1 Onset

Io, che due volte avea visto lor grato,  
incominciò: “O anime sicure  
d’aver, quando che sia, di pace stato,  

non son rimase acerbe né mature  
le membra mie di là, ma son qui meco  
col sangue suo e con le sue giunture.”  

Dante, Purgatorio, Canto XXVI, 52-57.

The dissertation begins by explaining its provenance, and it does this to connect positively with the reader. The hope is that readers will warm to the project, not in spite of the provenance, but because of it. The standard form of introduction takes up most of the remainder of the chapter. It speaks of what the research presented here does. Thus, it signposts the area of work; positions the research question within that area; provides a chapter by chapter overview of the thesis; and summarises the significant results that emerge from the work. The matter of provenance – verging on technique, and success of technique – makes a return in the chapter’s last section.

1.1 Introducing a project from the clinic

In this piece of research and writing, I have taken as my watchword Gilles Deleuze’s rhetorical question: ‘How else can one write, but of those things which one doesn’t know, or knows badly?’¹ My work seeks acceptance, and in the same stroke it courts dismissal, as a shot in the dark of thinking. It is not from a social science discipline, even though it concerns a campaign of political action. It is not a work of political philosophy or theory in an established tradition, nor is it an essay in the humanities. It does not properly even straddle the borders between disciplines. Inspired by the writings of Deleuze, this undertaking is one of those experiments in thinking that shun the light spread by the disciplines that identify truths. Or perhaps those disciplines no longer exist. By turning away from that lamplight, thought can affirm its predicament in face of the fluid patterns of the real and the possible. Thought is sourced in, and blocked by, a quandary: thought and the patterns at which it aims condition one another. Nobody imagines any more that it is possible to stand, torch aloft, holding a mirror up to nature.

¹ (Deleuze, 1994/1968Fr: p xxi).
In the allegory of Plato’s cave, the search for knowledge of the real is a search for unchanging truths, a search for identities, and a reaching toward the absolute. That time-honoured mode of thought is the antipode of what happens with the shot in the dark of thinking. The shot in the dark stems from an appreciation of difference and the non-absolute. It affirms that truths’ adventures and misadventures can be evaluated from the inside, and mistrusts judgments from the outside. With regard to truths’ misadventures, or the pathologies of thought, it affirms them as matter for clinical study. And it recognises that there are different conditions among the pathologies of thought, not just one affliction. Some common examples are dogmatism, absurdity, misapplied remembering and forgetfulness, and myopia. Other afflictions can be added, such as malevolence, sheer idleness, gratuitous whimsicality, being enslaved to habit, and irrelevance.

The clinical study of such afflictions (‘the clinic’) calls on its practitioners to be open-minded in their approach. We are in an epoch, argues Deleuze, that calls for a particular kind of open-mindedness. The clinic, a body made up of practitioner-patients, finds itself in the grip of a fixation on a single pathology of thought, namely error. The clinic responds by treating that fixation as one more affliction. And rightly so, since a clinic obsessed with one deviant condition would botch the overall handling of pathologies of thought. And yet, the open-minded approach is controversial, even scandalous. In the Western tradition, we (are conditioned to) see no harm whatsoever in treating error as causa sine qua non, when it comes to failures in thinking. Indeed, we live in almighty fear of changing that habit.

The clinic is familiar enough to the academic world. First Nietzsche and then the philosophers of difference, especially Deleuze, could see an empire of truth, a phallogocentric empire. They took the liberty of saying (in effect), ‘The Emperor has no clothes.’ There is no good reason why the expunging of error and deception and illusion should invariably prevail in the handling of all the pathologies of thought. So, the project was launched, of freeing Western thought of its fixation on error, that is to say, dethroning truth. Fittingly, the project justifies itself, not as a war against error or frontier-work for truth, but as a break-out of thought from dogma concerning the handling of pathologies of thought.²

It is within that project of breaking-out that I find a niche. So, I am a participant in the clinic – a clinic that sees the scientific approach associated with the Enlightenment infecting the clinic itself with a fixation on error. For participants in the clinic, that is reason enough to closet science for a spell, and see what comes out of allowing art to play upon the senses. The turn to art is the remedy Nietzsche suggested more than a century ago, in the Third Essay of On the Genealogy of Morals. And since the late 1980s, that turn has been experienced – though opinions will differ on how much of this can be ascribed to Nietzsche – throughout the academic disciplines. Thus, there has been a change, variously referred to as a cultural turn or

² The Nietzschean clinic for pathologies of thought is an important concept in Deleuze’s philosophy. My sketch of the concept here is limited to the essentials. The concept is developed and explained in (Nietzsche, 1996 /1887Ger: Third Essay); (Deleuze, 1994 /1968 Fr: ch 3, especially pp 150-151); (Patton, 2000: pp 18-19); and (Smith, 1998).
a rhetorical turn, across the hard and soft sciences.\textsuperscript{3} There has also been a cultural turn – again, a broad shift away from the scientific approach – in letters, the arts, and architecture, as the humanities have transformed themselves into ‘the new humanities.’\textsuperscript{4}

In a pluralist spirit, one can only applaud the academic world’s commencing a turn to art: to decry the turn, would be to say that (Western) society’s salvation lies in maintaining or increasing science’s momentum. I am not saying that society’s future is at stake over the question of the turn to art. But just supposing it is, a moment’s reflection should convince us that pinning hope for society on the unrelenting hold of scientific thought is a woeful bet. The turn to art across all fields of intellectual labour is therefore good news for thinkers, including those whose steadfast faith in the scientific approach keeps them outside the clinic.

The above can be summarised in just a few lines. This thesis, which is an experiment, is a mark of my participating in the clinic for pathologies of thought. The ambition is to connect positively with a multiplicity of readers: the fellow practitioner-patient; the reader who is outside the clinic; and the one that flies betwixt and between.

