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**‘Against “representation”:
Deleuze, Zapatismo and the search for the post-political subject’**

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The representant says: ‘Everyone recognises that ...’, but there is always an unrepresented singularity who does not recognise precisely because it is not everyone or the universal. ‘Everyone’ recognises the universal because it is itself the universal, but the profound sensitive conscience which is nevertheless presumed to bear the cost, the singular does not recognise it. The misfortune in speaking is not speaking, but speaking *for others* or representing others. (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 52)

High up in the mountains of the south east of Mexico an experiment is taking place which tests some of the most cherished notions political theorists have held and still hold about the nature of politics, of rationality, of order, of emancipation. The experiment is being conducted by the Zapatistas a group that insists that it is ‘exercising power’ not on *behalf* of the people of the Chiapas, the region it ‘liberated’ from the federal government in 1994, but *with* the people of the Chiapas. Whilst seeking to give a voice *to* the people they are not speaking *for* them, if they are ‘speaking’ at all (no official communiqués were issued between the end of 2001 and January 2003 – the Zapatistas had announced that they were too busy ‘listening’ to people). The Zapatistas are seeking a way in which these people can not merely find their own voice, but be heard by those who would otherwise remain deaf, which, predictably, includes those who would seek to ‘represent’ them: the official parties of the Mexican political establishment; various Marxist and revolutionary groups; movements representing the poor or particular indigenous groups, and so forth. But how are the Zapatistas different to the various groups before them who were unembarrassed to lead, to represent? What have they seen or thought about which makes them suspicious not merely of the actuality of political representation in Mexico, but its very logic? Why have they set their face against, what for occidental political thought, *is* politics?

What I want to suggest in this paper is that the stance and philosophy of the Zapatistas is indeed remarkable in itself, but also symptomatic of a more general shift in the underpinnings of the political ‘field’. This is a shift that first announced itself in relation to the philosophy, ethics and literature some decades ago, but which can now be felt in what can be termed ‘the new activism’, for which we read the various struggles of groups sheltering under the ‘anti-capitalist’ or ‘anti-globalisation’ banner. The ‘not in my name’ sentiment that resounded in response to the preparations for war with Iraq speak directly to this mood, and more generally to a politics that sets its face against ‘representation’. Yet political philosophy has been and remains attached to representation as a mode of articulating the various needs and wants of diverse communities. Indeed it is difficult to think of many normative prescriptions that are *not* in some way representative in structure. Even thinkers such as Rousseau and Marx who offer a critique of representation tend to fall back on representational

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strategies to support their case in other respects.¹ What we seem to be confronted with then is the crisis of normative thought itself and by extension the privileged ‘space’ of political philosophy which has traditionally seen its role as delivering pre-packaged solutions for the construction and maintenance of the Good Life. My suggestion here is, simply, that these two moments are linked: that the collapse of representational schema, if not of ‘normativity’ more generally, is mirrored in the collapse of representational politics as a basis for inspiring action and thinking about how the world might otherwise look.

In order to advance the case the paper focuses on the work of Gilles Deleuze, a philosopher and activist more usually associated with the events of May 68 and with the intellectual recriminations which resounded through French intellectual life through the 1970s and 1980s. With his co-writer the psychoanalyst-cum-philosopher Felix Guattari, Deleuze is best known for a pungent analysis of the condition of late modern society, the two volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.² But before this work he inaugurated a critique of representation in *Difference and Repetition*, a work that, as far as I can see, has received virtually no attention from ‘mainstream’ political theorists.³ Unlike Jean-Francois Lyotard, and others animated by a similar hostility to ‘representational’ thought, Deleuze gave strong indications of what a post-representational form of discourse and a post-representational form of politics might amount to, albeit in a demandingly ‘continental’ language and vocabulary – which might in turn help the lack of a ‘reception’.⁴ What I aim to show is how this critique maps onto the attempt of the Zapatistas to delineate a post-representational politics. This is a form of critique that, far from endorsing a ‘nihilistic’ stance in relation to the political (as critics such as Ernesto Laclau assert), highlights how the critique of representation can illuminate developments in the political field itself and indeed inspire us to think that there is a beyond or outside of representation in both theory and practice.

The ‘crisis’ of representation

Before unleashing Deleuze on the paper, it is perhaps useful to set out what I take it to be the problematic of representation as it appears in normative political theory. The themes will be familiar, so I shall be brief.

