5 Constituent power and the state in the 1990s I

In the speeches we made in the course of our march to the capital, we told people – and ourselves – that we could not and should not try to lead the struggles we encountered on our journey, or fly the flag for them. We had imagined that those below would not be slow to show themselves, with so many injustices, so many complaints, so many wounds . . . In our minds we had formed the image that our march would be a kind of plough, turning the soil so that all this could rise from the ground.

[...] In the end we didn’t manage to plough the land, as we had hoped. But the mere act of our walking on it was enough to bring all these buried feelings to the surface.

Subcomandante Marcos, of EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation)

We all live in a failed democracy, failed democracy, failed democracy.

charted, to the Beatles’ tune, ‘Yellow Submarine,’ by a crowd protesting at a summit meeting on the Free Trade Area of the Americas – Miami, November 2003

5.1 Introduction

This chapter and the next discuss how the active left mobilised in the 1990s. They also look at how that mobilising forms part of biopolitics.

The present chapter deals with nineties left activists whose forte is direct action. Direct action makes no use of the channels for ‘voice’ and for choice, as set up by the state and by business corporations. Instead, direct action groups take matters into their own hands in establishing their turf, or their enclave, and in organising what happens there. Autonomists and anarchists had a higher profile than other direct action groups during the nineties. When Hardt and Negri, in their book, Empire, declare that labour is now actualising its power to constitute itself in government, the basis of their claim is the spreading, in the nineties, of autonomist and anarchist practices.1

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 give an account of the practical side of poststructuralist direct action, pointing out how the action of the nineties relates to like episodes in the past. Section 5.2 looks at direct action by the Zapatistas in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, and how it spread elsewhere. Section 5.3 presents autonomists, as seen through their repertoire of practices.

Section 5.4 outlines autonomists’ thinking – the purpose of doing so is to show how the autonomist project works as biopolitics.

Section 5.5 discusses a claim that is in circulation largely due to Hardt and Negri’s Empire. The claim is that direct action, of the kind that the preceding sections have dealt with, raised constituent power to a level where it supplanted the constituted authority of the state in relevant zones. I develop a counter-thesis to that claim, as follows. Rather than supplanting the constituted authority of the state in the said zones, the direct action clashed with state power so as to open out, in a particular way, the question of representative democracy’s possible self-transformation and its future survival.

Conclusions from the chapter are stated in section 5.6.

5.2 Poststructuralist direct action: the Zapatistas

For an active left politics to be possible after the onset of centrist rule in the 1980s, there needed to be a sign that it was possible. The sign appeared in the region of Chiapas, Mexico, in the early nineties. The peasant communities of Chiapas rebelled against the neoliberal edicts that had put the country on a new course over the preceding decade. The success of the Chiapas rebellion gave new impetus to direct action by the left in Western countries from the mid nineties on. It showed that direct action could open up cracks in centrist rule, and, as part of the process, the peasant communities invited activists from around the world to visit Chiapas and be apprenticed in the building of the new polity.3

The Chiapas uprising involved a people’s army, known as the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, Zapatista Army of National Liberation). The name ‘Zapatista’ links the uprising to Emiliano Zapata, a respected figure in the modern history of Mexico. Zapata led a force of indigenous irregulars that took part in the revolution, in the years 1911-1917. Those forces achieved their aim. The peasant-soldiers administered for years their own brand of agrarian reform in the state of Morelos, to the south of the capital. There they set up a non-coercive production system and society.

In Morelos in those years, the people lived in freedom from any constituted authority, and they lived in security, including economic security. The particular composition of

2 (Hardt and Negri, 2000).
3 *New Left Review* began its series of five articles on the ‘movement of movements;’ or the ‘new opposition’ to corporate power, with an interview in which a member of the rebel army in Chiapas lays bare the enabling conditions of the uprising (Subcomandante Marcos, 2001). The following sources also credit the people of Chiapas with a substantive role in the rekindling of left direct action around the world: (Starr, 2000); (Flores and Tanaka, 2001); (Graeber, 2002); (Morton, 2002), and references therein (see Morton’s endnote 118); and (Callinicos, 2003). Surprisingly, Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (Klein, 2001), which is for the most part a reliable source, is silent on Chiapas and the role of the uprising there in spreading direct action in the West. Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (Hardt and Negri, 2000: pp 54-56) lists the Chiapas uprising as one of several discrete or ‘incommunicable’ struggles in the last decade or so of the century. Negri elsewhere accepts the special role and wider influence of Chiapas (Negri and Dufournantelle, 2004: pp 122-123 and 137).
negative and positive freedom the people won, was in large part due to the anarcho-
syndicalist precepts that they stood for, and taught, learned, and practised. The revolt in
Morelos got rid of constituted authority for a time, supplanting it with constituent power.
That exercise of constituent power served as a model for the Chiapas uprising some eighty
years later. The model evokes concepts of which I wrote in chapter two: it is the
deleuzoguattarian model of liberation. A subjugated group takes direct action and, for as
long as it sustains that action, it becomes a subject-group.

The key point is that the people of Morelos, and later of Chiapas, were not reverting to
the traditional ways of an indigenous, archaic economy and society. They invented a new
société contre l'état; they did not retreat to the same one that Pierre Clastres charted and that
Deleuze and Guattari ascribed to ‘the primitive territorial machine.’4 I repeat, the linked
revolts of Morelos and Chiapas ousted the civilised capitalist machine (social machine three)
from contested zones; and, the revolts owe their success to a source of order that is not
the primitive territorial machine (social machine one), whilst it is anti-state. So, it is possible
that the Morelos and Chiapas revolts will prove, in time, to have put into effect a social
machine four.

The repetition in Chiapas of the rise of constituent power in Morelos involves new facts
and affects that are specific to the second half of the twentieth century. The new material is
laid out in an article by Adam Morton.5 I take up the story in the eighties, when Mexico’s
oil-based economic restructuring effort had collapsed. On pain of external finance being
withdrawn from Mexico, the state put into effect a neoliberal program. A range of measures
squeezed the poor, and let large corporations have a much bigger slice of the economy than
before. From 1988 on, to help shore up the neoliberal program, there were attempts, using
targeted social programs, to bring back populist and clientelist modes of governing.