1.2 A decade as its ‘vital centre’ saw it

This piece of research has to do with political activism, and it is concerned with developments in the 1990s, in the imagined hemisphere known as ‘the West.’ (The reader will already have noticed that writing from a non-Western perspective is not attempted here. In another world, I might have felt equal to that task, and would have taken pleasure in exercising that capacity.) I use the term ‘political activist’, or simply ‘activist’, for a person who, working from within or from outside the present system, seeks either to reform the system or to replace it; and who, to that end, does things that go beyond voting in national and sub-national elections. The range of things an activist may do includes protest actions, such as street rallies and the use of banners. It also includes such things as signing petitions, writing to members of Parliament, attending public meetings, and taking part in radio talk shows that have to do with reform or replacement of the system.

Activism in the West rose in the nineties from being in terminal decline, so it seemed, to reach a level not seen since the challenge of 1968 to state authority (in France) by the direct action of young people and workers. Broadly speaking, my question is this: as students of politics and government, what are we to make of the rekindling of activism in the nineties? And I want an answer that comes from allowing art to play upon the senses – but I leave it to the final section of this chapter, to say something about the discipline for that process of responding through the sensory play of art. In this second section and the third, I outline the mainstream political thought, and some of the heterodox and left-leaning political thought, bearing on the activism of the nineties. The fourth section states the research question; the

\textsuperscript{3} See (Majone, 1989), (Maines, 1993), (Jasanoff, 1995), (Callon, 1995), (Law and Hassard, 1999), (Latour, 1999), (Cook, 2000). Among those works, the ones that connect with actor-network theory – viz the works by Callon, Law and Hassard, and Latour – show that Nietzsche’s thought is implicated in the late twentieth-century cultural turn in the sciences.

\textsuperscript{4} See (Jameson, 1998), and (Fuery and Mansfield, 2000).
fifth provides an overview of the thesis, chapter by chapter; and the sixth comments on the significance of the results.

The label ‘left-leaning’ (hereafter simply ‘left’) calls for some clarification. Left politics, as the term is used in this thesis, is politics whose purpose is to act on the present system, from within or outside it, with one or more of the following effects: (a) safety nets and an end to sharp disparities in personal income and in personal well-being (inclusive of educational opportunity); (b) protecting natural systems from further depredation at the hands of the present and later generations of humans; (c) a restructuring of the state, moulding it to fit with people’s (or at least adults’) wider participation in decisions affecting them. Thus, I am using the term ‘left’ in a broad sense, which includes groups as diverse as civic republicans, liberals, anti-capitalists, anarchists, and people whose chief concern is to foster peace and save ecosystems. As to what is sometimes called ‘identity politics,’ if it takes the forms supported by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe or by William E Connolly, then it comes under item (c) in my definition of ‘left.’

In the late 1990s, one of the calls heard in political street rallies was, ‘This is what democracy looks like!’ If this scene came from some game plan for the state and society, it was not the plan that leading contemporary thinkers on democracy, and experts in the practical art of democratic rule, had adopted. The game plan of the wise was plain enough from discussions of the current form of democratic rule in the academy and in public policy think tanks. It pervaded the practical handling of state rule in government bureaucracies and politicians’ offices. Nearly all of that action of the wise was taking place within and between two schools of socio-political thought. They were known as the new-modernity or second-modernity school, and the pragmatic relativist school. The second-modernity school’s most influential exponents were two sociologists, Ulrich Beck in Germany, and Anthony Giddens in Britain. Leading the pragmatic relativist school were two US based moral philosophers, Richard Rorty and Michael Walzer.

Both schools held that – for Western states and the transition states of the Eastern bloc – the 600-year long era of recurrent outbreaks of political activism, or protest, or rebellion, was over. Modern democratic government, they said, had provoked recurrent unrest because it relied on a degree of coercion of the public by the authorities. It was a staple of modernity, accepted across almost the entire spectrum of political thinkers, that a state is ruled partly by means of coercion, partly by the consent of the ruled, and partly by deception. As Machiavelli put it, the ruler is part lion, part man, part fox. But at the beginning of the post Cold War era, the specialists in democratic governance were agreed that coercion and conflict no longer had a place in the proper body politic.

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5 See references in note 22 below.
6 (Beck, 1992), (Beck et al., 1994), (Giddens, 1990), and (Giddens, 1991).
7 (Rorty, 1998a), (Rorty, 1998b), and (Walzer, 1988).
8 The concept of the modern state is grounded in Machiavelli’s The Prince and Discourses on Livy ((Machiavelli, 1999), (Machiavelli, 1997)). Machiavelli endorses a state that rules over a people by a combination of three measures: force, in the image of the lion; the consent of the ruled (ie the system of law), in the image of man; and deception, in the image of the fox (Machiavelli, 1999: s XVIII).
They reasoned as follows. The fall of the Soviet empire marked the end of class struggle, and ushered in a period conceived either as the second modernity (Beck and Giddens) or as postmodernity (Rorty and Walzer). In the newly opened era, the state differed from the creature it had been in modernity. The policies of governments were now subject to ongoing adjustment in a process that involved all of the national and sub-national stakeholders. That process, by and large, produced consensus. The new era’s state was steeped in harmony. Securing the concord of citizens were the thinkers and practitioners of the neoliberal consensus, which also called itself the radical centre, or the vital centre. Governments of the vital centre routinely arranged for policy consultations to be held, opinion polls and focus group sessions to be conducted, and deals involving side payments to be worked out. So, there was never any lasting coercion. Britain’s Prime Minister of the late nineties, Tony Blair, signposted the progressive centrist way with neatly clipped sound bites. ‘There are no longer Left and Right policies, only good policies and bad policies.’ ‘What works is what matters.’9

Drawn together by the sharing of a belief that state rule need no longer involve coercion, the second-modernity school and the pragmatic relativist school still had their differences. Each had its own tenets as to the way power was exercised in producing consensus, and that difference carried over to some extent into the practical steps they condoned (or not) for building consensus.