Looking at the history of political thought, representation seems to be articulated with two main aims in view; as a strategy of *exclusion* and as a strategy of *emancipation*. What do I mean by exclusion? Looking at early liberal thought gives the strongest clues as to why it is that representation become the accepted means for articulating political allegiances, and relating how ruler and ruled should relate to each other. Hobbes, for example, was writing in the shadow of a political crisis sparked by challenges to ‘transcendental’ modes of political legitimation. Monarchy and theocracy sought legitimation to something outside of the relationship between rulers and ruled, usually to God, Natural Law or Natural Right. These concepts survived in the work of the early liberals, but were rearticulated in a way which recognised the growing difficulty of ignoring the role that ‘the people’ had to play in the process of legitimation. Hobbes, arguing for a rational absolutism, describes Leviathan as ‘a Representative of the people’; a ruler who is brought into being to make the people

¹ Certain Anarchist and ultra libertarian positions present critiques of representation. Indeed one of the most celebrated works of recent decades, Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State and Utopia* famously does away with political representation as part of the critique of the more than ‘minimal’ state.

² See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. B Massumi (London: Athlone, 1983); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B Massumi, (London: Athlone, 1988). All references to *Difference and Repetition* are to the Paul Patton translation (London: Continuum, 1994) – hereafter referred to as *DR*.

³ One noteworthy exception is Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (London: University of California Press, 1999) which attempts to measure the relevance of the critique of representation to feminist theory. Indeed if there is an area where Deleuze’s work has been seriously received it would be feminism and more recently post-colonial studies.

⁴ Lyotard’s critique of the political aspects of representation appears in *Le Differend* where he terms describes the experience of being represented as analogous to ‘being taken hostage’. As we shall see, such sentiments are shared by Deleuze.

‘present’.⁵ The story of the social contract is one by which this representation comes into being. But as is obvious, Hobbes’s representative is hardly ‘representative’ as that term would be understood today. This is to say that Leviathan is unaccountable to the people once brought into being. So how is then *is* Leviathan representative? Because it represents that which all (rational) individuals aspire to creating: a secure, safe environment in which to enjoy their (private) ‘liberty’. Representation thus operates as a form of containment in the sense that what Hobbes creates is the oxymoronic-sounding ‘legitimate absolutism’ that he saw evading ‘transcendentally’ based alternatives. The people do not rule; they do not even have the right to resist; but in some sense their interests have been safeguarded, and thus we can say that they are (or have been) ‘represented’.

In case the example of Hobbes is thought to ancient, too distant or extreme to illustrate the point in relation to liberalism, let us move forward 200 years. In the middle of the nineteenth century we find J S Mill in his *An Essay on Representative Government* articulating a different sounding argument but with an essentially similar outcome. One of Mill’s great fears was of course the tyranny of the majority, and in order to prevent such a prospect developing he argued for representation based on complex mechanisms ensuring a ‘fair’ outcome, for which we read a government that would safeguard the individual liberty without which civilised or ‘commodious living’ would be impossible. The people themselves cannot be trusted with power because they can be swayed by selfishness, rhetoric and guile. This necessitates government by the ‘wise’ who would represent the people’s best interests whilst being accountable to the people at periodic elections. As with Hobbes, the point of representation is essentially to contain ‘the mob’; to prevent the demand for political power being translated in terms that might threaten the basis of the (liberal) social order. As he rather bluntly puts it in the *Essay*, ‘Men, as well as women, do not need political rights in order that they may govern, but in order that they not be misgoverned’.⁶ In short, power needs to be at one remove from the people, and as for Hobbes so for Mill representation was the mechanism of its preservation.

It is not just liberals, however, who are prey to using representation as a means of containing the people, as opposed to giving them a platform in which they can meaningfully or effectively be ‘heard’. Lenin famously articulated a ‘left’ version in *What is to be Done?*, explaining in deliberate terms why it was that a revolutionary party had to represent the interests of the working class, rather than letting it determine party policy.⁷ Ordinary people are, he argued, only capable of developing a ‘trade union consciousness’ as opposed to ‘the revolutionary consciousness’ that was needed, in Lenin’s view, to bring down Tsarist Autocracy. The people thus had to yield before a ‘vanguard’ who would be able to articulate its own best interests better than they could themselves. So the effect is the same: a voice of the people is needed in order to legitimate political action; but it is a voice heavily mediated by ‘representatives’ who can be ‘relied upon’ to deliver satisfactory/rational outcomes rather than the contingent, wayward, easily swayed outcomes that ordinary people are prone to yield.

Turning to representation as *emancipation*, what becomes evident is that the latter is an attempt to fill the void created by the unredeemed promise of liberal modernity. *The Declaration of Independence* and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* associated with, respectively, the American and French Revolutions spelt out a new deal for humanity. They were documents which described liberty as ‘universal’, as belonging to everyone. Yet these were promises their authors were unable and, indeed mostly unwilling to see met. Thus follows the history of successive demands for the hitherto abstract notions of ‘universality’ articulated in the documents to be extended to otherwise ignored or excluded groups: women, non-‘whites’, ‘young’ adults, the psychologically different, those subject to colonial rule, the ‘disabled’, and so on. ‘Progressive politics’ became over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the term for the unfolding of these various struggles for equal recognition of various particularities. Progressive politics is now of course ‘identity politics’; but the cause is the same: the continuing attempt to redeem this early promise, particularly as regards who and what is ‘represented’ in spaces of power, whether they be national assemblies, local or regional committees, boardrooms, and so on. Yet in considering this ‘unfolding’

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Pt.1, Chapter 18: ‘Of the Rights of Sovereigns by Institution’, first para.

