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**Constructivism and the Future**  
*Anterior of Radical Politics*

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## Abstract

This article argues that radical theory in general, and post-anarchism specifically has spent so much effort deconstructing and analyzing power that it has largely overlooked the important task of examining the constructive and prefigurative dimensions of the political alternatives coming to the fore. Drawing on the post-anarchist thought of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas this article offers the beginnings of a corrective to this trend by outlining three strategic contributions located in their political theory and practice: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions.

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“It is in concrete social fields, at specific moments, that the comparative movements of deterritorialization, the continuums of intensity and the combinations of flux that they form must be studied” (Deleuze, *Dialogues*).

## Introduction

Radical politics today faces a two-fold challenge: to show the problems and undesirability of the current structures of exclusion and power, and to show the desirability and coherency of various alternatives that may take their place. This paper argues that over the last 15 years, in particular, radical politics have been vastly more attentive to the former than to the latter and that what is now required is an appropriate shift in practical and theoretical efforts toward more constructive and prefigurative activities. In particular, the politics of difference, often associated with post-structuralist political theory and contemporary radical politics would do well to attend more closely to some of the more productive and promising political experiments emerging today. Not merely by exemplifying them as instances of a general potential for political transformation, as is more often the case, but to concretely clarify their field of struggle, the types of political subjects they create, what makes them desirable as alternatives, and the dangers these experiments confront. That is, radical political theory can no longer be satisfied with the mere critique of various forms of representation and essentialism in favour of difference and the affirmation that “another world is possible.” It has been ten years since this admittedly important slogan was adopted by the World Social Forum, but it is time that radical theory and practice begin to create a new

praxis adequate to the world that will have been emerging: our political future anterior.

To be clear, I am not arguing that radical political theory does not engage contemporary political events. I am arguing that it has disproportionately favoured the practice of critiquing of them, and insufficiently engaged political events that propose inspiring alternatives to the present. For the most part it has merely exemplified them in name: the No Borders Movement, Zapatismo, the Landless Peasants Movement, etc. These events are understood as parts of a new revolutionary sequence demonstrating the *possibility* of another world. A shift in radical political theory toward a clarification, valorization, and prefiguration of these events that are currently drawing an outline of the future would thus have the following advantages: (1) It would prove, against its critics, that post-structuralism (in particular) is not merely an abstract theoretical discourse, but has analytical tools adequate to contemporary struggles; (2) It would help clarify the structure and importance of radical political events, not only for those subject to the event, but for those who do not yet understand its consequences; (3) Finally, it would show the intelligibility and desirability of promising alternatives to present authoritarian phenomena.

But since the analytical category of “radical political theory” is perhaps too broad to address in this paper, I would like to focus my argument on what I think is one of the more prominent efforts to connect radical theory to contemporary political struggles: post-anarchism. Post-anarchism is the explicit conjunction between post-structuralist political philosophy and anti-authoritarian politics. Here one might expect to see a relatively high degree of theoretical analysis of concrete political struggles with an attention to their prefigurative capacity to create a new future in the present. But for the most part this has not been the case, although there are some recent notable exceptions.<sup>1</sup> Post-anarchism has often been criticized for being either a purely scholastic critique of humanist essentialism in classical anarchism (Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon) or being a purely theoretical effort with only speculative relation to the political field. But while I too remain so far unconvinced by articulations of post-anarchism’s applicability to the political field, I also believe that it does have the ability to offer a host of constructive analytical tools that other political theories lack. In this paper, I aim to vindicate this capacity.

Post-anarchism is perhaps too large of an analytical category to digest. Todd May has drawn on the work of Deleuze, Foucault, and Rancière, while Saul Newman has focused his own on that of Lacan, Derrida, and Badiou. These are all very

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<sup>1</sup> See Todd May, *Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière: Equality in Action* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

different thinkers and it would be a mistake to conflate them into a single post-anarchist position. But distinguishing them all or attempting to re-synthesize their “anarchist” inclinations is perhaps equally indigestible. Thus, I would like to make a more modest intervention into this discussion in a way that not only provides support for my thesis, that the political philosophy of difference (adopted by post-anarchism) is insufficient for understanding the positive contributions of anti-authoritarian struggles, but also motivates a turn to a more constructive analysis of contemporary events. By constructive analysis, I mean a theoretical focus on the degree to which political struggles offer or inspire alternative modes of social organization.