In brief, the second-modernity school held that everyone in society has in common some essential quality of being human. Because of that bond, Beck and Giddens argued, citizens can form an ‘ideal speech community’ to resolve questions of government policy (the concept of the ideal speech community, upholding Enlightenment values, comes from the Frankfurt School philosopher, Jürgen Habermas). Of course, citizens would typically have initial disagreements on any given question. But those disagreements would be progressively removed by a practice of coming together to mull over the facts and issues; participation in this could be rostered, after the fashion of jury duty. Citizens would be fed relevant advice from scientific experts, and they could put questions to the scientific experts. The scientific briefings would include how to handle imperfect information in a rational manner.

The pragmatic relativists were on a different planet. They held that, as a practical matter, not every citizen is capable of making decisions for herself that are good decisions, meaning decisions that serve her own interests. At any given time, many citizens have still to learn to subjugate their appetites and passions to their interests. But people who have been fortunate enough to receive a certain kind of ‘sentimental education,’ the liberal kind, can make good decisions for themselves.

Continuing in that vein, the man or woman who has had a liberal sentimental education is tolerant. These people do not get into lasting conflicts – not among themselves, that is – on questions of government policy. But the liberally educated do not always have the numbers,

9 Those sound bites reverberate with a saying by Deng Xiaoping from 1960s China: ‘It doesn’t matter if a cat is red or white; what matters is that it actually catches mice’ (Žižek, 1999: p 199). The aphorism, ‘Truth is “what works,”’ of course, is not pulled out of the air. It comes from a line of careful, solid, and scientifically oriented reasoning, in the philosophy of pragmatism.
to make elections and government policy consultations work out well. Still, there is a way of preserving democracy and having government decisions made as much as possible in people’s best interests. Just crank up the showmanship in statecraft. It is only logical that, in the era of issues management via the media, the state should arrange for a constant massaging of public opinion. Deftly timed sideshows are gold. The thought is that the end (the liberal policies which are in everybody’s interest) justifies the means (the con in the manufacture of consent).

There is a further important aspect of the pragmatic relativist game plan. The state must promote a liberal sentimental education for all. Society will then consist of ‘choosers’ and ‘learners.’ Choosers are individuals who feel that, for all practical purposes, liberty is indistinguishable from living in a ‘market democracy.’ Learners want other freedoms; they are placed in tutelage, and until they graduate as choosers, the state uses artifice to win their general consent to liberal (neoliberal consensus) policies.

In the pragmatic relativist plan, facts and advice from scientific experts are not fed into any inclusive ideal speech community. Instead, scientific experts are hired to supply services and material for use in the massaging of public opinion. Thus, on the one hand, there are the centrists like Beck and Giddens, who say the state (the ruler) has outgrown its need for the lion and the fox. On the other hand, there are the centrists who are pragmatic relativists, and who say the state has only outgrown its need for the lion. But that distinction is of no great import in practical terms, given the progressive centrist stance that the two camps shared.

The centrists had no presentiment of the dissident political action that began in the mid nineties. The centrists’ state had just buried the lion, but second thoughts about that were now in order.

1.3 Nineties political activism and heterodox left thinking

The heterodox left had its own visions of the fate of the beast/man in modern state rule. The two visions that I am going to outline will seem off-balance compared with their centrist counterparts. If the off-balance sensation is an irritant, it has a compensating positive effect that comes from including concepts that are foreign to the mainstream. The alien concepts help to show how it was that the lion, while briefly buried, was not dead.

Micropolitics and constituent power

To do justice to the two heterodox left visions I am presenting, I need to say a few words about the mid-century critique of psychoanalysis. ‘The critique’ questions authority, that is to say, it questions power in all constituted forms. The critique does not spare party, state, or managerial authority, and its questioning extends to the social norms that make conduct and expression meaningful (or rather, purport to make them meaningful).

The critique had a twenty-year gestation, before it reached book form, and sparked wide debate, with the publishing in 1972 of Capitalisme et schizophrénie 1. L'anti-Œdipe, by
Deleuze and Félix Guattari. (The second volume, *Mille Plateaux*, followed in 1980.)\(^{10}\) The critique was informed by a great deal of accumulated experience and thinking, only a fragment of which can be mentioned here.\(^{11}\) To touch on just some of the background on the political side: from the 1950s on, Guattari had been working with others on experiments with the form of institutions. The changes were designed to get rid of oppressive, top-down modes of working, replacing them with participative modes. A major strand of the trialling of new institutions was in clinical psychiatry. The critique was also provoked by the slow progress in de-Stalinising the French communist party in the fifties and sixties, and by the party’s betrayal of the cause of Algeria’s liberation in those years. On top of that came the communist party’s and trade unions’ betrayal of the May 1968 uprising by students, workers and intellectuals on the left. Deleuze and Guattari decided in 1969 to collaborate in a major work, which would create new concepts and bring them to bear in the social and political unconscious. Their combined thought was the fruit of their separate work over a long period. It enabled them to start enacting, in and through their writing, certain changes to the structures of domination in society. Those structures would be opened to dismantling and to creative renewal, in life-affirming ways.

At the core of the critique of psychoanalysis is a willingness, first, to regard our kind as part of animal/machine kind, and second, to act as if we belong in the subdivision or estate that is not hard-wired. It may be that the organelles and cells of our bodies, which became automata in pre-historic times, are by now hard-wired automata. We, however, are always sliding out of that condition – hence my use of the open term, ‘our kind,’ which avoids any suggestion that some supposed essence of the human can close a space or category we are in.

The critique works by drawing attention to present-day eschatology, if that is not too strong a term. The critique warns us about thinking as if we could be hard-wired, bee-like, for any professed queen-of-all-social-systems (the capitalist system, or any other). For the present, certainly, our kind is dealing with the socialisation of desire as revealed in Freudian analysis. In that pattern of socialisation, the individual is a covetous male; if a female person, she becomes an honorary male individual, with the special baggage this entails for her. The individual is Oedipal: he believes his object of desire is something held by a powerful other, who withholds the object from him.