Dating back to the 1960s, the people of Chiapas had sustained a network of organisations
that worked to secure their rights, with those rights frequently coming under attack by the
state and wealthy landholders. The network had adapted and survived, despite the forced
eviction of the people from lands that they had taken up by squatting, and despite waves of
arrests and assassinations of the peasants’ and workers’ leaders over the years. The network
had given the peasant-worker movement the security it needed to achieve its economic and
social aims. Thus, the movement had managed, by direct action, to put into effect land
reform. More than that, it boasted autonomous control of production, credit and marketing
for the regional economy.

Those gains had an increasing need to be defended, as Mexico’s neoliberal program was
pressed by the state onto the society. By 1993, the state had closed off legal avenues for
resisting the neoliberal program. Hence the peasant-worker alliance went underground to

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4 As mentioned in ch 3 (note 40, p 59), La Société contre l’état is the title of a collection of essays by Clastres,
on which Deleuze and Guattari draw in stating their claims as to how primitive societies ward off centralised
authority. Clastres helped to spark ‘their [Deleuze and Guattari’s] conception of a primitive, anti-state political
organization’ (Bogue, 1989: note 12 on p 173), viz the primitive territorial machine.

5 (Morton, 2002).
prepare for the uprising. The EZLN mobilised for armed combat, and on 1 January 1994, the
day that the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect, the uprising began.
The EZLN took over seven towns in Chiapas, and in the ensuing years it held those towns
and the surrounding lands against the Mexican state’s counter-insurgency campaign, waged
by the military.

The rebel army soon laid down its arms, but this was no surrender. The EZLN had put in
place a non-combative security shield for the autonomous communities of Chiapas. It had
invited international observers to witness and to publicise globally the acts of the Mexican
army in its attempt to put down the insurgency. Thus, word passed around in certain spheres
in the US, Canada and Europe. On student campuses, in youth hostels, in non-government
organisations, and in urban squatter colonies and anarchist collectives and internet mailing
lists, there was talk of the Chiapas people – their courage and resourcefulness in blocking the
neoliberal program; their win that now hung in the balance; and the call for observers.

Some activists connected the call with the peace camps that they or their forebears had
established at British and US military sites in the Thatcher-Reagan era. Another precursor
action in that era was the supply of volunteers to work as observers and human shields in
Central America. Where peoples’ movements faced repression and external subversion, they
had been able to call for those acts of solidarity by First World activists. Transnational
Advocacy Networks had put the volunteers in the field.

So, from 1995 on, foreign volunteers came to spend time in Chiapas, as guests of the
Zapatistas. They worked the land, faced the Mexican Army troops and private militias, and
lived among the indigenous and immigrant workers and peasants, in the various settled
localities that dotted the region. In the process, they learnt the Zapatista way of mobilising
and organising for production and defence. It is a system that has no place for leaders, and
deflects the destructive tactics of factions trying to gain ascendancy. (Section 5.5 below goes
into the working of the system.)

As part of their defence program, in 1996 the EZLN called for people to come to a
gathering in Chiapas. Six thousand foreign activists attended, and the event, which was held
in August 1996, came to be known as the First Intercontinental Encuentro. The Zapatista
system had a rousing effect on anarchists and autonomists who took part in the Encuentro.
They were impressed by the system’s left-libertarian ethos, and by how well it served the
people, including the fact that it withstood attempts by the state (acting for corporate
financiers and big business) to destroy it. The Encuentro inspired Italian autonomists to form
the Ya basta! movement, taking the name from the war cry of the EZLN forces.

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6 The women’s movement was largely responsible for organising the peace camps of the eighties. In Britain,
Greenham Common peace camp was set up in 1981, and Molesworth in 1985 (the former remained in place for
nineteen years). In North America, the Puget Sound and the Seneca peace encampments developed lateral
forms of group interaction, which featured the sharing of leadership and the breakdown of patterns of exclusion
based on class and race.

7 My discussion of how the Zapatistas of Chiapas influenced activists in other places, is based on (Moore, 2004),
(Graeber, 2002), and postings by ‘irlandesa’ to the a-infos anarchist listserv in the period 2001 through 2003.
The Second Intercontinental took place in Spain, in 1997. There, …

[...] the idea for the construction of a more action focused network, to be named Peoples’ Global Action (PGA), was hatched by a group made up of activists from ten of the largest and most innovative social movements. They included the Zapatistas, Movimento Sem Terra (the Brazilian Landless Peasants [sic] Movement who occupy and live on large tracts of [so-called] unproductive land), and the Karnataka State Farmers Union (KRRS), renowned for their “cremate Monsanto” campaign which involved burning fields of Genetically Modified crops.8

The first gathering and direct action organised through PGA took place in Geneva, in February 1998. Delegates came from movements in seventy-one countries:

[from the Canadian Postal Workers, and Earth First!, to anti-nuclear campaigners, to French farmers, to the indigenous from the Maori, U’wa and Ogoni peoples, to Korean Trade Unionists, to Reclaim the Streets, to the Indigenous Women’s Network of North America, to Ukrainian radical ecologists.9

Another source lists a selection of the groups mentioned above, and adds others, viz:

[...] anarchist groups and radical trade unions in Spain, Britain and Germany, [...] associations of Indonesian and Sri Lankan fisherfolk, the Argentinian teachers’ union, indigenous groups such as the Maori of New Zealand and Kuna of Ecuador, [...] a network made up of communities founded by escaped slaves in South and Central America – and any number of others. For a long time, North America was scarcely represented, save for the Canadian Postal Workers’ Union – which acted as PGA’s main communications hub, until it was largely replaced by the internet – and a Montreal-based anarchist group called CLAC.10

The striking thing about the action of February 1998 is the heterogeneity of the movement behind it, rather than the gross number of persons taking part. Because of the many different stripes of activist joining in, the movement does not readily submit to being named. For want of a better alternative, the name ‘movement of movements’ seems to have stuck.

The PGA called a ‘day of action’ in May 1998. That, and further days of action that were coordinated through PGA in subsequent years, brought direct action by the active left back from the brink of extinction, as it were. The unfolding story of PGA and the series of days of action, from May 1998 on, is taken up in section 5.5 below. It is an untidy story. The whole process that coalesced around the days of action would within a few years dwarf the days of action. And the process would somehow draw in groups of activists not sharing the extraparliamentary ethos of the groups networking through PGA.

8  (Moore, 2004). Movimento Sem Terra, or Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), is in fact a movement of landless rural workers. Its members are not necessarily peasants – some are immigrant workers, displaced from areas where jobs became scarce after the economic restructuring that took place in the eighties.