To do this I will draw on two figures associated with post-anarchism who I believe articulate an overlooked potential for a more constructive theoretical contribution: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari are particularly useful for three reasons: (1) they are post-structuralist philosophers who explicitly reject the representational politics of the state, party, and vanguard and (2) who, according to Todd May, supposedly affirm a political philosophy of difference. But more importantly, (3) Deleuze and Guattari also propose three positive political strategies often expressed in anti-authoritarian experiments that I think have been overlooked in post-anarchist readings of these philosophers. I think these strategies are able to show the unique analytical strength of post-anarchism’s contribution to concrete struggles. Additionally, and following my own imperative to examine more closely positive political experiments offering alternatives to the present, I want to look at the often touted, post-anarchist political event of Zapatismo.<sup>2</sup> Zapatismo has achieved a relatively high degree of success, or stability over the past 15 years, and I believe it corroborates at least three of the transferable political strategies found in the post-anarchism of Deleuze and Guattari: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions. These strategies are both inventions specific to Zapatismo but also consonant with several political-theoretical structures in Deleuze and Guattari’s work.

## I. Post-structuralist Anarchism’s

Before I begin with an analysis of these three post-structuralist or post-anarchist strategic insights located in Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas, I want to be clear of precisely what I find so insufficient in post-anarchist political theory

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<sup>2</sup> See [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

and why I think it would benefit from engaging in more prefigurative political analyses. My criticisms are by no means meant to capture all of post-anarchism, but only a specific formulation of it I find particularly insufficient.

While there are of course many anarchists writing under the proper name of post-anarchism, there are, I think, two distinguishing features that unite the particular formulation I want to focus on: (1) the critique of all forms of authoritarianism and representation (statism, capitalism, vanguardism, essentialism, identity politics, etc.) and (2) more positively, the affirmation of difference. Unlike classical anarchism, Newman and May claim, post-anarchism does not rely on naturalism or humanist essentialism, but rather affirms difference as the radical horizon of politics as such. According to Newman, it is “the infinite demand that will remain unfulfilled and never grounded in any concrete normative social order” (Newman, 2007: 11). Todd May accordingly defines post-anarchism by two central commitments: the “anti-representationalist principle” and the “principle of promoting differences” (May, 1994: 135). This is the formulation of post-anarchism that I find most inadequate and ill-equipped for theorizing constructive alternatives to contemporary forms of political domination and exclusion.

Given this commitment to anti-authoritarianism and the promotion of difference, understood positively as the radical possibility “to create new, non-statist forms of communal association and direct democracy that would make the state irrelevant,” how are we to understand the relationship between, on the one hand, this radical possibility freed from the constraints of authoritarianism, and on the other the concrete practices of direct democracy that may or may not come to realize the “infinite demands” of post-anarchism (Newman, 2007: 8)? Not only does post-anarchism reject any concrete practices that would seek to centralize power but, according to May and Newman, it also rejects institutions themselves as forms of coercion and authority (Newman, 2007: 4).<sup>3</sup> How then are we to understand, positively, the kinds of organizations post-anarchism is proposing as alternatives to the coercive ones currently in place? In an anarchist society how will decisions be made on global issues like climate change, border issues, and pollution? How will the fair exchange of goods and services take place and how will we negotiate conflicts among community groups without centralized authority, either socialist or market? Or is Frederic Engels correct in his common criticism that anarchists have no idea how an anarchist society would function? “[H]ow these people [the anarchists] propose to run a factory, operate a railway, or steer a ship without having in the last resort one deciding will, without single management, they of course do not tell us” (Engles, 1978: 728–9).

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<sup>3</sup> “Importantly, these movements are anti-authoritarian and non-institutional.”

Insofar as post-anarchism and contemporary radical politics share a similar commitment to “political contingency” and “radical possibility” they also share a similar uncertainty regarding the true alternatives they are proposing. But why is this? The post-anarchist position, that all of politics emerges from the inconsistent void of being, (from Greek: ἀναρχία, anarchía, “without ruler” or “without origin”) unfortunately does not seem to tell us anything about the kinds of political distributions that seem to emerge from this void and how they should be reorganized. With no certain ground (it is after all, an-archic) for determining the revolutionary object (seizer of state power, etc.), the revolutionary subject (the proletariat, etc.), the just society, or its future organizations, there is really no way to tell whether or not a particular group or organization has really articulated the “difference” post-anarchism aims to be promoting. Political action must be understood instead as “aporetic” or “preformatively contradictory” because “difference” is nothing other than the unconditioned and inconsistent unground for the emergence of radical politics as such, not any particular actual difference we may encounter.