Whilst the Freudian socialisation of desire currently affects us, we would not like that to be as water affects fish. So, we need to guard our ability to label the Oedipal thing, as the capitalist form of socialisation of desire. The critique reminds us that the socialisation of our desire can take, and has taken, other discrete forms. Each discrete or polar form has a

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\(^{11}\) Ronald Bogue provides a helpful account of the gestation of the critique of psychoanalysis (Bogue, 1989: pp 1-7). Bogue includes the philosophical antecedents of the critique, and the influence of Jacques Lacan’s ‘return to Freud,’ none of which appears in my abridged account.
spectacle that serves to imprint or trace the socialised desiring-body. (In early capitalism, the spectacle is the panopticon – the arrangement where an imagined spying eye constantly rates the subject, who gets brought back into line if found to be deviant. In post-WWII capitalism, the panoptic device has metastasized, as it were, spreading into the subject’s bloodstream.) We do not let the contingent polar form, complete with spectacle – the schema that happens to be in the ascendant just now – blind us to the other polar forms.12

The critique is not an armchair drill. It sparks an active curiosity, and the critique’s particular concept of desire is instrumental in doing that. In pursuing the critique, one takes desire to be ultimately an impersonal force. That force accomplishes both production and consumption, that is to say, it produces intensities, and produces the consumption of intensities.13 Production, or synthesis, takes place among individual differences (actual, non-identical presences); hence it is assigned to micro or ‘molecular’ quanta of being, as opposed to macro or ‘molar’ beings. So, when giving a critical account of synthesis, one has to give particularities their due. Synthesis is the sequenced contact and keeping apart of particular body/machine parts, with each stage taking place at a particular moment, and in the particular ambient conditions of its time and place.

A critic must work, then, on an empirical basis to give some account of how it is that all the micro synthesis gets coded into molar chunks – those molar chunks that pop up in flows of enunciation concerning who subjects ‘are,’ and how subjects are made better off or worse off. Thus, on the part of the critic, there is a probing of the flow patterns of certain traffic, while one is immersed in the flow. The traffic is between micro synthesis and the supposed interests of beings who identify as belonging in molar categories – human; worker; investor; woman; man; co-national; of a particular sexuality; thirty-something; partisan; student; ‘Westerner;’ ‘non-Westerner;’ the list is endless. The immersion and probing in the micro/molar flow of traffic is an empirical practice of critique, which goes by the name of micropolitics.14 Micropolitics finds lines of breakdown, which are also lines of breakthrough (lines of composition), linking the molecular synthesis to the molar picture. In so doing, it nurtures and has tutelage of a consciousness; one realises, to some extent, how one is implicated in the laying down of a cut of the molar picture, part by part.15

12 A-Œ. Outlines of the critique of psychoanalysis are provided in (Holland, 1999), and in (Patton, 2000: ch 5).
13 Intensities are effects, in the form of fresh differences, that arise from an encounter of two differences (Deleuze, 1994/1968 Fr: pp 117-118). To give an example from the physics of wave motion: when two waves of slightly different frequency mingle, the intensive effect is a wave of a different kind, viz a pulsating of the wave amplitudes (ie the interference pattern known as beats).
14 Instead of ‘micropolitics,’ people sometimes write ‘schizo-analysis,’ which is a term Deleuze and Guattari introduced to the language in Anti-Oedipus. As early as 1973, Deleuze said that he and Guattari would rather not continue to have their work revolve around certain words, such as ‘schizo-analysis,’ from their previous writings. They saw the words’ success as a problem, causing a sort of hang-up. ‘We don’t know very well what they mean, we no longer believe in the words; when we use a word, we want to say, if this word doesn’t agree with you, find another, there’s always a way. […]’ (Deleuze, 2004b: p 278).
15 Micropolitics (or its precursor, schizo-analysis) is presented in A-Œ: pp 1-8, 16-17, 68-112, and ch 4; and it is discussed at many points in MP – notably in Plateau 9, especially at pp 221-222.
Given the lines of breakdown and (re)composition, it is plain that desire opens to multiple structural tracings. That is to say, ‘the’ law that instils order into what flows where, is open to being posited in more than one way. What is more, desire has as its constant ally, a power to constitute bodies, where ‘body’ is shorthand for an organic system of conduits for the flow of materials. The power involved here is the power to posit the law – **constituent power**. It is an instance of power as capability of affecting and being affected (**puissance**, **potentia**), as distinct from power as authority (**potestas**). The effects of desire and constituent power are desiring-bodies, and they are *not* all structured the same as the socialised desiring-body.

The power that joins with desire in constituting bodies is a counterpart to the Foucauldian concept of biopower. Michel Foucault presents biopower as the modern form of sovereign power: it is the growing network of practices that sprang up to command and control life after the cutting off of the king’s head (ie after Europe had rid itself of Absolutist rule). In constituent power, as it emerges from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, we have another kind of biopower. Constituent power runs counter to, or cuts across the grain of, Foucault’s biopower. Michael Hardt has called the deleuzoguattarian kind of biopower – the kind that counters the modern form of sovereign power – ‘biopower from below.’ But ‘biopower at large’ is more apt, since it is a power that disrupts the below/above divide. Biopower at large – constituent power – tracks nomadically through any society that is made up of thinking parts, no matter how secure is the grip of sovereign power in and on the society.

**Absolute democracy**

*Empire*, the book that Hardt wrote with Antonio Negri, paints with some bold strokes a scene in which the extraparliamentary political action of the nineties is the playing out of constituent power. *Empire* suggests that constituent power produces absolute democracy, that is to say, a society in which to rule is a right that has to be exercised as a condition of belonging to society. As a member of a society of absolute democracy, one cannot give or trade away one’s right to rule. Every member of society must be part of the society’s ruling body. The right to rule, in such a society, is an inalienable possession of each member of society.

In absolute democracy, people may appoint delegates who will act as they are instructed, but people do not agree to be ruled by any assembly of representatives. To say yes to subjugation of any kind, then, which includes saying yes to state rule with representative democracy, is to confess that one lacks what it takes to participate in society. Docility expunges your right to be part of society: that is how absolute democrats structure their social contract.