9  (Moore, 2004).

10  (Graeber, 2002: p 64).
The Zapatista communities have held their ground in Chiapas since the 1994 uprising, despite attempts by the state and big business to repress the movement. Morton reports that for a period after 1994, a third of the Mexican Federal Army was deployed in Chiapas: one soldier for every three or four regional inhabitants. There have been arbitrary expulsions of visiting human rights monitors and aid workers. And there has been fighting from time to time between anti-Zapatista militias and the Zapatistas.

In keeping with the model of a subject-group (as opposed to a subjugated group), the Zapatistas would like their rebellion to spread, but they do not act as the vanguard of a people to come. Equally, they make it clear that they do not represent a majority, or the masses. They speak as the minority group that they are, the indigenous people(s) of Chiapas.11

The Zapatistas do not want well-wishers bringing outside assistance to them. Instead, they invite foreigners to learn by taking part in Zapatista social and productive efforts; to do so, in their words, is to practise *acopañamiento* (accompaniment), as opposed to *asistencialismo* (supportism). By extension, the way you can support this rebellion is to ‘become a Zapatista wherever you are’. If you try to further the cause of the Zapatistas without yourself becoming one of them, then you are undercutting their ability to further their own cause. As an outsider, you ought to know that your interest in Zapatismo is welcome only if it spurs you to work and live in your own surrounds according to the ethos and practices of Zapatismo. Welcome to a struggle that you see, and in which you fight, ‘from your own foxhole’.12

The Chiapas revolt, through the founding of PGA and the ongoing visits by activists to Chiapas, gave a boost to the extraparliamentary left in Western countries. Two elements – autonomist and anarchist – gained momentum due to the revolt. I discuss autonomists in the next two sections, and anarchists at the beginning of section 5.5, showing in each case the path they were on pre-Chiapas, and how they gained, from Chiapas, a new gait.

### 5.3 Poststructuralist direct action: autonomists

**Autonomists’ repertoire of practices**

It is now over thirty years since the first autonomists began gathering in colonies, which function as collectives. What makes somebody an autonomist is a certain repertoire of practices; though not everyone performs the entire repertoire.

The most visible practice is that of using squatted meeting-places for social and cultural pursuits. Some of these places open and close within hours or days: Food Not Bombs

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11 When colonial regimes dispossessed and displaced indigenous people, many of the displaced persons had to settle in other people’s traditional lands. Hence it is problematic to speak of indigenous peoples in regions. I have no form of words that is adequate to the situation.

12 (Flores and Tanaka, 2001).
occupies a space for a few hours, where it provides a free meal for all comers to share; a Critical Mass bike ride occupies a road route for an hour or so on the last Friday of every month; a Reclaim the Streets party occupies a mid-town street on a Saturday; a squat party occupies a vacant industrial building or a paddock for a weekend. Other meeting-places are kept going for open-ended periods, in some cases stretching into tens of years. They are squatted, self-managing social and cultural precincts.

Of the squatted precincts, the earliest to be established was Christiania, in Copenhagen (established 1971). Others include De Blauwe Aanslag in The Hague (1980), Kreuzberg in Berlin (1980), and Hafenstrasse in Hamburg (1981). In Italy, there are more than a hundred squatted social centres (*centri sociali occupati autogestiti*), of which CSO Leoncavallo in Milan, established 1975, is the oldest. All such precincts are creations of the autonomist/squatting, punk, and anarchist movements.

The squatted precincts are places for collective production and enjoyment. They have kitchens, cafés/bars, crèches, and accommodation; art workshops, galleries, music, film, and theatre; media centres (from bulletin boards and book distribution outlets, to radio stations, and print and electronic publishing); participative forums on topics of interest. They foster learning and provide training, for example in film and radio production, in computer centre set-up and maintenance, and in leaderless organising. Some of the precincts have hubs for reverse garbage; some have commons where people grow food and flowers.

Less visible practices in the autonomist repertoire are: ‘self-reduction’ of rent, utility bills and transport fares; ‘free shopping’ from corporate retail chains; unauthorised gleaning, and on occasion looting and petty theft; and in capitalist workplaces, the use of various direct actions to improve workers’ conditions – work-to-rule campaigns, wildcat strikes, calling in sick, knocking off early. At certain times and places, there is a need for defensive actions, such as freeing autonomists detained by the authorities, and fending off thugs or the authorities when they attack autonomists and squats. Even the taking of hostages, with ransom demands, can be viewed as a defensive tactic, if a group considers that it has slim chances of survival and that the ransom demand will be met, improving those chances.13

Apropos of defensive actions, Italy serves as an instructive case.14 The state, with the support of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), made efforts to repress autonomists in the seventies. It stepped up the repression from ‘77 on. Prompting that change was the PCI’s failure to form a government in the 1976 elections, to the chagrin of its members and supporters. The authorities and the business community saw that the failure would fuel worker militancy – workers had been promised much by the PCI, and their patience had worn

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13 Malcolm Bull (Bull, 2001) sketches the autonomist movement. Chris Harman writes about Italian autonomists and the PCI from 1968 to 1980; his account is somewhat unsympathetic, as it is written from a Trotskyist point of view (Harman, 1988: pp 200-219). Useful sources of information on autonomist practices are (Anonymous, 1976a), (Anonymous, 1976b), (Vera-Zavala, 2002), and the articles in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org, various authors) on Christiania, De Blauwe Aanslag, Kreuzberg, Hafenstrasse, and the squatter movement in general. As regards hostage taking, Bull mentions a case where a radical youth from a wealthy family was held hostage as a means of raising funds, but the attempt went horribly wrong.
thin. The repression was stepped up, and autonomists’ defensive action was inept. The state succeeded in its campaign, all but quashing the militant element in autonomism, and thus bringing to an end the anni di piombo (the leaden years, 1969-1978).

Italy’s autonomists, for the most part, backed off. Some renounced active politics and began to lead a ghetto-like existence. They settled for displaying the style of autonomism without the substance, or, as their detractors put it, they sank into lifestylism.

Others joined (or rejoined) the PCI, which meant either giving up their extraparliamentary agenda or keeping it secret. That cadre managed to bring into the PCI the concept and the practice of prefigurative community. Thus, for a growing portion of the PCI’s membership, communism was a matter of actual practices here and now, not a matter of waiting for the revolution and, who knows how long after that, seeing the state wither away.