⁶ J. S. Mill, *An Essay on Representative Government* (Oxford, OUP, 1972), p. 291.

⁷ V I Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1902] 1967). The relevant passages are located in Part III, Section E.

of emancipatory struggles, what has become evident is the degree to which such a process is subject to infinite morsellation and thus to infinite regress. Today, 'we' care about ethnicity, social class, gender, disability, linguistic capacity, weight ('fatism is the new racism'); tomorrow it may be height, eye colour, IQ, educational background; 'postcoded identity', and all manner of under-represented hybrid, transnational, or 'glocalised' identities (Tiger Woods' 'Calabinasianism' to take one example). As an Irishman it has been intriguing to note how my own 'stock', for example, has risen in recent years on the back of the understandable concerns of an identitarian or representational logic. From being considered part of the dominant majoritarian group in the UK ('white male'), I now find myself as a result of recent legislation a member of a protected minority ('Irish white male') that has to be represented in various official settings, whose applications have to be monitored in case of discrimination, who are to be made eligible for special grants etc. On with inexorable logic the 'emancipatory' logic of representation goes.

It is an awareness of the limitations of infinite regress that contemporary theorists protective of the emancipatory claim of representation search to complement what Anne Phillips terms a 'politics of presence' with a 'politics of ideas'.⁸ Thus we should not be concerned solely with ensuring that as many groups or minorities are represented as possible, but also with ensuring that as many possible viewpoints and opinions are able to be articulated too. A sophisticated version of the argument was recently presented by Ernesto Laclau in *Emancipation(s)*.⁹ His view there is that representation must indeed 'fail' for the reasons given above; but this alone does not give us reason to jettison the logic of representation itself. He argues (*pace* Lacan) that (modern) society is itself the product of a 'failure' or lack produced by the impossibility of 'fullness' or 'transparency' of the sort imagined by proponents of alternative schema, particularly participatory or direct democracy. Each of us is a product of society, but preserves a distinct identity that 'escapes' it. In this sense there is always under modern conditions a dislocation between the self-description of the social ('land of the free') and our experience of it. This is what gives rise to politics. We are constantly dissatisfied and this dissatisfaction translates itself into political contestation and debate. In complex societies such as ours we need some way in which this debate can be represented and articulated and thus the need for some forum or space in which these dramas can be played out. The virtue of representative democracy (or 'radical democracy' as Laclau rather confusingly calls it), is that it provide a space of antagonism and contingency which is left open and 'undecided' thus mirroring the 'openness' and 'undecidability' of the modern subject herself.

The Burkean twist in Laclau's story is that representation should not be read merely as the means by which voices 'from below' can be articulated, but more importantly as the basis upon which new 'voices' and positions can be heard. Thus the function of the representative is not simply to give voice to pre-existing views, but to generate new 'voices' which in turn might map back onto the dislocated identities 'below'. What we have in other words is an image of flux and complexity that in turn helps to ensure that it not just the predictable or 'known' positions of static 'groups' or identities that come to be presented, but all manner of views which would be impossible to know in advance of 'the debate' taking place. So the wider point is that democratic politics cannot be reduced to a politics of (imperfect) representation; but has to be looked at as a means whereby the necessary diversity and plurality of modern societies can be reflected in political practice. The reality of 'multiple', 'shifting' identities calls for a more elusive, less reductive notion of representation to underpin democratic politics.

Even considering the above, it still seems legitimate to ask whether my being represented by something that approximates me and my shifting, multiple identities and opinions but is not *actually* me something to which we should look forward to as a sign that the promise of modernity has got closer to the universalist ideal of 'inclusivity' and 'respect for difference' that such authors identify as the basis of emancipatory political practice. Can we say that *I* have found a voice under such circumstances – or is 'someone' still speaking on my behalf? Am I emancipated, self-legislating, or have I, in the moment of my 'emancipation', been *excluded* by the logic of representation? Is

⁸ Anne Phillips, 'Dealing with Difference: A Politics of Ideas or a Politics of Presence', *Constellations*, vol 1:1 (1994), pp. 74-91.

⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996). See in particular chapter 6: 'Power and representation'.

representation a poison or a cure, or, like Plato's *Pharmakon*, both poison and cure, *both* a moment of exclusion *and* emancipation? A famous painting by Rene Magritte, *La Reproduction Interdite*, shows a man standing in front of a mirror; only instead of seeing his face, he is looking at the back of his own head. In a letter explaining the picture to Paul Collinet Magritte notes that 'whoever is looking at the picture is representing what he sees'. What is represented is 'lacking' in the field of representation itself. I recognise myself in the mirror (or is it a picture?), but it is not 'me'. Is it 'someone' else who has usurped me and taken my 'place'? Representation seems to have 'failed'; but must it always, and of necessity, fail? Time for Deleuze.