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16 (Foucault, 1970/1966Fr), (Foucault, 1977), and (Foucault, 1979).

17 *MP*: pp 208-231; (Hardt and Dumm, 2000: paragraph 16). Patton, too, notes that there are differences, as well as parallels, between Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of desire, and Foucault’s treatment of power (Patton, 2000: pp 73-74).

18 (Hardt and Negri, 2000). See also (Hardt and Negri, 2001) and the selection of other scholars’ articles responding to *Empire* in the 2001 special issue of *Rethinking Marxism*, (Mustapha and Eken (Eds.), 2001).
In the eyes of such a society, the state is not altogether rejected, but the terms on which
the state is accepted are unconventional. It is simplest to convey the terms by bringing back
the conceit of the state as beast and man in one (i.e., a three-way blend of coercer; wily
deceiver; and competent, promise-keeping, contractual protector of the people). For absolute
democrats, the state is part lion and part fox, period. The state may often try to present itself
as part man, but that is a disguise or attempted imposture (the work of the fox). The state will
fail in attempting to dupe absolute democrats, who hold that there is no transcendent moral
force capable of making individuals or collectives honour a contract. Promises can and will
be broken when convenient. Constituents have their own power, and they have nothing but
that power, to serve as a guarantee that the state will honour its side of any contract.

Since absolute democrats find it impossible to consent to any form of constituted power,
they adopt tactics aimed at de-posing the state. Their tactics are also aimed at positing a new
form of global stateless society (which Hardt and Negri call ‘Empire’), though its features are
far from clear.19 The absolute democrats, as they work toward the de-posing of the state, live
at the fringes of mainstream society. They themselves form an embryonic society, which
goes by various names: a tag that sums it up neatly is i disubbidienti (the disobedient).

Where does all that action leave the state? The supposedly human part of the state – the
ruler who, through a social contract, has gained the consent of the ruled – meets with no
recognition from a segment of the people who are ruled, the disubbidienti. The state therefore
has to acknowledge the lion in its character, as a condition of being sovereign. And by
design, this forced move echoes the discipline that the disubbidienti apply to themselves, viz.
you must rule – and in current circumstances this means you must admit to being part lion –
or you are not part of society (as we conceive it).

Thus, absolute democrats insist that, whether the rest of society looks at it this way or not,
the fiction of rule by consent is an incitement to violence. The violence comes from two
broad sources. First, the absolute democrats’ attempted de-posing of the state entails a
striking at authority. Their tactics may range from mild civil disobedience and industrial
‘slacking,’ through to pilfering and looting, sabotage, hostage taking, and armed insurgency.
Second, there is sovereign violence in the partial or full-scale ‘state of exception,’ in which the
fiction of the Lockean social contract is stripped away as the state deals with a threat to its
security. Absolute democrats hold that the state of exception is the defining feature of state
power, which is a view they share with several notable political thinkers of the twentieth
century.20

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19 You are just a bunch of anarchists, the new Plato on the block will finally yell at us. That is not true. We would be
anarchists if we were not to speak [...] from the standpoint of a materiality constituted in the networks of
productive cooperation, in other words, from the perspective of a humanity that is constructed productively,
that is constituted through the ‘common name’ of freedom. No, we are not anarchists but communists who
have seen how much repression and destruction of humanity have been wrought by liberal and socialist big
governments. We have seen how all this is being re-created in imperial government, just when the circuits of
productive cooperation have made labour power as a whole capable of constituting itself in government.

20 Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt engaged in a debate on the state of exception, both thinkers seeing it as
central to state sovereignty. Giorgio Agamben clarifies the issues in that debate, and contributes observations
The conceit of the lion-man-fox is just that, a conceit. It shows, or proves, that a piece of rhetoric can serve through centuries of inquiry into the state and power, and can help orient thinkers in ‘a new biopolitics that reveals the struggles over forms of life.’

Agonistic democracy

The second of the heterodox left visions that relate to the political activism of the nineties has its genesis in a 1985 book by Laclau and Mouffe on agonistic democracy. Laclau and Mouffe present agonistic democracy as two things in one: a practice of transforming society, and a practice put into effect through institutions of state. The practice will actually occur only where, underpinning the state, there is a recognition that freedom cannot be had with harmony.

The point, it needs to be said, is not that states lack effectual means for achieving harmony. Internal dissent and opposition can be forestalled. Thus, the state may set up the institutional machinery that picks up internal disputes and converts them into accord. Such machinery sets off an ordered and peaceful process in which we negotiate, we arbitrate, we conciliate, we compromise, and at some point perhaps we just give in. The state that thrives on internal harmony also maintains the homeland in peace and good order by allowing a mentality of the gated zone to become the norm. New means are used to fortify and patrol the housing complex and the ghetto, the mall, the technology park, the sovereign territory. The means include high-tech surveillance; razor wire; turning away of asylum seekers; detention camps; getting people, even children, to turn informer; and high-tech data capture and sifting. In effect, a state of that kind fosters a unified nation, whose people settle into a society that is their ideal home, complete with the panic room. And that whole process seems only natural, as a condition of security in an us-versus-them world.

Overall, the state that thrives on internal harmony helps to implant an organicist culture. That is to say, it implants a culture of acquiescence in the presence of certain relations of subordination, with that group of relations ordering society. And, when power has implanted that culture, every one of the relations of order echoes the Oedipal subject’s relation to the powerful other. The relation of workers to the owners and the managers of firms is a case in point. Another is the bargaining relation in markets where power is unevenly distributed across buyers and sellers (eg banks, and large and small borrowers); and of late, this uneven bargaining power has become a major source of order.

The nub of the matter, say Laclau and Mouffe, is that the organicist and Oedipus-charged culture impairs people’s freedom to try to transform their society. The radical alternative is to found the state on institutions that value people’s freedom to take up the task of transforming...
their own society, including by direct action. People, if they are free, will be troubled by their own or their equals’ acquiescence in relations of subordination. They will set out to transform the acquiescence into antagonism in the political sphere. In agonistic democracy, the state’s job is, above all else, to affirm that transformative practice.