For a few autonomists, to sink into lifestylism and/or simply to join the PCI were abhorrent options. They chose either to go into exile, or to take part in the small, clandestine combatant groups; the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades) were among those groups. The underground militants, as the state stepped up its campaign of repression, were at growing risk of being denounced by pentiti (‘penitents’), who received a full pardon no matter how serious their own crimes. The underground militants were at risk of being raided by police (and by right-wing thugs), and of being held in prison under indefinite preventive detention. There were beatings and assassinations. Placed on the state’s wanted list, the militants could not keep up their ties with the wider working class, and the isolation made them prey to defeatism. The fragmented residual militant groups declared an end to their armed struggle in 1982. When trials finally were held, there were lengthy prison sentences.  

Non-Italian autonomists helped to keep the movement going by working with the exiles, most of whom were in France, with a few in Britain, Brazil, and Central America. In the US, an autonomist collective ran the journal *Midnight Notes* (1979-), which filled the gap left when a kindred journal, *Zerowork* (1974-79), closed down.

The autonomist movement was to have a comeback, with its original repertoire of practices expanded, but it took an external event to bring that about. The Chiapas revolt in Mexico gave autonomists a chance to learn new practices for keeping the state at bay. In turn, the resurgent autonomists (acting in concert with anarchists and other left groups) would achieve gains in the global struggle against neoliberal ‘progress,’ and those gains were of value to the people of Chiapas. To indicate what autonomists achieved, both pre- and post-Chiapas, I need to convey how bold their program is, and to sketch the thinking that informs the project.

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14 The Italian case is conditioned by Italy’s geopolitical and historic particulars, but it is nonetheless instructive. I draw on the following sources: (Clark, 1996: ch 18); (Harman, 1988: Part Three); (Jones, 2003: chs 2 and 4); and (Negri and Dufourmantelle, 2004: pp 1-57).

15 Negri’s account (Negri and Dufourmantelle, op. cit.,) gives the reader a taste of the bitter and desperate left infighting that took place, especially from ’77 on, both within the autonomists’ camp and between it and the PCI. The judicial process in the aftermath of the armed struggle was seriously flawed, but it had wide public support in Italy, even among workers who had been staunch autonomists. Despite strong and continuing rumours that infiltration by enemies of the left played a part in fomenting the troubles, nothing of that kind came out in the investigative and judicial process.
The boldness of the autonomist project

In performing their repertoire of practices, autonomists are not just taking direct action at random; they are acting in a systematic manner. Whenever anybody has formed part of an autonomous zone, they have joined in a project that puts in place, unilaterally, a guaranteed basic income. There is free or cheap access to a range of collectively amassed goods – goods and services that are collectively produced, gathered, and gleaned.16

Importantly, the project that is being realised via the repertoire of practices is not a campaign advocating a basic income guarantee. Autonomists are not petitioning, or even negotiating with, any powers that be, as in, ‘Here are our demands: … that the state establish a guaranteed basic income.’ The fact is, autonomists are themselves collectively enacting a guaranteed basic income – it is a DiY project. Viewing autonomists in that light, far from freeloading on the capitalist system, they have established a way of life that goes on outside the bounds of the capitalist system. It can be said that their strategy is the containment of capitalism: waging a second Cold War, as it were. Autonomists’ being outside the capitalist system of course does not stop them from making use of that system, opportunistically, while ever the capitalist system lives on.

Autonomists are not inspired by a utopia, nor is theirs a reformist politics. As noted in relation to the autonomists who (re-)joined the PCI in the late 1970s, they feel that they are living as communists in the here and now, distant as it may be from the collapse of capitalism. They are communists of the present, showing by their way of life that ‘the circuits of productive cooperation have made labor power as a whole capable of constituting itself in government.’17

It is crucial to the autonomist project that autonomous zones respect people’s freedom of movement. Indeed, the zones actively defend that freedom. The zones have no policed borders, and they actively challenge the measures taken by states to control flows of people across state borders. So, autonomists clash with the authorities at border entry points and at migrant detention centres. They take steps to boost the morale of immigration detainees, and where it helps the cause, they publicise the plight of people that are seeking to migrate without the blessing of the state. Clandestine migrants are welcomed in the squatted precincts, where they are afforded protection from state authorities.18

16 (Smith, 2004) provides a useful history of left- and right-wing proposals for a guaranteed basic income, albeit a history focussed on the US. See also the short article, ‘What is the Basic Income Guarantee?’ (US Basic Income Guarantee Network, 2004). Both articles, however, are flawed in that they make no mention of the distinctive DiY form of basic income guarantee, which autonomists have put into effect.

17 (Hardt and Negri, 2000: p 350, italics in original).

18 (Vera-Zavala, 2002). Autonomists (and anarchists) facilitated the mass break-outs from Australia’s Woomera immigration detention centre at Easter 2002, and have helped to shelter immigrants fleeing detention and deportation. That said, autonomists do not regard what they are doing as either speaking or acting on behalf of refugees and clandestine immigrants. Some refugees and clandestine immigrants want the protection and other benefits that the state has power to bestow. Autonomists are attempting to contain the state: they establish no-go zones for the state.
No autonomous zone aspires to have any tax system – not for them the social goal, ‘from each according to his ability.’ Autonomists instead hone their repertoire of practices so that it yields the makeshift guaranteed basic income, for however many bodies (at a given time) mingle so as to form an autonomous zone. So, autonomists share with the new right – for quite divergent reasons – contempt for the compromise deal that was the Keynesian welfare state. Autonomists do cohabit with the state system they reject. There is nothing wrong with that, they say, because they make no compromise in the cohabiting.

The demise of the Keynesian welfare state was, in some measure, a result of militant shop-floor workers’ disobeying the terms of tripartite accords that were signed by trade union leaders. Thus, autonomist practices (wildcat strikes, unauthorised go-slow, and so forth) helped to transform the capitalist system; they helped push it over the brink, from the fordist economy and society to the post-fordist.

Whether doing that damage to the welfare state was a clever move, from a left point of view, depends on what may come when the post-fordist arrangement in turn gets swept aside. This much is clear: after the failure of the chaotic 1968-69 uprising, there were just two notes that the left in the West could sing next: one a risky upbeat, the other safer, muted. Autonomists went for the upbeat.