But if this is the case and “the only ontological ground is the void,” according to Newman’s paraphrase of Alain Badiou, on what condition or criteria do we say that a given political experiment is radical, reformist, authoritarian, capitalist, etc. (Newman, 2007: 14)? And what is the structure or order particular to actual radical organizations (not just possible ones) that distinguishes them from authoritarian ones? As political phenomena they have always already fallen from their radical possibility into the realm of concrete effectuation and are no longer purely possible. This does not mean, of course, that post-anarchism is unable to define radicalism as such, but merely that it has difficulty defining radicalism outside the affirmation of difference, in this account. Post-anarchist radicalism is, strictly speaking, the degree to which the phenomena defends its “possibility of becoming-other,” or “difference.” Thus, direct action groups like Peoples Global Action (PGA), the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), or even the anti-globalization movement may be considered radical political groups because they are defenders of a “political potentiality” foreclosed by global capitalism, but not because of the particular way in which they are positively ordered or distributed in themselves.

The politics of the possible, in this case, has occluded a politics of the actual. The “multitude,” according to Hardt and Negri, or the “counter-hegemony,” according to Laclau, are the *potensia* or “constituent power” of the people to rise up and defend their *capacity* to create a new world in the shell of the old. The slogan, “another world is possible” thus seems to articulate post-structuralist and radical politics well insofar as both valorize the possibility of the people to come and criticize the authoritarianism of the present. But what is to be said of the actually existing infrastructure of worker cooperatives, free schools, local exchange trading

systems, equalitarian kinship models, consensus community councils, land trusts, etc. beyond the monological affirmation of their ontological “difference” in a possible “world to come?” What *kinds* of concrete practices are they effectuating in their decision-making, self-management, exchange, and conflict resolution and how do such practices *work*? What are the new conditions, elements, and agencies that are emerging and how are they viable alternatives to parliamentary capitalism?

Richard J.F. Day, in his essay, “From Hegemony to Affinity: The Political Logic of the Newest Social Movements” has advanced a similar concern. While Hardt and Negri’s concept of “constituent power,” he says “thus appears to be strongly identified with constructing concrete alternatives to globalizing capital here and now, rather than appealing to state power or waiting for/bringing on the revolution,” “ultimately it is not at all clear how they perceive the practical political logic of the project of counter-Empire” (Day, 2004: 735; 736). Thus despite Hardt and Negri’s claim that, “[o]nly the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real,” the question of *how* these *real* political effectuations function as actual existing alternatives to Empire is left completely unanswered (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 411). So while it may be true that the *when* of a singular political emergence is in some sense contingent and nomadic, the concept of the multitude ultimately says nothing about the *how* of alternative political organizations as they are ordered and distributed in reality. Thus it says nothing of actually existing radical politics.

Day’s response to this problem is a move in the right direction but in his essay he offers only a glimpse of the post-anarchist alternatives. Instead of being satisfied with Hardt and Negri’s account of the vaguely creative power of the multitude, or Gramsci’s logic of hegemony that would centralize these heterogeneous and anarchistic social movements, Day argues instead that several of these newest social movements like Food Not Bombs, Independent Media Centers, and Reclaim the Streets offer new post-anarchist strategies of affinity and direct action: (1) grassroots organization; (2) autonomy from state centralization and instrumentalist accumulation, and; (3) a move away from strategies of demand and representation to strategies of direct action and participation. Instead of demonstrating at NBC’s news headquarters to demand that they more accurately represent race relations in the area, for instance, activists are instead creating their own independent media networks as an alternative to mainstream media.

While I agree with the three characteristics Day mentions, as well as his support for a general strategy of disengagement and reconstruction (drawn from Gustav Landauer), I would like to suggest the additional importance of a few uniquely post-anarchist strategies I think can be found in Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas. My motivation in this analysis is to supplement what I believe is an insufficient



vision of post-anarchism based on the political philosophy of difference with an analysis that focuses instead on the more constructive alternatives offered by contemporary political struggles.

The problem of radical politics today is thus not that it lacks resistance to all of the many forms of hierarchy and oppression (sexism, racism, ecological destruction, etc.), but that such resistance groups form no organizational consistency or cohesion by which to put in place a viable alternative network to replace the present systems of power. The problem of the anti-globalization movement is not a new one. Resistance movements faced a similar difficulty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in their struggle against industrial capitalism. How to organize, whom to organized with, to what degree such decisions were binding, the positive demands that would be made politically, and the specific practices that worked in the interest of the struggle and those that didn't. These were central questions debated then, just as they are now among movements at the World Social Forum, for example. What can post-anarchism, in particular, contribute to these questions?