Agonistic democracy’s strength is the special way it imbricates society and the state. It puts the state at the service of society in the transformative practice, but in doing so, it relies on the state’s power over society. Hence the transformative practice – the practice of taking the resolved Oedipus, in all its guises, and turning it into a politics of antagonism – is tainted. The contaminant is the practice’s own reliance on the power of the state over its subjects. To give an example, agonistic democracy includes agitation for (as well as against) the making of laws curtailing hate speech. Where such laws are in place, agonistic democracy sanctions their being policed and enforced by state authorities. Thus, in agonistic democracy, the taking away of freedom contaminates freedom, and that blemish on freedom is just viewed as part of life.

I include a chart, on the facing page, which sums up on a single sheet some models of democracy that are relevant to the present thesis, as discussed above. Of course, I make no claim that the chart provides a definitive way of seeing different models of democracy. There are other maps of the terrain for other purposes. (One of the useful maps is the sequence of four institutional accommodations, which for a time saved liberal capitalism from being brought down by the clash of human rights and property rights, as discussed by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community, and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought.23)

Agonistic democrats and absolute democrats seem to be miles apart. They do not share premises as regards power or the formation of subjects. They are at odds on the issue of whether representative democracy can promote freedom. They do share a reluctance to let states’ coercive power pass without notice, though they differ in their ways of factoring that power into their own agendas. As Hardt has said, ‘The question is not should the state be destroyed in order to establish a democratic society, but when is the right time to do so.’24 That comment prompts the question of whether absolute democrats and agonistic democrats were connected as one movement in the nineties.

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23 (Bowles and Gintis, 1986). This is how the institutional accommodations worked:
Lockean excluded the non-propertied
Jeffersonian promised property to the non-propertied (the civic republican path)
Madisonian divided the non-propertied
Keynesian assimilated the non-propertied

Chart: Modern democracy – some models relevant to this thesis

Note: Agonistic democracy (Laclau & Mouffe) does not belong in the chart; nor does democratic pluralisation (Connolly). That’s because they are not forms of rule but autonomous transformative processes. Agonistic democracy dissolves the binary shown in the chart (the binary of ‘for’ or ‘by’ the people). Its transformative process works by way of consent, deception, and coercion – as in Machiavelli’s image of the ruler as man, fox, and lion in one.

Rule ‘by the people’, ie rule with the consent of the governed

- constitutional rule
  monarchical rule with the consent of the estates of the realm
  (Magna Carta (1215); Locke (1690))

- constitutional democracy
  rule by the decisions of the assembled freemen, with ministers delegated to execute those decisions
  (Rhode Island, 1641)

- representative democracy
  sparked by the revolutionary cry of no taxation without representation
  (Alexander Hamilton (1755/57-1804))

Rule ‘for the people’, ie rule in the interests of the people

- absolute democracy
  rule by a constituent power, as opposed to a constituted power
  (Spinoza 1632-1677)

- pragmatic relativist liberal democracy
  (Rorty, late 20th C)

- directed democracy
  democratic centralist rule, ie Soviet or Cuban style partyocracy
  (Lenin, turn of 19th-20th C)

- deliberative democracy
  cognate with the idea of the second modernity
  (Beck and Giddens, late 20th C)

- Spinoza holds that rights are coextensive with powers. (That is a realist view. Appealing to law to legitimate the use of power is not deemed relevant.) Spinoza argues that power is the precondition for seeing the true value of limiting political power. He holds that the ideal sovereign is a democratic assembly filled by those who exercise the power that must be ruled (ie filled by the owners of property).

The idea of the second modernity is that (the first) modernity was full of misplaced optimism about science and about the experts alone solving the world’s problems; rational citizens would defer to the experts. In the second modernity, there is a smart democracy, so that the people are the masters of the scientific experts – the science of deliberative polling and so on enables the people to make value judgments based on a proper understanding of experts’ assessments of the uncertain facts.
1.4 The research question

In the last ten or so pages, I have set down the material that is relevant to my research question. I first sketched the centrists’ thinking that did not connect with the dissident political action of the nineties, and then I presented two pieces of heterodox left thinking, each of which has prima facie threads of connection with the dissident action. This is the time to state my research problem.

What insights can we derive from Deleuze and Guattari to understand the dissident political action of the nineties?

It may well be, as Hardt and Negri have argued, that activists were practising the style of self-rule known as absolute democracy. But is that the whole story; or do the activists’ practices also evoke a second political process – namely, agonistic democracy? Is there a mingling of the form of self-rule with the process?

What insights can we glean from the style and content of late twentieth-century cinema to understand the dissident political action of the nineties?

Deleuze and Guattari make us aware of the somatic pathways of dissident political action: pathways of change as to what-flows-where through our bodies and on our tongues. Deleuze and scholars who are influenced by his work – notably, Michael Shapiro and William E Connolly – implicate cinema in those pathways of change. So, if we take as a case in point the late-century ebbing of citizens’ political engagement and then the partial turning-around of that trend in the nineties, is mainstream cinema implicated in that shift? And if so, how is it implicated?

1.5 Organisation and overview of the thesis

This introductory chapter has touched on micropolitics, and the next two chapters take the discussion of it further. Micropolitics and politics as conventionally understood can never be at ease with each other: they are notes that form a dissonant chord. Chapters two and three affirm that there is an estrangement, while exploring the micro-side. Appreciating the ‘bump’ of micro-alongside macro-is a precursor to working creatively with that bump in later chapters. Putting the potential of the overall schema into words:

Micropolitical genealogies [...] are not substitutes for macropolitical studies; rather, they must stand alongside such studies, not merely as additions but as integrally interwoven into them. Seen this way, micropolitics does not leave macropolitical understanding broadened but untouched in its essence. Instead, micropolitical theory – and practice – re-forms traditional understandings of, and interventions in, macropolitical institutions and practices.25

25 (May, 1994: p 100).
Chapter two discusses the link that exists between the use of signs, and biopower. It presents the concepts that are most needed for the thesis, notably immanent critique; the partnership of the virtual and the actual in composing the real; types of multiplicity; subjugated groups; subject-groups; constituted power; and constituent power.