5.4 Autonomists’ thinking

Much of the thinking that permeates autonomous zones is of recent vintage. Autonomists hold that, in the relationship of labour to capital, and likewise in any relationship that gives rise to exploitation of one class of life by another, there is a sense in which the exploited class has the upper hand. The fact is that a parasite class (capitalists/exploiters) cannot live without the class that serves as its host (workers), whereas the host is viable without parasites. From there, the main part of the argument unfolds, concerning the host’s endeavour to rid itself of the parasites.

Autonomist thought dates back to operaismo. (The word is best left as a borrowed foreign word in English. If it must be translated, then the term is not ‘workerism’ but ‘Italian workerism,’ since workerism and Italian workerism are two different things.) Operaismo is a set of ideas and a basis for action that were expounded by Mario Tronti, in his book Operai e capitale (1966).

Tronti wrote, in particular, about what workers’ shop floor committees were achieving in Italy during the fifties and sixties. It was a time of sweeping change in Italy’s economy and

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19 In Critique of the Gotha program, first published in 1875, Marx alludes to the time when ‘a higher phase of communist society’ will be able to ‘inscribe upon its banners: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!”’ (Marx, 1978 /1890-1891Ger: pp 17-18).

20 (Tronti, 1971 /1966). The book contains essays which were published from 1962 to 1964, with some new material. The title translated into English is ‘Workers and capital.’ As explained later in the present section, operaismo encourages the waging of class struggle both within and outside the workplace. In contrast, for workerism (of the Anglophone variety), only action in the workplace counts as class struggle.
society. (The cinema of the period eloquently attests to that. Many films could be mentioned, but there are two, both directed by Dino Risi, that are pivotal: the comedy-drama Un' vita difficile (1961); and Il sorpasso (1962). Just a year separated the making of the two films, but it is a vast gulf in time that one senses, when seeing and comparing them.)

Thinking about the workers’ efforts at shop-floor level led Tronti to play in reverse the story of capitalism. Operaismo is the result. In operaismo, driving the changes in the system of capitalism over time, are the cycles of struggle by the working class to get rid of their exploiters. Likewise, driving the changes in systems of exploitation that pre-date capitalism and intertwine with it, are cycles of struggle by exploited classes to get rid of the parasite class. Each wave of struggle by the class that plays host can be expected to yield a measure of success from the host’s point of view. But there is a leakage of effort, since the host’s struggle prompts an adaptation in the parasites.

Tronti and scholars whom he influenced, Negri among them, pointed out in the early seventies something else about class struggle. Groups of workers, appropriating their own time, and organising their actions by means of shop-floor committees, were staking out sites of autonomy. The sum of those bubble-like sites came to be known as l’area dell’autonomia. The term signals that the sites form an expanse of time and ground – a kind of out-take, or enclave – where workers owe no service to capital. It is also an expanse (a turf) where workers have autonomy from trade unions. L’area dell’autonomia is made by, and for, workers who organise on the shop floor. Delegates are appointed to take on designated tasks, but they are subject to recall at any time. (Regular trade unions’ role in collective bargaining hinges on their offering to capitalist bosses, for a price, a disciplined workforce. Making that deal would bind workers to service capital, which cannot happen in l’area dell’autonomia. Hence autonomists have no time for regular trade unions, only shop-floor committees.)

It became clear, to Tronti and others, that the wave of working class struggle to build l’area dell’autonomia was prompting certain changes in the capitalist system. Workers were staging, as it were, a secession-in-progress from the capitalist state of the early postwar decades. That deed spurred powers that were acting in the service of capital to penetrate ever further into life, and not just in working hours. The penetration was effected through the welfare state and through the promotion of a consumer society. It took the form of a remoulding of people’s bodily and mental habits, and of social relations.

Thus, autonomists in the early seventies – when Foucault’s writings on biopower had barely begun to circulate21 – had already seen and were speaking of the ways in which biopower was then working. Through the action of biopower in the heyday of the welfare state and its mass-consumer society, the masses came to accept as normal a new type of subjectivity. Working people expected not just to be in a job, but to enjoy upward mobility in a climate of stable prices and economic growth, with social insurance. In return, we did what was needed – in terms of consumer spending, making ourselves employable, and ensuring labour force replacement – to keep the system on track.

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21 Foucault’s Naissance de la clinique was first published in 1963, Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison in 1975, and volume 1 of Histoire de la sexualité in 1976.
The norm just outlined was hostile to the opening up of zones of autonomy. Thus, the system of postwar Keynesian welfare states, complete with ‘organisation man,’ formed a newly widened realm of capital, extending on either side of the factory gate. The entire system was (and is) therefore the site of working class struggle, and it remains so, even now that the Keynesian welfare state is gone. To convey that idea of a system-wide struggle, one speaks of ‘the social factory’ (la fabbrica sociale).

Autonomists, then, are Marxists who say emphatically that bodies resisting exploitation are formed other than by the process of their exploitation. Bodies that resist comes first; they precede the power that they resist. What emerges is a cycle or circulation of struggles, involving decomposition and recomposition of the very class of body that resists. An Australian autonomist describes class decomposition and recomposition, first discussed by Tronti, in the following terms:

Working class composition and capitalist restructuring chase each other over ever widening and more complex expanses of social territory. As long as capital retains the initiative, it can actually harness the momentum of the struggle as a motor of development, using workers' revolt to propel its growth and drive it to successively more sophisticated technical and organizational levels. The revolutionary counterproject, however, is to rupture this recuperative movement, unspring the dialectical spiral, and speed the circulation of struggles until they attain an escape velocity in which labor tears itself away from incorporation within capital – in a process that autonomists refer to as autovalorization or self-valorization.22

The same dynamic is described in highly abstract terms (yet lucidly) at the end of Plateau 13, ‘Apparatus of capture,’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus.23

The circulation of struggles threads its way through all kinds of oppressive relations, including gender, race, and language-group, as well as labour (or class). Realising that, Negri began to think in terms of jurisprudence as a system for the confluence and dispersal of power, and gave less attention to economic analysis. In Negri’s turn to jurisprudence, he draws on Spinoza. Negri has critics, some of them autonomists, who disagree with the turn to jurisprudence, on two counts. They insist that labour relations are pivotal to the circulation of struggles. They also argue that Spinoza’s pragmatism, which is of use to the new right, can bring to the left nothing but danger.24

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22 Sergio Fiedler, quoted in (Siegl, 2001). Autonomists think in terms of workers, students, householders, and the unemployed. Where people from those groups achieve self-valorisation, they are closing off capital’s chances of achieving it. See the discussion of social machine three, the civilised capitalist machine, in ch 3 above (pp 54-55). As I noted there, when Marx sketches the process of self-valorisation of capital, he speaks of capital as an ‘animated monster.’ Autonomists interrupt the action of the animated monster.