## **II. The Post-anarchism of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas**

The following analysis of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas develops three specific political strategies that I believe are relatively unique post-anarchist contributions to understanding some of the more positive political alternatives emerging today, poorly understood according to the philosophy of difference. The following analysis is broken down into three sections corresponding to each of the three political strategies: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions. The following analysis is by no means an exhaustive account of these strategies. Rather it is just the beginning of a more sustained engagement.

### **A Multi-centered Strategy of Political Diagnosis**

The first strategy is one adopted by Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas in order to positively grapple with the consequences that today political struggles are, as Richard Day says, “interlinked [in a way] that no particular form of inequality — be it class, race, gender, sexuality or ability — can be postulated as *the* central axis of struggle.” This observation is absolutely, although not exclusively, a post-

anarchist one according to Day, but what are the productive consequences of this? What alternative strategies does it propose to us in theory and action?

For Deleuze and Guattari, unlike Day, the thesis that there is no central axis of struggle is not a matter of groundlessness, lack, or infinite responsibility, rather it indicates a *positive multiplication* of axes of struggle requiring a new kind of multi-centered political analysis. If political reality has multiple intersectional axes, we can no longer employ diagnostic methods that reduce them all to a single plane (economics, culture, or gender, etc.). But what does Deleuze and Guattari's post-anarchism offer us as a political-theoretical strategy to respond to this? I argue that they propose a topological theory of diagnosis. "It was a decisive event when the mathematician Riemann uprooted the multiple from its predicate state and made it a noun, 'multiplicity,'" Deleuze and Guattari say, "It marked the end of dialectics and the beginning of a typology and topology of multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 482-3). Thus, taken from mathematics, the concept of a topological field is a single surface with potentially infinite dimensions created by foldings or morphisms (like a piece of origami). Independent of linear contiguity or succession it moves and changes by folding itself into new relations. Sierpinski's sponge, Von Koch's curve without tangent, and Mandelbrot's fractals are examples of iterated topological fields in geometry.

The concept of a specifically "political" topology thus provides a new way to consider political events as having several political tendencies at once, each to a greater or lesser degree, and not as a matter of lack. For example, perhaps a political struggle has a strong anti-capitalist tendency but also a strong territorial or religious tendency toward patriarchal norms. Topologically speaking there is no central axis or "essential political ideology" operating here. There is only a relative mix of political tendencies to be determined without the aid of evolutionary succession or explanatory reductionism. Rather, each of these political tendencies instead, according to Deleuze and Guattari, acts as the "loci of a topology that defines primitive societies here, States there, and elsewhere war machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 430). Thus topologically, these political tendencies or types are really distinct insofar as they occupy different dimensions of a struggle and yet they also coexist simultaneously insofar as they occupy a single political event that holds them all together under the same name. Thus, instead of succession (presupposing separate taxonomic categories) political tendencies change and merge as they cross the different thresholds immanent to the struggle under consideration. For example, Deleuze and Guattari say,

The appearance of a central power is thus a function of *a threshold or degree* beyond which what is anticipated takes on consistency or fails to, and what is conjured away ceases to be so and arrives. This threshold of consistency,

or of constraint, is not evolutionary but rather coexists with what has yet to cross it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 432).

The Zapatistas, contrary to centrist or vanguard analyses that revolve around a privileged method/science, site or dimension of struggle, similarly offer an inclusive intersectional analysis that does not necessarily privilege any single method, front, or site of struggle. Revolution, according to Marcos:

is about a process which incorporates different methods, different fronts, different and various levels of commitment and participation. This means that all methods have their place, that all the fronts of struggle are necessary, and that all levels of participation are important. This is about an inclusive process, which is anti-vanguard and collective. The problem with the revolution (pay attention to the small letters) is then no longer a problem of THE organization, THE method, THE caudillo [dictator, political boss]. It becomes rather a problem which concerns all those who see that revolution as necessary and possible, and whose achievement, is important for everyone (Marcos, 2004: 164).