Chapter three outlines universal history, as it is brought to micropolitics in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Much of the point of universal history, for micropolitics, is to infuse our bodies and their parts with a feeling for certain polar forms of socialisation of our desire. The point is also to show how all the polar forms of socialisation, including those yet to be knowingly experienced, coexist in the present; and how they coexisted also in the past. There is no telos, no transcendent ladder of organisation. Instead, there is an immanent valuing of powers as they inhere in different forms of life. The ‘universal’ history helps set the scene for a connective move in two later chapters, which link active left politics with a cycle of films from the mainstream cinema of the nineties. It also helps to position my work vis a vis Hardt and Negri’s concept of Empire.

Chapters four, five and six form a triptych depicting activists on the left side of politics, who came together in what is now called the movement of movements, in the 1990s. The movement of movements, alias ‘the movement,’ was initially mis-named in the mass media as the anti-globalisation movement. It is a movement formed by activists on the left, who have diverse beliefs and agendas, and who share a commitment to working together under a system of consensus decision-making in which it is difficult for factions to gain a hold. (The diversity within the movement is so great that some parts of the movement do not regard certain other parts of it as leftist; they are nevertheless prepared to work together because of the consensus decision-making system.)

Chapter four makes a point about the setting. It discusses the huge disappointments, the rifts, and the unhelpful tangent path-taking that had happened in the preceding forty years, with the result that many leftists were losing hope as the nineties got under way.

Chapter five discusses what the nineties held for left activists whose forte was direct action. It details the rise of constituent power, which supplanted the constituted power of the state in autonomous zones (with some of those zones being itinerant in time and space). Constituent power showed that it could prevail over the power of the state, with the Zapatista revolt of ‘94 in Chiapas, Mexico. From there, constituent power spread out through networked projects, notably the global days of action, in which activists re-set the tone of the spectacle around summit meetings of the great and powerful. The altered tone forced a rethink of who could ‘do’ summits – it showed that summiteering was an open game. Overall, the rise of constituent power sparked interest in Hardt and Negri’s claim that absolute democracy had arrived. Chapter five points out that there is room for continuing debate around that claim.

Chapter six enters the debate by way of the indirect action that formed part of the movement of movements in the nineties. The chapter puts the case that some of the indirect action avoided capture by the fiction of the Lockean social contract, the pact that is said to be at the heart of representative democracy in the constitutionalist state. Indirect action in the nineties did affirm a democratic system, the chapter argues. It affirmed a democracy that
blocks the ascendancy of the marketplace in the exercise of freedom. Indirect action in the
nineties affirmed agonistic democracy, for which Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe had set
out a case some ten years prior, and for which Machiavelli had long ago argued.

Key to the argument in chapter six is the fact that a large section of the public in the West
had become disenchanted with major-party politics. Many people saw through the con in the
centrists’ game plan, but accepted, with varying degrees of cynicism, that it was the only
game in town. Even so, one did not have to surrender to the centrists. Deception is a game
that two sides can play. One could be cynical, and decide to play ‘non-cynic’ (in other words,
keep up a pretence of being a duped naïve believer). As that mock-obtuse mood took hold, it
would form a delay in the circuit of cynical response. Others may then be minded to carry on
as if the conventional political struggle around social justice and caring about the planet still
mattered. A hypostatised project of social justice and green-work can have positive real
effects.

Chapter six notes that there was indeed a carrying on of conventional political struggle in
the active left of the nineties. The activists were not getting involved purely and simply in the
name of absolute democracy. In fact, only a fringe within the fringe of activists was refusing
to recognise the extant (ie constitutionalist) state. The major part of the uptake of constituent
power was in efforts by groups that recognise the extant state, and have set out to recuperate it
for the project of social justice and green-work. That tension in the overall movement –
between the part that refused to recognise the state, and the part that was bent on recuperating
the state for social justice – gave rise to a schizoid style of democracy. Perhaps the
movement, with its need of the extant state, serves as a fillip to representative democracy.
Perhaps, to the contrary, it could one day pose a challenge to representative democracy. Pace
Hardt and Negri, it is too soon to tell.

Chapters seven and eight take up the second part of the research problem, relating to
cinema.

Chapter seven explains how cinema – and middlebrow cinema at that – fits into the
search for evidence on the active left’s handling of cynicism about politics in the nineties. It
sets out the background in philosophy, and in cinema’s links to earlier forms of demotic
spectacle, for the turn to cinema in this project. It also points out why the turn is a gamble.

Chapter seven also discusses a set of twenty or so films from the nineties, which fit
together within a frame narrative. The frame narrative is a nonfiction affair, to do with covert
systems of control in existing society. The ensemble of films resumes and widens the cycle
of political thrillers from the mainstream cinema of the seventies. Some of the films in the
new phase of the political thriller cycle work with body paranoia, which is an acute inward
turn of the fear of being sold out to the enemy. The cycle evokes a certain sense of unease
about the pull toward political cynicism and non-involvement, a sense of unease that perhaps
helped some spectators to escape that pull.

Chapter eight gives a close reading of one film in the ensemble, *Memento*. It shows how
the film offers a critique of transcendent knowing, and how it works at re-inscribing the body
for the micropolitics of playing ‘non-cynic’. It also reads *Memento* as an aid to revivifying Locke; perhaps we can bring back to life a transformed, poststructuralist Locke.

Chapter nine summarises and concludes the thesis.

### 1.6 Significance of the thesis, as intervention

The thesis is an intervention directed not just at knowledge. As such, it makes a particular kind of contribution to knowledge. Though it is a tome, it shares in the spirit of the online journal, *Theory & Event*. The watchword is that the work has to be ‘both rigorous and lively, and […] attentive to scholarship without sacrificing creativity or timeliness.’