23 MP: pp 468-473; the authors cite both Tronti and Negri, in endnotes 66 and 67. Deleuze also deals with Tronti’s contribution to the study of biopower in (Deleuze, 1988 /1986Fr); I am indebted to Mark Coté for pointing this out (Côté, 2003).

24 (Siegl, 2001), and (Anonymous, 2003). The latter article is a review of two books on autonomist Marxism by British-US leftist scholars; the author of one of the books, Harry Cleaver, has written a spirited and detailed response to the review (Cleaver, 2003).
The heterogeneity of the movement of movements that has flowed from the Chiapas revolt tends to vindicate Negri. The movement is proving to be pragmatic and minoritarian, in that it accepts as fact that a group of people escaping any relation of oppression could be pivotal. The move of rejecting that fact is then seen as the ploy of an (undeclared) oppressor.

5.5 Absolute democracy

New anarchists

There is a new wave of anarchists, sometimes calling themselves ‘small-a’ anarchists, that has been in contact with Zapatistas and autonomists since the mid nineties, often acting side by side with them. New anarchists have shared in the forming of a prefigurative community of the left.

New anarchists have been described as the fifth in an historical series of generations of anarchists. The series begins with the mutualists of Lyons, whose acephalous form of organisation inspired the work of Proudhon in the early nineteenth century.25

Perhaps the main thing that sets a small-a apart from the four preceding generations of anarchists (all of those being big-A) is this: a small-a does not identify as a member of a sect within the left. A small-a’s goal and journey are one, namely to work with others on a politics of prefigurative community. It is a hallmark of the work in progress that those taking part put sectarian disputes aside for the time being.

Debate always focuses on particular courses of action; it’s taken for granted that no one will ever convert anyone else entirely to their point of view. The motto might be, ‘If you are willing to act like an anarchist now, your long-term vision is pretty much your own business’. Which seems only sensible: none of us know how far these principles can actually take us, or what a complex society based on them would end up looking like. Their [ie small-a anarchists’] ideology, then, is immanent in the anti-authoritarian principles that underlie their practice, and one of their more explicit principles is that things should stay this way.26

The basis for cooperation and community, say the small-a, is not any fixed long-term vision that you, the insider, swear by, while outsiders do not. The basis is instead your practical and present support for modes of joint action that give everyone concerned an active voice, in a complex process that is always open to improvement. The sole shared premise is that the right to decide for yourself, on matters where you are concerned, is inalienable. That is to say, there can be nobody that ‘represents’ you, though in some circumstances you can delegate a discrete, closed-form task to be done by somebody else, whom you have instructed.

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25 The history of five generations of anarchists is traced in (Grubacic, 2003). The terms ‘new anarchist’ and ‘small-a anarchist’ come from (Graeber, 2002).
26 (Graeber, 2002: p 72).
The small-a modes of joint action stem from carefully chosen means of coordination. The product is a system of coordination in which the linkages are purposely diffuse and labile. It works something like a complex adaptive system, a type of acephalous swarming of different kinds of being, seen in nature and in machine worlds. Researchers began to find, and to model, such adaptive systems as soon as advances in computing permitted the finding of them.

The coordinating system for small-a actions is made up of values-oriented, close-knit groups, known as affinity groups. There is extensive cooperation between affinity groups, which work together on specific actions by forming clusters. Clusters often take the form of colour-coded blocs, each bloc given to using distinctive tactics in campaigns, and especially at major rallies. Frequently seen clusters are the White Overalls (*tute bianche*), made up of participants wearing kits of protective padded clothing and armour in a fun and fantasy mode; the Pink Bloc that performs high camp spoofs, and goes about tickling the faces of riot squads with feather dusters or flowers; pagan clusters that conduct rituals and dances to induce non-violence (respect for life) on the part of police and activists; and the Black Bloc, whose mission is to storm the no-go areas that state agencies set up in the service of élites.

Debates are held around minor and major actions, with affinity groups taking part in the planning and execution of the action. If the number of people involved is more than about thirty, the debate takes place as a spokescouncil, which is a self-facilitated discussion by delegates each of whom answers directly to her affinity group. There are also procedural routines, which have crystallised into a useful template or protocol for the conduct of meetings. The result is decision-making by consensus and without leaders.

The reliance on consensus means that effort does not go into ‘having the numbers’ in a vote. Blocs seeking control through the stacking of meetings are nipped in the bud. And single affinity groups tend not to use their power to obstruct decisions. The system distributes ownership of the decision process evenly, to the point where everyone would feel diminished in the event that someone stands aside and does not support the decision. (Because ownership is so evenly spread, consensus decision-making does not amount to the same thing as a rule that decisions have to be unanimous, ie that each party involved has the power of veto.) There are no rival concentrations of power that might tilt at and ambush one another. Nor is there any dominant power, which might deserve one day to get its come-uppance.

The system is not perfect. It is a work in progress, whose future is uncertain. On the positive side, people’s growing experience as they use the protocol for the conduct of meetings, and as they take part in actions guided via spokescouncils, gives rise to a threefold general change in relations of power. There is a progressive weakening of fixed roles and

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27 There are several published accounts of the direct action groups’ means of local and global coordination. I draw on (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2000); (Davis and Sprinker, 1988); (Epstein, 1988); (Graeber, 2002); and (Redden, 2001). (The first of those sources misconstrues direct action and takes a simplistic view of violence, but it is a useful source in other respects.)

28 (Crass, 2002) yields many practical insights into the protocol for the conduct of meetings.
positions of power within activist circuits. There are releases of activist power in a positive and increasingly fluid form. And detached knowing – the kind of knowing that insists it has universal application, transcending the particular and the personal – is denied the special warrant it seeks.  

The new anarchists were vital to the First Intercontinental Encuentro, and to what followed. Their input was on a par with that of autonomists and Zapatistas. The whole process relied on the means of coordination that the anarchists developed and demonstrated. Anarchists and autonomists clash with each other over the nature of class and of class struggle, and over the new economy. Anarchists tend to dismiss the new economy as mystification, while autonomists put it at the heart of class struggle. And yet, far from weakening the movement of movements, those internal differences strengthen it – a positive result that is owed to the anarchists’ means of coordination.