Deleuze and the crisis of representation

Deleuze is not a political philosopher as that term is used in an Anglo-American environment. This is to say that nowhere do we find a fully mapped out image or 'vision' of how the world should look. One looks in vain even for clear recommendations or strategies for resisting the *status quo* notwithstanding the fact that Deleuze himself was always suspicious of the 'status quo' irrespective of the field or discourse to which the epithet referred. Nonetheless there is a sense in which his work is very intensely political and that is in his hostility to all manner of what he termed 'statist' thought, and this in turn meant anything that represented foundations, truths, certainties of the kind that could be used to justify some kind of 'order', whether philosophical or political. The two terms in any case wash into each other in Deleuze's work, such that what is political can be read as necessarily philosophical and what is philosophical can be read as immediately political. The argument here is that what Deleuze says about the nature of representation and about representative thought generally can thus be transferred across in a way that remains true to the object of critique.

As it emerges in *Difference and Repetition* in particular, Deleuze's critique of representation hinges on the availability of a means of conceptualising similarity or Sameness in the midst of what he sees as constitutive ontological difference. This already sounds abstract and 'difficult', so let's proceed with an example. Take three apples: what is it that constitutes their sameness, their 'appleness' as it were? In Platonic and neo-Platonic systems of thought sameness is constituted by approximation to an ideal Form of the Apple that exists independently of our immediate or sensory experience. So in Platonic terms all existing apples are mere reproductions or copies of the original Thing that can only be accessed after a great deal of training. Only the Philosophers (in other words) can distinguish between the Thing and the mere copy or reproduction of it, for only Philosophers have access to a realm of Truth or Knowledge in which Things appear as themselves. The rest of us are stuck in the Cave: a world of representations, copies, imitations. The real Thing eludes our grasp, and thus we are reliant on the philosophers, the ones who 'know', to confirm that what we have in front of us are indeed apples and not pears. Now in Deleuze's view this Platonic model of how reality or essence is opposed to appearance survives in different forms in western rationalism. This is to say that the conceptual basis of our understanding is derived from notions of epistemological foundation, as opposed to the immediacy of ontological being. Most systems of thought, and particularly rationalism, proceeds from the idea that the world is unavailable to the senses. Apples cannot be seen for what they 'are', for what 'is' can only be thought on the basis of a *system* of thought that helps us to distinguish conceptually apples from pears. Such systems of thought are what Deleuze will later term 'arborescent' in that they rest upon some notion of the origin of reality as growing out of thought itself, as opposed to lying in the world 'open to view'. Descartes's classic statement, 'I think therefore I am', shows this legislating moment most clearly. Something has to be true for all other truths to 'follow'. Let's transfer across to an example that might make more sense in this 'political' context of ours.

How does, say, the more Engelsian kind of Marxist make sense of the world? On a Deleuzian view, she starts from something they 'know' to be the case which here would be the 'fact' that material production is the basis of social life and can be read as derivative of it. Humans need to produce in order to keep themselves alive. Thus human life is always-already dependent on the productive process. If we cease to produce, we die. So given that production forms this background we can then read social phenomena in light of it. What is exploitation? What is Surplus Value? What makes commodities similar – in what is their Sameness constituted? The answer is the 'fact' that they are produced for 'exchange value' as opposed to 'use value'. An apple (sorry) becomes

‘similar to’ a pear to the extent that they are both grown for the market and for the purpose of making money, not for as it were ‘eating’. Here in other words, we have a ‘code’ for reading the world, for making sense of what goes on. Out of the primordial facticity of production emerges a vast ‘arborescent’ system for ordering, coding, ‘understanding’, interpreting, representing all social phenomena. In order to understand ‘reality’ one must, like Plato’s Philosopher Kings, learn the code, become *au fait* with how objects stand in relation to each other. Only with this knowledge will we be able to represent the true interests of humanity when the time comes, as of course it will

Put in these terms it becomes difficult to see how access to reality could otherwise be mediated. Do we not always rely on a code of some sort, even if we simply call this code ‘language’? Why don’t we say with the structuralists and everyone else who insists that language is prior to the ‘thinking subject’ that there is no ‘outside’ of the code, of the linguistic field itself? At this point we can clarify the main lines of Deleuze’s own position, for what he wants to argue will build upon the arguments of Duns Scotus and David Hume, both of whom insist on the ‘univocity’ of being, of the prior-ity of the world over thought. As Deleuze puts it, ‘[t]here has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal. There has only ever been one ontology, that of Duns Scotus, which gave being a single voice’.¹⁰ What comes as something of a surprise is that Deleuze says this insistence on univocity is what it means to be an ‘empiricist’, which of course is the dominant position in Anglo-American philosophy. But in Deleuze’s hands ‘empiricism’ comes to signify a form of thought and beyond that a form of ‘practice’ that is liberating and affirmative as opposed to suffocating, regressive and ultimately despotic as he argues representational thought to be. How so?

