the opposite, namely that there is no big Other to rely on. In contrast to classical Marxism where ‘history is on our side’ (the proletariat fulfils the predestined task of universal emancipation), in the contemporary constellation, the big Other is against us: left to itself, the inner thrust of our historical development leads to catastrophe, to apocalypse; what alone can prevent such calamity is, then, pure voluntarism, in other words, our free decision to act against historical necessity.” (ibid.)

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2002, 51) takes the same line, drawing attention to people’s diminishing scope to determine their destiny and follow the options they want. Individual choice are insufficient for overcoming problems, when what is needed are united efforts and “Politics with the capital ‘P’, where private problems are translated into the language of public issues and public solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private troubles” (Bauman 2002, 39). We measure the contribution of the rebellious researcher for this better world in terms of daily struggles, successes, failures, trial and error, and not just in the (intrinsically necessary) festive highs of subversion, protest marches and demonstrations, when the feelings of joy and togetherness are most pronounced. “The success of a revolution should not be measured by the sublime awe of its ecstatic moments, but by the changes the big Event leaves at the level of the everyday, the day after the insurrection.” (Žižek 2009, 154).

Rebellious researchers should whenever possible gather the materials and ingredients for their work. Written words, discussions, dance, song, action – sometimes also directly and concretely. You don’t always find the means and tools of struggle where you might expect to, which is why it is good to frequent numerous different settings and remain receptive and open-minded.

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To summarise rebellious research: We must work for a better world without being either blindly optimistic or unduly pessimistic. This work must be carried out together with others, with movements, by creating scope for social activism for pupils, students and anyone else who is interested. Where possible we must show them examples, and search for solutions of diverse designation. Above all, we must develop the “judgment and choice antecedently to overt action” as required in moral situations, since the significance of such situations demanding action is never self-evident, and must be sought according to one’s powers, as Dewey (2012) describes. Rebellious researchers prompt people and society in general into critical
motion by their own actions and involvement. Together with others, they look for and develop suitable procedures and decisions for different situations by studying issues: “Hence, inquiry is exacted: observation of the detailed makeup of the situation; analysis into its diverse factors; clarification of what is obscure; discounting of the more insistent and vivid traits; tracing the consequences of the various modes of action that suggest themselves” (ibid., 182).

For rebellious researchers, framing questions and searching for reflective answers go hand-in-hand with cooperation and activism. The social liberation that takes place in the process of questioning, answering and acting is by no means always straightforward, but around the world rebellious researchers are bolstering the knowledge that no one’s contributions are pointless and no one is working alone.