Marcos, in *Beyond Resistance* (2007) describes precisely the practical labour of this task in *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign). To mobilize the population of the excluded and marginalized in Mexico was not a matter of discovering the evolutionary, dialectical, or single explanatory cause of oppression, it was a matter of listening and surveying all the multiple folds/fronts in the topological field. It was to create, as Marcos says, “a diagnostic of suffering” in all its dimensions (Marcos, 2008: 11). These folds, “the criminalization of youth, the oppression of women, environmental pollution, etc” are all coexisting and intersecting dimensions of the same struggle (Marcos, 2008: 11). During this time the Zapatistas also began diagnosing their own internal dangers. “[T]here are two mistakes,” Subcomandante Marcos says:

which seem to have persisted in our political work (and which flagrantly contradict our principles): the place of women, on the one hand, and, on the other, the relationship between the political-military structure and the autonomous governments.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> (From the mountains of the Mexican southeast. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos Mexico, August of 2004. 20 and 10.) Originally published in Spanish by the EZLN Translated by irlandesa. See: [flag.blackened.net](http://flag.blackened.net)

The Zapatistas have tried to address this problem by allowing women *insurgentas* and *comandantas* into the EZLN political-military structure (by no means entirely egalitarian). The Zapatistas allowed “young indigenous women [to] go to the mountains and develop their capacities more, [creating] consequences in the communities,” and gave them “the right to choose their partner and not [be] obliged to enter into marriage,” to “occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces,” as well as other rights detailed in the EZLN’s *Women’s Revolutionary Law*<sup>5</sup> (Ramírez, 2008: 312). These laws are being increasingly implemented in the Autonomous Townships through new women’s alliances (craft cooperatives, women’s councils, etc.). However, the decoding of certain patriarchal traditions comes at the risk of creating a new set of vanguard military codes. Hence the second mistake or danger.

These groups operate through detachment, election, and residual selection: they detach a supposedly expert avant-garde; they elect a disciplined, organized, hierarchalized proletariat; they select a residual sub-proletariat to be excluded or reeducated. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004: 198)

As Deleuze warns (and the EZLN is well aware of) the detachment of EZLN commanders living in the mountains (particularly from 1983 to 1993) that elects/recruits *campasin@s* from the villages to be disciplined, organized, hierarchized into the EZLN, and then creates a residual selection of *campasin@s* to be excluded/reeducated in ever widening circular segmentations, risks creating new military codes that undermine the autonomy and self-management of the Zapatistas. As Marcos says,

The idea we had originally was that the EZLN should accompany and support the peoples in the building of their autonomy. However accompaniment has sometimes turned into management, advice into orders and support into a hindrance. I’ve already spoken previously about the fact that the hierarchical, pyramid structure is not characteristic of the indigenous communities. The fact that the EZLN is a political-military and clandestine organization still corrupts processes that should and must be democratic.<sup>6</sup>

Patriarchy and militarism in Zapatismo are two examples of what Deleuze and Guattari call micro-fascism: “everything that [Zapatismo] dismantles [at the level of the state] it reassembles on its own level: micro-Oedipuses, microformations

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<sup>5</sup> EZLN – Women’s Revolutionary Law. See [flag.blackened.net](http://flag.blackened.net)

<sup>6</sup> See [flag.blackened.net](http://flag.blackened.net)

of power, microfascisms” (1987: 205). It is no small task to liberate all these dimensions at once as the Zapatistas have shown us. But to liberate them all thus requires a topological (not a chronological or dialectic) and multi-centered diagnostic.

## A Prefigurative Strategy of Political Transformation

This second strategy is one adopted by Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas in order to positively grapple with the consequences that today political struggles like Food Not Bombs, Independent Media Centers, and Reclaim the Streets are moving away from strategies of demand and representation to strategies of direct action and participation (Day, 2004). This observation too is a post-anarchist one. But again, what alternatives to the present does this propose? Food Not Bombs hardly provides an alternative to corporate food distribution. If anything, it relies on it. What is required is a theory of how direct action becomes prefigurative of a future alternative, and an analysis of some compelling examples of how this is really being done. In Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas we find both.

How are political transformations accomplished? Opposed to achieving revolutionary transformation by an evolutionary process of transition, progress, and reform in representation, or achieving it simply through a spontaneous rupture with the present, Deleuze and Guattari argue that prefigurative political transformations take place in the future anterior. That is, future anterior political struggles aim to construct a new political present *within and alongside* the old. Prefigurative struggles are neither reducible to the reform of the past or the revolution of the future, they are the committed political belief that one *will have been* laying the groundwork for a better world “now.”