The most straightforward way of accessing Deleuze’s ‘empiricism’ is via his reception of Hume, whose work formed the subject matter of Deleuze’s first major work *Empiricism and Subjectivity*.¹¹ In Hume’s view conceptual ‘Sameness’ does not of course lie in the world, but is an invention of the human mind when confronted with regularities. As Hume puts it, ‘Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it’.¹² Our forebears saw three objects which looked the same, smelled the same, tasted the same, and grew on similar looking trees and called them ‘apples’. The sameness of apples does not on this view lie outside or beyond of their ‘being’, but through a tacit, but contingent consensus about the nature of a particular group of objects. The ‘univocity of being’ can be translated here as meaning that each object has its own reality or essence which is then mediated in terms of language. But the point is that the sameness of the objects is not a property of the objects themselves, which remain ontologically distinct, particular, different. The sameness is a figure of human imagination or ‘psychology’. We perceive objects to be similar and so give them a collective label. ‘Associations’, as Hume puts it, arise in our minds which give rise to concepts.

Now where Deleuze begins to depart from Hume is that for the latter, such a process is ‘normal’ and desirable, a function of human interaction and sociality; but for Deleuze the process of signification or representation contains the potential of violence to being itself. To spell this out, whereas Hume reads the reduction of the world to the same, the similar, the ‘known and understood’ as the basis upon which life can take place, Deleuze offers what he terms a ‘superior empiricism’ in which ontological difference is to be preserved and nurtured for the sake of being true to the character of existence itself, but more importantly for recuperating an autonomy and authenticity from the hands of those who would annex it to representational and identitarian schemas. What does this mean? For Deleuze, if difference really is prior to sameness, then we ought to celebrate it as of the very essence of being. Difference should not be subsumed within the Same or the Identical but be allowed or encouraged to ‘speak for itself’. Here Deleuze moves from Hume to Nietzsche, and from a resigned stance vis-à-vis the primacy of difference (representation via analogy and associations as the necessary underpinning of sociality) to one that seeks to enlist difference within the radical reappraisal of the possibilities available to the individual subject to ‘speak to’ her difference. This is quite a complex issue but hopefully can be rendered in brief terms without losing too much of the sense of Deleuze’s thought on this key matter.

¹⁰ *DR*, p. 35.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, trans. C V Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹² Quoted in *DR*, p. 70.

In 'arborescent' or totalising schemes of thought, difference is negation and thus has to be resubsumed within the totality in order to possess 'value'. If the dominant value is A then something that is not-A, will appear as a lesser object, and thus as something that has to be swallowed within A, lest A become itself recessive or minor. For representation to 'work' being (objects, events, etc) has to be rendered familiar and known and that means being subsumed within the dominant code, narrative or framework. Nothing must be allowed to 'escape' in case it undermines the code itself. Everything must be accounted for, everything must 'fit', no matter how crudely or with what degree of violence to the object to be subsumed. Thus this process of affirmation of the term is a process of subsumption, oppression, hierarchy, which produces a new reaction or resistance, which in turn must be repressed. As Deleuze puts it:

The prefix RE- in the word representation signifies the conceptual form of the identical which subordinates differences. The immediate, defined as 'sub-representative', is therefore not attained by multiplying representations and points of view. On the contrary, each composing representation must be distorted, diverted and torn from its centre. Each point of view must itself be the object, or the object must belong to the point of view. The object must therefore be in no way identical, but torn asunder in a difference in which the identity of the object as seen by a seeing subject vanishes.¹³

To make matters more concrete, think back to the idea of representation as a strategy of emancipation. Something - or more accurately someone - always escapes; some difference that disrupts the 'universal' schema, and which in turn feels itself to be repressed or excluded. At first women, then blacks, and so on and so forth. If we read the problem backwards to the very notion of representation and it should be clear the nature of the critique Deleuze is offering. The point is that *no* system of representation, considered philosophically or politically, can cope with, manage or accommodate difference without doing violence to difference itself. Why? Because it is the possibility of becoming different that defines the univocity of being. If being can be 'represented' then it is not different, only the same ('three apples'). The sameness of being is that it is capable of being different, and thus it is difference that is constitutive. Recall Hume: it is us who impose Sameness on being; Sameness is not itself a *quality* of nature or being. What Deleuze adds is the sense in which the 'impositional' act produces a reaction, a resistance which must query signification or representation itself. To be true to itself, being cannot stand the voicelessness of being 'represented' rather than heard in its own singularity or 'univocity'.