As previously mentioned (page 96), the first ‘day of action’ coordinated via PGA took place in May 1998. It was a global street party, coinciding with the G8 summit in Birmingham, UK, and with a ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland. The second of the peoples’ global days of action was J18, a carnival against capital, conducted in financial hubs around the world on June 18th of 1999. It coincided with that year’s G8 meeting in Köln, Germany. The third people’s global day of action was N30 in November 1999, when there were vibrant street actions in Seattle and other designated cities. During the next four years, there were upwards of ten organised days of action, each focussed on a regional or global summit meeting of business and/or government.

The activists were drawing on a practice the Situationists had invented some thirty years earlier: detournement. They were subverting the aesthetic of the news and current affairs spectacle around the summit meetings, an aesthetic that served as a prop of market democracy. Other instances of detournement were the spoofs and stunts known as ‘adbusters’. Through fake hoardings and display ads, and clever graffiti, bumper stickers, tee shirts and posters, activists subverted the marketing and PR campaigns of some of the worst corporate offenders in exploiting people and the planet.

Detournement subverted the aesthetic of market democracy … but its impact was mild. Most detourned sound grabs and images had a short shelf-life. Often, the system they targeted would recuperate them. Wordplay, after all, doesn’t have endgame. And protest is readily repackaged as protest chic; it then sells the opposite of what it was supposed to.

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29 Graeber’s article conveys some idea of the threefold change in relations of power (Graeber, 2002: pp 65, 72). However, not all participants see benefit in the sidelining of detached knowing. Some – and Noam Chomsky is one of these – deplore the move away from Enlightenment values, and argue for the primacy of reason (Grubacic, 2003).

30 (Heath and Potter, 2002).
Constituent power: shrugging off the state

So far in this chapter, I have presented some facts on three interlinked activist persuasions: Zapatista; autonomist; anarchist. As discussed, from the mid nineties on, the ensemble of those three persuasions built up a presence that made it the visible face of the extraparliamentary left in Western countries.

The bodies in the ensemble constitute a society, whose form of rule is absolute democracy. The concept of absolute democracy comes from Spinoza, who wrote about it in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Western Europe at the time was in turmoil over the divine right of kings and absolute monarchy, vis a vis states governed by parliaments of the landed gentry. The same age of ferment gave rise to Locke’s version of the social contract, a useful fiction that has served ever since as the chief rationale for constitutional democracy.

In absolute democracy, there is no constituted power of state(s). Supplanting constituted power, there is constituent power. Anybody can join in this society, whose every constituent has the inalienable right to speak for herself. In permitting no one to contract out of that right, the society rejects representative government. Its members argue against all the political theory and doctrine that supports representative democracy. In particular, they regard as a danger to society, the doctrine that there is a social contract legitimating the state and its use of power.

Underlying that stance is a desire not to cede the job of ruling – not to cede command – to a particular cadre, or class, or professional group (bureaucrats, technocrats, econocrats, femocrats). It is a left libertarian stance. The soil in which it took root last century was marked by dogged resistance first to fascist and Stalinist regimes, and then to fascist and Stalinist tendencies in mainstream and dissident organisations in ‘the free world.’ The stance has some elements in common with that of the libertarian right, but the two diverge sharply on certain issues, chiefly the democratising of the institution of private property.

Absolute democracy gives rise to a society that is, above all, a bodily expression, a gesture. To be exact, it is a gesture of open invitation (or a call, a cry), which is at the same time an asking for permission: May we together become a multiplicity that directly self-governs?! The new grammatical mood of that gesture is key. It is a seamlessly joined subjunctive and interrogative, a thing that is actualised only in gesture or in verse, not in speech.

I am not alone in pointing to the use of a new mood, achieved by gesture, in the democratic constituting of a people. The Zapatistas, says Roberto Flores, become a free people caminando juntos (by walking together). Not for them the model of a path-breaking, universal nation of the free, or of a revolutionary band of people that, caminando adelante
(by walking ahead), teaches or shows others the way. In the same vein, when discussing the concept of *kairos*, which is implicated in the being of the multitude, Negri says:

*Hospitality is not only a matter of opening one’s arms and saying, ‘Come’. It is also taking the other’s arm and saying, ‘Let’s walk together.’*

**The Norris counter-thesis**

Some psephologists, who have researched the deeds and attitudes of activists in the late nineties, see no evidence of a society, or counter-culture, that has a novel form of rule and rejects representative government. In a series of publications, Pippa Norris and her co-researchers rebut claims by various scholars and commentators that in the past thirty years there has been some kind of crisis in Western states’ form of rule.

For instance, in a recent article, Norris, Stefaan Walgrave and Peter Van Aelst test the thesis of a democratic crisis against the following alternative. They propose that citizens may well be taking to the streets, in growing numbers, without feeling any urge to replace the present democratic institutions with a new system. On that view, demonstrating is a practice that sits entirely within the repertoire of normal and legitimate citizen conduct in a representative democracy – it is not a sign of crisis.

To test the crisis and the no-crisis hypotheses, Norris, Van Aelst and Walgrave draw on data from a range of sources. Their conclusion is that …

[...] popular concern that demonstrations are undermining representative democracy, by displacing conventional channels with radical and extremist politics, even violent tactics, due to political disaffection, seems misplaced. Clearly some demonstrations do result in destruction or damage to property and even illegal acts. But on balance demonstrations appear to be a growing channel of political expression used for the legitimate articulation of demands in a democratic state, and a form of activism that has evolved and expanded over the years to supplement and compliment [sic] existing organizations in civic society. [...] Far from threatening or even challenging democracy, demonstrations have become today one of the major channels of public voice.

Norris and her co-researchers reach that conclusion by examining several data sets, including some data they collected. They do not see direct action. In their eyes, the situation is simple. Any political action that is not supportive of the status quo is a message
addressed to the agents who are properly tasked with tweaking the knobs, within the rules of the democracy of the status quo.