Revolutionary political transformation thus occurs as the prefigurative emergence of a particular new present (from within the old) that both “rewrites and reinterprets the totality of potentials that already existed in stratified form,” as well as creates “an action of the future on the present,” and “the present on the past” (Guattari, 2008: 252; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 431). This is what Deleuze and Guattari call “reverse causalities.” More than a break or zig zag in history, they argue, what is to come already acts upon “what is” before the future can appear, insofar as it acts as a limit or threshold continually being warded off by the past’s attempt to preserve itself. But once a new present emerges it is seen to have been on its way the entire time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 431). If, from the perspective of the plane of organization, revolutionary novelty may seem to emerge “out of nowhere,” this is only because it was unable to see or represent the prefigurative labor of deterritorialization before it had transformed the political

conditions under which it could be seen and understood as such. However, from the perspective of the revolutionary struggle, the emerging event appears entirely consistent and intelligible as that which will have been. This prefigurative labor, according to Guattari,

consists in detecting the outlines, indicators, and crystals of molecular productivity. If there is a micropolitics to be practiced, it consists in ensuring that these molecular levels do not always succumb to systems that coopt them, systems of neutralization, or processes of implosion or self-destruction. It consists in apprehending how other assemblages of the production of life, the production of art, or the production of whatever you want might find their full expansion, so that the problematics of power find a response. This certainly involves modes of response of a new kind (Guattari, 2008: 339).

The new revolutionary present thus emerges from strategic sites of struggle that draw it “in negative outline,” Deleuze and Guattari say. “But for it to be realized there must be a whole integral of decoded flows, a whole generalized conjunction that overflows and over-turns the preceding apparatuses” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 452). That is, it must “cause the other elements to cross a threshold enabling a conjunction of their respective deterritorializations, a shared acceleration. This is [. . .] absolute, positive deterritorialization.” It is not only an escape but the creation of new weapons, “the creation of great machines of struggle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 142; Deleuze, 1987: 136; Guattari, 2008: 210).

However, less we risk arguing in favor of a purely subterranean and imperceptible form of revolutionary transformation, we should highlight, because some often forget to, that the purpose of absolute positive deterritorialization, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not simply to become-imperceptible in relation to the plane of organization for the sake of doing so. This has too much fascist potential. The purpose of prefigurative revolutionary interventions are to render everything “fragment by fragment” imperceptible from the plane of organization to create “the plane of consistency, which is nevertheless precisely where the imperceptible is seen and heard (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 252). The task is not to relish the theory of an impossible and invisible revolution, but rather to “bring the imperceptible to perception” by changing the dominant conditions for visibility (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 267). It is neither by oppositional destruction or by *ex nihilo* creation but “by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces, that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 280).

The Zapatistas have also deployed a prefigurative revolutionary intervention in two ways. First, the only way one could possibly say that the Zapatistas “burst

onto the scene of Mexican politics out of nowhere” is if they had not been aware of the ten years of prefigurative revolutionary activity, training, and indigenous mobilizations sustained in the jungles of the Lacandon since 1983. Marcos and three others began as Che-inspired military vanguardists living outside indigenous communities and slowly earning the trust of, and radicalizing the indigenous population. Far from appearing out of nowhere, there was a long and ultimately collective decision by the assembly of indigenous campesin@s to go to war. During this time the event of Zapatismo certainly existed as a new present connected to a specific historical legacy (emerging from Emiliano Zapata’s peasant revolution) with a determinate future (leading to the democratic transformation of Mexican politics). During these ten years Zapatismo existed as a form of invisibility that *will have been* visible. Not only retroactively visible but visible as a real historical sequence resurrected from Zapata and drawn into a future overthrow of the Mexican government.

The second example, and perhaps the most original one, is the scale on which the Zapatistas have refused to “take power” and have instead continued their revolution by creating in the present the world they want to see in their own autonomous municipalities. They began in August of 2003 to create the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*: directly democratic institutional frameworks for collective and autonomous decision making. One JBG was created in each of the *Caracoles* (regional communities, or snails) to

promote and approve the participation of compañeros and compañeras [. . .] to mediate conflicts which might arise between Autonomous Municipalities [. . .] to monitor the implementation of projects and community work in the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities [. . .] to serve and guide national and international civil society so that they can visit communities, carry out productive projects, set up peace camps, carry out research, etc (Marcos, 2004: 619).