'after' representation

To return to the 'Nietzschean' Deleuze (as opposed to the Humean), the issue is how to recognise and celebrate difference, not as negation, or as a being against (not-A), but as an affirmation, as something valued in itself. Here Deleuze rests on his novel reading of Nietzsche's account of the 'eternal return' to show that the 'value' of being is not relative, proportional or analogical to something else, but immanent to being itself.¹⁴ This is to say that difference should not be posited merely as negation, as being something that is not the same as the other, but as a positive. This requires us to think of being generally as a process of continuous affirmation of difference, rather than difference as *relative to* something else, and thus as only of *relative* worth or value. Deleuze goes into more detail on this aspect of his thought in *A Thousand Plateaus* (written with Guattari) where eternal return re-emerges as the concept of 'becoming minoritarian'.¹⁵ As opposed to the 'majoritarian' logic of representation, becoming minoritarian involves setting one's face against the superior codes and meanings of the social field. This translates as a continual struggle against 'territorialising' attempts to be enveloped within the categories and causalities that underpin sociality and in particular against attempts to be

¹³ *DR* p. 56.

¹⁴ See in particular *DR* chapter 1, 'Difference in itself'.

¹⁵ 'Becoming minoritarian' is in one sense what *A Thousand Plateaus* is about, what it is designed to promote. However, for useful summary of the link between becoming minoritarian and autonomy see in particular plateau no. 4, pp. 105-6.

subsumed within the logic of representation. Thus becoming minoritarian is a continual process of affirmation of difference through the rejection of attempts to reduce difference to the Same. This is in contrast to representation which subsumes difference within identity and thus requires 'no further action' on the part of the one represented ('Everyone recognises that ...'). But it is this essential passivity between that which represents and that which is represented which signals for Deleuze the denial of difference. Something is represented, but it is not me. It is the 'I' that always escapes reduction to the Same. Becoming minoritarian, setting one's face against representation, categorisation, pigeonholing is a denial or negation of the logic of representation; but this is a denial that is itself active and thus constitutive. Through the denial, Deleuze wants to say, being affirms that which is unique to itself: its singularity as opposed to its collective, group, genetic or 'given' identity.

Here then is the importance of the (re-reading of) 'eternal return': it is the *process* of becoming that affirms difference. Difference cannot in this sense be mute or silent; but must 'speak' for itself. It must actively posit itself as different. If it does not, then of course it will be resubsumed within the majoritarian category as a passive element of the Same ('white Irish male'). What is 'noble' in Nietzsche is thus this capacity to stand out as distinct from 'the majority'. Nobility is the quality of distinctiveness, and to be distinct one has in this sense to be 'noble' to establish a (pathos of) distance from that which would seek to subsume being within representative categories. But to be clear on this key point, the 'majority' here is not numerical but *impositional*, a device by which voices are silenced in the name of Reason, 'common sense' or 'the Good'. On a Deleuzian reading therefore the 'pathos of distance' which is required to establish nobility does not involve a distancing from the other(s), but a distancing from that which seeks to deny difference. The *Aristoi* are merely the different, not the Same. It is true, then, that the critique offered by Deleuze rests as Laclau argues on a form of 'nihilism', but as I think is obvious from even this brief discussion, this is nihilism not as the abandonment or dissolution of critique, but rather as the reconstitution of critique in terms of the affirmation of a possible form of existence that resists reduction to something outside itself, most notably to 'lack' or 'dislocation' as in Laclau's own schema.

It is in this sense that autonomy (which Deleuze posits as coeval with a becoming minoritarian) is a form of resistance rather than an 'achievement' or 'act' of the sort associated with arborescent doctrines. There is no resting place for difference, but rather a continuous positing and repositing of the different via a setting one's face against extant territorialising logics, new codes, new forms of representation. One has to transform oneself into a 'nomad' who in turn transforms the space around her into the smooth space of the 'steppe' or the 'desert' as opposed to the striated space of a representational 'apparatus of capture'. And here lie clues to determining the question of the 'after' of representation considered in terms of a 'politics'. Though both Deleuze and Guattari get criticised for the lack of outright normative prescriptions that seem to flow from their critique of representation, it is nevertheless possible to delineate what a post-representational approach seeks to develop.