One might expect that, in order to put that interpretation on events, Norris and her co-authors would canvass how – in practice and in theory – representative democracy works. Not so. Nor do they state what kinds of disturbance of the manner in which the present system works, would put the system in crisis in their view; or what kinds of disturbance would amount to direct action, albeit of less than crisis proportions. Because of their silence on those matters, their finding that all the reported activism they have studied falls in the category of indirect action, is just too pat. (At one point, they note that “black box” [sic] demonstrators’ refused to take a survey questionnaire.36 Never having heard of the Black Bloc, they do not see the absurdity of asking Black Bloc activists to submit to a survey. The slip is symptomatic of the mis-connect by the researchers with what they are talking about.)

**Reworking the counter-thesis**

I take a pragmatist view. Pragmatists take an interest in how different systems of state power work, rather than how they should work. The range of systems of state power includes dictatorship, all types of direct and representative democracy, and other power-sharing schemes. Pragmatists’ views on how such systems work can be traced, in large measure, to Machiavelli’s two classic works, setting out what actually makes an effective ruler for a people – a ruler whose people will attain security and thrive.37

Machiavelli shows, among other things, that state power over the ruled, where it is exercised to good effect, operates partly in that it *coerces* the ruled, partly in that it *has the informed consent* of the ruled, and partly in that it *deceives* the ruled. Hence the ruler is three creatures in one. She is *lion* – a dominant beast that inspires obedience through awe and fear. She is *human* – a wise, upright provider of the system of law and administrator of the law, thereby prompting the ruled, by their own human faculty of reason, to see that it is in their interest to obey the law. And she is *fox* – a clever creature with the wit to be able to rise to power and stay in power by deceiving, as need be, those who would thwart her moves.38

Now suppose, for a moment, that Norris were to adopt a pragmatist’s advice in putting forward her counter-thesis to the thesis of democratic crisis. Since she evidently considers representative democracy to be an effective system of state power, she would need to say that it does not work purely by the informed consent of the ruled. She would need to show that its

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35 (Norris et al., 2003) draws on data from the following sources: (Etzioni, 1970); (Barnes and Kaase, 1979); (Pross, 1992); (Fillieule, 1997)*; (Della Porta and Reiter, 1998)*; unpublished data from the 1999 General Election Study of Flanders-Belgium; (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 1999)*; (Kaldor, 2000); (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001); ch 10 in (Norris, 2002); and (World Values Survey, 2004)*. References that I have marked with an asterisk contain analyses of statistics on the number of protests and demonstrations.

36 (Norris et al., 2003: p 14).

37 (Machiavelli, 1999) and (Machiavelli, 1997).
working involves elements of coercion of the ruled, and deception of the ruled. That is the opposite of what Norris has been saying. She has been running a sort of Geiger counter over the growing ranks of demonstrators, over disaffected voters, and over the escalating proportion of the electorate that refuses to turn out to vote. Through their very (in)action, she says, the persons in each of those groups are revealing that they consent to the existing system of state power, viz representative democracy. If she is to be taken at her word, then representative democracy, evaluated as a system of state power, has lost its edge. It has shrunk to be just one of the three creatures it has to be, and as a result it has put at risk the peoples living under its rule.

Since Norris’s theorising has been weak, and her fact-gathering hasty, I am not convinced by her work. Instead, I look for evidence that a pragmatist can use, in assessing the vigour of representative democracy in the last quarter of the twentieth century. There are two spheres in which I look for such evidence.

First, state power seems to have been operating, in the main, with the informed consent (albeit often a passive or a cynical consent) of the people under its rule. That appearance is evidence of the human, and/or the fox, being active in the system. In the next chapter, I have more to say on the human and the fox, discussing how the two were linked to political cynicism in the nineties.

Second, as I have reported in this chapter, a segment of the populace was involved in direct action: these people were bent on actualising a new system of power in society. The existing system all but crushed that attempt in the late seventies and the early eighties, but the movement for a new system of power – absolute or grassroots democracy – staged a comeback from 1994 on. Recurrent internal strife over transforming the system of state power gives the system its suppleness. When the system eventually succumbs to some internal transformative force, it will not have been defeated, overthrown, or destroyed by that event, but swept onward by it. The coercive force – the lion – connotes just that creative-destructive edge of the power to rule.

Thus, the material I have presented in earlier sections of this chapter, does more than just show that an attempted transition to absolute democracy was (still) afoot in the nineties. It also opens out, in a particular way, the question of representative democracy’s chance of surviving in a world that will not cease to move.

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38 (Machiavelli, 1999: s XVIII). I make the ruler a woman. Machiavelli’s prince is skilled in dissembling – from spectacle and theatre, to rhetoric, to conniving and lying – in order to achieve a desired effect on the public; so the prince can be conceived, if one wants, as a woman impersonating a man.

39 The point being made here taps into the philosophy of Henri Bergson. As one endures representative democracy, the waiting for it to change – one’s consciousness of the waiting – bears witness for a whole that changes. It is an open whole, of which the ‘I’ or ‘we’ who wait, and representative democracy, and who-knows-what else, are parts or phases. According to Bergson, in any such situation the whole is not given, and it is not givable. It is a whole, whose ‘nature is to change ceaselessly and to make something new surge forth, in short, to endure [durer, ie to “durate” or manifest durée]’ (Deleuze, 1992 /1983Fr: p 9; cited in (Bogue, 2003a: p 25)).
5.6 Conclusion

The bulk of this chapter described how direct action unfolded in Western countries in the nineties, and showed how that process is linked to precursor actions that took place up to eighty years earlier. The chapter traced how the Chiapas revolt in Mexico, which broke out in 1994, prompted a spreading of the Zapatista movement outside that country. Tied in with that event was a revival of an extraparliamentary left, made up of Zapatistas, the autonomist movement, and the anarchist movement.

The overall effect was a rising of constituent power, in such a way that it supplanted the constituted power of the state in autonomous zones. Was it the advent of absolute democracy, as Hardt and Negri claim, in Empire? The chapter ends by discussing ways of testing that claim. It sets out a pragmatist’s alternative view of what may have been going on. To be sure, there was conflict in the system of representative democracy, viz the clash (or the new cold war, a cold civil war) between a rising constituent power and constituted authority. But perhaps that clash, by keeping the system near the brink of a transformation, gave the system the right degree of suppleness for it to survive. Hence the factual material from earlier in the chapter, whilst it is evidence for the rising of constituent power, falls short of showing that representative democracy was in trouble.

The next chapter looks at the balance that was struck between coercion of the ruled, winning the informed consent of the ruled, and duping the ruled, within representative democracy as practised in the nineties.