Currently over 2,200 communities (over 100,000 people) are federated into 32 autonomous municipalities each grouped into five local self-governments (JBGs). Today the Zapatistas remain committed to, among other things, autonomy, participatory self-government, consensus decisions making, respect for nature and life without the use of pesticides, dams, or unnecessary logging, and the inclusion of “everybody without distinctions of party, religion, sex, or color.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), trans. irlandes, *Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. See [www.inmotionmagazine.com](http://www.inmotionmagazine.com)

By forming a specific block of becoming through rotational self-government, the federation of their communes, and ultimately their solidarity with an international network of shared social struggle, the Zapatistas continue to make political interventions and alternative institutions that prefigure the kind of democratic and equalitarian world they and their allies want to live in. Opposed to directly declaring war on the Mexican government and instituting a regime change in the state, or simply affirming the radical possibility that “another world is possible,” the Zapatistas are building, to what degree they can, another world from inside the old: “one that can overlay the first one, like a transparency,” as Guattari says.

## A Participatory Strategy of Organizing Institutions

This third strategy is one adopted by Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas in order to positively grapple with the consequences that representational politics is structurally unable to account for the voices of the marginalized (and often produces their marginalization in the first place). This particular critique is so abundant in post-anarchist literature I will not duplicate it here. But what has not been sufficiently grappled with however, are the possible political alternatives this thesis entails. Should we reject all political institutions as such or just some kinds of them? If the latter, what kinds of institutions do post-anarchists propose to put in their place? In Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas I believe we can find a response to this question.

Deleuze and Guattari offer a participatory theory of institutions that does not aim to offer new conditions for political life based on a “more just” sphere of political action whose foundational principles are still held independently from the constituted sphere where such principles are deployed. Nor do participatory institutions merely aim to establish anti-, or counter-institutions, whose sole purpose is to undermine all forms of representation and await the possibility that something new, and hopefully better, may emerge. Rather, participatory institutions are built and sustained through an expressive process whose founding conditions are constantly undergoing a high degree of direct and immanent transformation by the various practices and people who are effected, to varying degrees, by its deployment. In particular, this participatory “feedback loop” can be located in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “consistency,” found in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?* and in the Zapatista’s political practice of Governing by Obeying (*Gobernar Obedeciendo*). In order to understand the structure and function of this consistency and governing by obeying in revolutionary institutions, we need to understand how their conditions and elements work differently than in representational and counter-representational institutions. To show this I want to



look at two concepts in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy that correspond to the conditions and elements of consistent participatory institutions: what they call the abstract machine, and the concrete assemblage.<sup>8</sup> Just as these two concepts immanently transform one another in a relationship of "order without hierarchy," according to Deleuze and Guattari, so does governing by obeying provide the equalitarian frame-work for the participatory institutions of the Zapatistas (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 90).

For Deleuze and Guattari, the abstract machine is a shared condition for action and evaluation only insofar as it is *immanently transformed* by the concrete elements that realize and differentiate it. There is thus a "coadaptation" or "reciprocal presupposition" of the two that allows for their participatory transformation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 71; 1994: 77). The institution thus *changes in nature* each time there are "*reconversions subjectives actuelles*" (actually occurring subjective redeployments) of it (Deleuze, 2006: 236). Subsequently, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the abstract machine is absolutely singular and unable to be deduced from either history or introspection (Deleuze, 2006: 233). The abstract machine is not deducible because it is the condition for deduction, description, and prescription itself: it is a more primary evental commitment. It is abstract in the sense that it is not a thing among other things, but it is also *real (vrai-abstrait)* insofar as it is a condition that allows for the appearance of "new space-times" and new subjectivities antagonistic to representation and power (Deleuze, 1997: 172). However, while it may not be a thing, the abstract machine is still marked by a singular and asignifying proper name, date, and image like the names of military operations or the names of hurricanes, as Deleuze and Guattari say (1987: 28; 264). These names do not represent, symbolize, or refer to anything at all. Rather, they are spoken *through*. As a self-referencing and autonomous event independent from political representation, the abstract machine allows for the shared *expression* and conjunction of the various heterogeneous elements that speak and exist *through* it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 142).