The intervention has to do with the movement of movements, thus placing the thesis in the domain of social and political thought and experiment. The thesis draws attention to a part of the movement that has not previously been singled out as a figure in the discussion of activist politics. In doing so, it points out that *constituent power is expressed in the movement dimorphically*. Examination of the movement in the 1990s (chapters five and six) shows that its power consists in two forms of constituent power, with the two forms working side by side.

One form is forthright constituent power, as seen in anarchist and autonomist groups. The other form is a clandestine constituent power; or rather, if I may borrow from Thomas C Wall the nonce words, it is a *perhaps* constituent power, a *maybe* one. It is constituent power mixing with powers of the false, by plying its trade under cover in an ambiguously constituted power. The perhaps constituent power is also a way of handling political cynicism: one winks, and plays the ‘non-cynic’ who naively trusts in the Lockean social contract.

The thesis works with concepts from Deleuze and Guattari, and draws on the writings of Laclau and Mouffe on agonistic democracy. Those sources enable me to diagram the dimorphic constituent power, as it wrestled with constituted power in the nineties (chapter six).

The observed dimorphism does not negate Hardt and Negri’s claim as to the dawning of absolute democracy; rather, it shows that the claim leaves out something that is worth considering. In terms of ‘universal’ history, what we are seeing could be a new social machine (so to speak), namely the global stateless society that Hardt and Negri call *Empire*. Equally, it could be a new round of the drawn-out encounter between first nations on one side, and on the other, settler states and metropolitan powers. Putting the second possibility another way: the world’s and the earth’s New World is the New World Europeans named,
but erred in imagining. It is taking a combined effort, prompted by first nations and the
movement of movements, to re-imagine the New World.

Of further significance is what I found when I searched in mainstream cinema for a
cultural expression of the movement of movements. The cycle of political conspiracy and
paranoia films from the 1970s, which went into a lull in the eighties, had been presumed
defunct. I find that a new phase of the cycle emerged in the nineties. The cycle of paranoia
films in the nineties gives rise to a ‘community of the diegesis’ for the part of the movement
of movements that plays ‘non-cynic’.28

By design, deleuzoguattarian concepts are riffs, which is to say, wherever the concepts
are used, they invite and support improvisation. I think there may be some value in my way
of improvising on certain concepts from Anti-Oedipus – concepts that in their original form
have not stood up well to the passage of time. I first mutter in sombre tones against the
‘universal’ history of Anti-Oedipus (chapter three of the thesis), and later turn that universal
history into a tall tale (chapter nine). My improvisation also tweaks the concept of a social
machine (chapter three).

Finally, the thesis is novel in that it is an exercise in immanent critique. Even after the
cultural turn in the social sciences, it is uncommon to see a thesis that sets in variation the
language through which it speaks.

1.7 The discipline of the clinic29

The best projects from the clinic are artworks. As Douglas Smith writes in his
Introduction to On the Genealogy of Morals,

Art has no pretensions to truth, its lies declare themselves as such. Unlike the
fictions of religion, morality, and science, the fictions of art do not seek to pass
themselves off as truths, but present themselves as what they are.30

In the discipline of the clinic, then, works of fiction and rhetoric are carefully weighed.

It appears that, in answering the research question, I shall be adding a granule of truth to
human knowledge, or if not that, then subtracting a speck of untruth, or rounding up or down
a half-truth. But I am writing – and I owe it to the reader to say it – with a different intention.
I am writing to pass on to the reader a problem. We might call it the problem of ‘What is
biopower at large when it’s at home?’ The short answer is that it never actually is at home.
And if what we had on our hands were a riddle, that would be end of story. The long answer,
of course, began before we named the problem. This entire thesis is but a droplet of its ink.

28 Sean Cubitt uses the term ‘community of the diegesis’ to sum up the effect of certain late century realist films,
in demonstrating and, in a sense, training particular communities to hold together in their own singular manner
29 This section is prompted by a passage in the Introduction to Brian Massumi’s Parables for the Virtual
30 (Smith, 1996: p xxii).
The act of writing to pass on a problem has its own discipline. It is governed by two broad criteria, both of them relating to what happens within the problem, as the writing and reading proceed. First, the problem passed on must be one that has been creatively transformed in my keeping. Something new must have presented itself, an unasked. And second, my style of thinking and expression, instead of purporting to represent in words the problem and the work done, must manifestly inhabit the problem, presenting an immanent critique. The thesis seeks to fulfil those two generic criteria.

It would have been more in keeping with immanent critique, if this drop of ink were structured not as a series of chapters, but as a group of scattered, uneven sites of thinking. I therefore close this chapter on a note between fear and hope. By the clinic’s criteria, the dissertation will have failed if it works (merely) as a conveyor belt, a smoothed path, or a line of stepping-stones. The clinic would have the writing unfold as a deliberately fragmented thing, something in the style of a Jacques Tati film. (Tati’s films are crazy quilts. Take *Playtime* (1967). In every frame there are umpteen loosely related and unrelated things happening beside each other and all are clamouring to be noticed. As one critic has said, ‘An alternative method of looking is Tati’s “message.”’ The task is to create a thing that works but defies organisation.

This thesis bears out that such textual surfaces can be attained. They tell us that life is affirmed not in treading what we believe is the path, but in retrieving scenes, mantling them afresh with connectivities that move us and leave us changed. That is not to say we burn our blessed straitjackets, which still have their uses. We may just need to think about making some up in a different style.

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31 The unasked would be unthought. It would be important but uninvited; important and therefore uninvited. Connolly describes the movement that is needed for that: it is ‘the most profound and inaudible transversal movement of all, as activists, poets, and creators of all types negotiate that uncanny line between thought and the unthought’ (Connolly, 2000).

32 (Rosenbaum, 1997: p 39). In the essay, titled ‘Tati’s Democracy,’ Jonathan Rosenbaum observes that the subject of each shot is ‘everything that appears on the screen.’ (p 38, emphasis in original). It’s all filmed in long shots, and all characters are extras. The audience chooses what to concentrate on, thus making their own film(s) from moment to moment. Thus, the screening of the film brings into being a certain kind of body: a conscious qualitative multiplicity.