As I think would be evident from what has already been argued, normativity is underpinned here by ontological rather than epistemological desiderata. This is to say that what is recommended (and in turn accepted) as normatively 'valid' rests upon demonstrating the capacity of being to affirm its difference as opposed to accepting the necessity for the truth of some exteriorised account of the necessity for particular forms of order, a particular system as 'just', or more fitting our 'needs'. This would be submission to a logic that lies outside of being, rather than one that it affirms, creates, employs. This is in essence the difference between inhabiting smooth space and being subject to the striated space of a representational 'system'. The implication is that in smooth space, nothing inheres; which is to say that every arrangement or distribution is 'immanent' to the multiplicity itself rather than resting on a transcendental premise, a primordial 'contract', duty or obligation divined by fictive, ideological or 'intuitionist' strategies of the sort that has classically undergirded representational thought. To recall earlier themes, no one may 'speak for' being and thus the distinct voice is preserved as unique, different – and not as part of a 'majority' or, indeed a minority that seeks 'representation'. Indeed one could say that voice is itself constitutive of multiplicity in that for Deleuze a 'nomadic' assemblage is constituted by voices and presences rather than by a given territory with delineated borders that has succeeded in 'capturing' those who happen to find themselves within. Nomadism is thus explicitly anti-'systemic' in that it represents immanence and deterritorialisation over the transcendentalism and territoriality of normative thought and particularly 'political philosophy'. It is concerned with the creation of spaces and assemblages in which difference is not in need of

representation, but can speak for itself. Thus, to be clear, this is a rejection of representation on quite different grounds to those offered by Rousseau and, perhaps more questionably, Marx.¹⁶ Rousseau demolishes the case for representation by reference to the problem of consent ('how can I consent to laws I myself have not created?'), but then immediately restores a surrogate representative power in the form of the 'General Will', which effectively subsumes the distinct, particular voice within the totality. With Marx the problem different. It is not so much the end point that a Deleuzian schema is at odds with as much as the means of getting there. If we accept for a moment that Marx was a radical individualist and *inegalitarian* thinker, that is a thinker of difference, then the difficulty lies with the means by which the molar notion of 'class' can be disaggregated to reveal the voices within. To Deleuze 'class' is merely another representational schema that effectively denies the constitutive character of being itself, and thus the way that being can, if desired, resist on its own terms. 'Class' identity is something to be overcome, rather than fetishised as the basis for a new emancipated 'order' ('The Worker's State'). This is a position that is entirely hostile to the idea, broached in the Lenin quote above, that representation can be justified as a means to the end of creating a 'system' in which individualisation can take place. This would be getting the matter back to front. It is being that resists, that is active, that speaks, not the 'representatives' of being's 'interests'.

Deleuze, Zapatismo, silence

How it might reasonably be asked can all of this reengage with the issues under discussion? How in particular do the concerns articulated by Deleuze and Guattari map onto those underpinning the politics of Zapatismo – assuming for a moment that they do – and indeed of anti-capitalist activism more generally?¹⁷

Firstly, it should be made clear that the Zapatistas themselves have not rejected 'representational' politics as such. It is still possible to hear articulated the demand for greater representation, that is for a truer or more accurate representation of the interests of the indigenous people at the level of Federal government. It is partly for this reason that left radicals have occasionally queried the commitment of the Zapatistas to a post-representational politics as opposed to a 'reformist' politics that seeks to remedy injustice through adjustments to the Mexican political system.¹⁸ But here I think it is important to distinguish between what Zapatista *demands* and what they themselves *practice* as a political movement. Demands arise for all sorts of reasons: sometimes they are mediated by the needs of the moment, for example by the perceived necessity for joining struggles, making alliances, attempting to forge a hegemonic bloc with 'reasonable requests' that might help prevent the alienation of key groups or hostile classes, and so forth. Practices tend more closely approximate what it is that the group believes in and so provides a firmer basis from which to assess their credibility to be offering a genuine alternative. So what are these practices?

¹⁶ As far as I can see Deleuze always called himself a 'Marxist', but of course this would be a Marxism of a highly idiosyncratic kind from the point of view of what 'Marxism' became in the course of the twentieth century. Needless to say, Deleuze was hostile to all 'official' or 'orthodox' Marxisms.

¹⁷ The primary sources for this section are: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*, edited by Juana Ponce de Leon (London: Serpent's Tail, 2001) – hereafter *OWOW*. This very useful collection contains full texts of many of Marcos's communiqués since 1994 which might otherwise be signed off simply as 'from the Mountains of the south-east of Mexico' or from the Zapatistas collectively. Other useful sources include John Holloway and Eloina Pelaez (eds), *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (London: Pluto, 1998) which contains a number of well-referenced interpretative essays. Inevitably, the internet is a crucial source of information (as well as mis- and dis-information). Those interested should consult the 'Struggle' website which maintains the Zapatista archive (<http://www.struggle.ws/mexico.html>) and also a long piece 'Chiapas Revealed' written by Andrew Flood of 'Struggle' which raises important issues in relation to the questions being looked at here. The Zapatistas also maintain their own web site under the 'Indymedia.org' umbrella which can be accessed via the Zmag site at <http://www.zmag.org/chiapas>.