Accordingly, the elements of the institution or concrete machinic assemblage cannot be considered as "normative" or "goal-driven" actions, since they are continually transforming the conditions or goals that are supposed to normalize and direct their actions. But such mutual institutional transformations should not be mistaken for a kind of pragmatic "revisionism" where a hypothesis is "tested," found to work or not work, and then rationally (or otherwise) revised accordingly in order to ground a narrative of political "progress."<sup>9</sup> Rather, political problems

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<sup>8</sup> There are several types of abstract machines according to Deleuze and Guattari. The concept abstract machine and concrete assemblage as I use them here should be understood as referring only to the "consistent type" of machines.

themselves transform and are transformed reciprocally by those who effectuate them and who are effected by them (without knowing ends in advance). “When people demand to formulate their problems themselves,” as Deleuze and Guattari say “and to determine at least the particular conditions under which they can receive a more general solution,” there is a specifically *non-representational* form of self-management and democratic participation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 471; Deleuze, 1968: 158). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the machinic assemblage is thus a purely affective or expressive political procedure. Affective decision-making is a procedure whereby the collection of the institution’s capacities to affect or be affected by its other elements are determined. Each machine may certainly have different capacities to be affected, but there is no single machine or affect that is independent from or in charge of representing the others. One must “count its affects,” (*on cherche à faire le compte de ses affects*) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 257). The procedure of counting the affects of the institution thus decides what can or will be done in the assemblage. There are no universal ends or values that inhere in the institution itself, only its immanent capacity to be assembled and reassembled in a continually renegotiated and expressive machinic assemblage of consistency.

Similarly, Zapatismo’s practice of “Governing by Obeying” has resulted in non-representational political institutions based on highly modifiable political conditions: those in positions of articulating the people’s will obey and express that Will or they are recalled. What is most interesting about the Zapatista communities is that they do not legitimate their revolution strictly by presupposed norms based on identity (requests for “rights,” the overthrow of the state, universal religious claims, a new ethnic nationalism, or reference to any principles outside their own collective determination), but rather they affirm a self-reference or autonomy. What does this mean? Instead of simply valorizing their difference and counter-institutional un-representability as such to the State, as Simon Tormey has argued, the Zapatistas have created a new form of political evaluation that better allows them to realize the (self)management of their institutions through the use of rotational governance (delegates rotate every 14 days) and common property (neither private nor public) (Tormey, 2006: 138–154). The condition of being part of the workers coops, common agricultural efforts, and judicial

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<sup>9</sup> John Dewey “Beliefs and Realities” in *Philosophical Review*, 15 (1906): 113–29. “Belief, sheer, direct, unmitigated personal belief, reappears as the working hypothesis; action which at once develops and tests belief reappears as experimentation, deduction, demonstration; while the machinery of universals, axioms, a priori truths, etc., is the systematization of the of the way in which men have always worked out, in anticipation of overt action, the implications of their beliefs with a view to revising them in the interests of obviating the unfavorable, and of securing the welcome consequences” (ibid., 124).

administrations is a shared and constantly modified condition where members directly express their will through consensus decision making and recallable delegation, not through representation. The distance or “mediation” between the spirit of their economic, political, and cultural institutions and the consequences of the practices is thus minimal. This allows for maximum participation and feedback within the institution. Participation is not based on race, class, gender, etc. but rather one participates to the degree one is affected by the decision. The consensus, rotational, and recallable delegation process thus offers a third way between normative institutions based on static constitutions and the rejection of institutions as such: it offers a highly mutable and continually renegotiated theory and practice of the institution.

## Conclusion

Drawing on the post-anarchist thought of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas I have aimed to demonstrate the relevance and potential strength of attending to some of the more constructive alternatives emerging in radical philosophy and politics. I think that the three political strategies analyzed above can be used to understand and connect to similar political theories and events, ultimately outlining a larger emerging consistency of what only appear to be heterogenous struggles, but are in fact the outline of a counter-Empire underway. It is my contention that radical theory in general, and post-anarchism specifically, has spent so much effort deconstructing and analyzing power that it has overlooked the important task of examining the prefigurative dimensions of these political alternatives coming to the fore.

I must admit however, that this analysis has only been able to scratch the surface of a much deeper theoretical and practical project that would be required to fully develop both Deleuze and Guattari’s radical political theory and the detailed implications of the Zapatista’s political experimentations. Such a project is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present paper. What I have been able to argue in this paper though is that the formulation of post-anarchism as the rejection of representation and the affirmation of difference offers little or no theoretical tools for pursuing a more prefigurative investigation like the one I have begun here. Instead I have proposed three theoretical-political strategies that I think might be useful for locating and clarifying new future anterior political events: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions. I have aimed to show how these three post-anarchist insights can be positively developed and enriched through a more constructive engagement with

both post-structuralist thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari, and political militants like the Zapatistas. My hope is that more efforts in radical political theory, and post-anarchism in particular, will be made to attend to inventions and experiments in the concrete political field and *vice versa*. If we are going to change the current political situation, its going to require a more constructive and prefigurative theory and practice.

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