¹⁸ One occasionally comes across statements such as: 'The Zapatista National Liberation Army will recognize the National Democratic Convention as the authentic *representative* of the *interests* of the Mexican people in their *transition* to democracy'. 'Second Declaration of the Lacondon Jungle', quoted in *OWOW*, p. 49 [emphasis added].

The first relates to the claim with which we opened the paper. This that the Zapatistas do not themselves claim to ‘represent’ the various groups and people who populate the Chiapas region, despite the fact that they are often cast in such terms by those describing their relationship to them. The Zapatistas, or the EZLN to be more precise, is a formally constituted army with a hierarchy of ranks of a traditional kind. No attempt seems to have been made to ‘democratise’ it or to make the upper ranks somehow accountable to the lower. Nor is there a system of *internal* voting on what action to take, how strategies are formed, in the manner made famous in Orwell’s depiction of the notoriously shambolic anarchist battalions of the Spanish Civil War. Rather the Zapatistas make themselves accountable to the ‘Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees’ (CCRI) which are local and regional assemblies based on the principle of delegated democracy. This body is in turn answerable to the forty autonomous communes which the Zapatistas helped set up and sustain after expelling federal troops from the region in 1994. However, the CCRI’s are not ‘sovereign powers’ or permanent standing bodies which ‘govern’. Indeed one of the novel features of the ‘system’ is that the CCRI’s are themselves subject to the views of the people. This goes well beyond Marx’s ‘Paris Commune’ model of immediate recall and rotation to embrace the demand that delegates listen to each and every ‘campanero’ who turns up. Thus delegates to the various CCRI’s are required to move backwards and forwards constantly from local assemblies to regional bodies. Inevitably decision-making appears slow, indeed laborious in the extreme. Yet the effect seems to be a shared sense of solidarity and common cause, one that enables us to question the correlation normally drawn between the ‘speed’ and ‘effectiveness’ of decision-making itself.¹⁹ What perhaps also should be made clear is that the forty communes of the Zapatista ‘zone’ are essentially self-governing, coming together to ‘exercise’ power only over inter-communal affairs and particularly military strategy.

One of the reasons evidently for the loose-limbed ‘anarchic’ nature of the CCRI’s is the shared perception of the impossibility of generating representational structures even on a delegated basis. Reading Zapatista communiqués one gets the sense of an acute awareness of the differences between communes, between ethnic groups, between regions, all of which makes it impossible as they see it to reduce this ‘difference’ to representational terms. So instead of declarations in the name of, say, ‘the poor and oppressed’ (‘working class’ would be simply be too absurd a category in this context), ‘the peasants’ or the names of the various groups and ethnicities, Marcos’s favoured formula is ‘the people of the Chiapas’, one which of course cannot exclude or rebrand people in terms of a favoured socio-political designation. What we see here is I think an echo of the concerns that underpins Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term ‘multiplicity’ or the Spinozan term, ‘multitude’. A multitude is not a class; it does not exclude those who are seen as exploiters or otherwise responsible for oppression or domination. It is the disaggregation of categories of designation themselves, including of course the favoured formula of romantic Enlightenment, ‘the people’. A multitude cannot be ‘represented’ because it is a description of disaggregation. It is, in Deleuze and Guattari terms, a ‘molecular’ not a ‘molar’ term, one intended to reinforce the image of combinatory dynamism as opposed to the stasis of ‘the people’. Marcos’s careful formula respects this sense of difference that he sees in his own ‘constituency’. As he puts it:

In the world of the powerful there is no space for anyone but themselves and their servants.
In the world we want everyone fits.

We want a world in which many worlds fit. The nations that we construct is one where all communities and languages fit, where all steps may walk, where all may have laughter, where all may live the dawn.²⁰

Such sensitivity to difference is itself reflective of the qualities Marcos exercises as the exemplary or iconic Zapatista. Whilst Marcos is sometimes portrayed as the leader of the Zapatistas, in reality his leadership is one built on exemplification rather than on hierarchy or bureaucratic fiat. Marcos is not an elected leader or a leader who owes his position to having made it to the top of the hierarchy; rather he is a leader because people want to listen to him and read what he has to say. In turn this is not, in his view, because he has something ‘new’ to say; but because what he says

¹⁹ ‘Chiapas revealed’ contains a number of first hand accounts of the assemblies.

²⁰ *OWOW*, p. 80.

articulates the feelings and needs of the multitude. Marcos's 'leadership' is thus not even exemplary in the same way that, say, Luther's was, which is to say, with Weber, that it is 'charismatic', or based on the elaboration of new doctrine or ideology. Marcos himself insists that he is merely 'a mirror' for the multitude, setting out what is already 'there' and adding little to it, except possibly a flair for the turn of phrase and an ability to translate folklore into the language of resistance. In his view, he is a mere 'face in the crowd'. 'Marcos' is in this sense a *nom de plume* for Zapatismo.²¹ Here again we find echoes in *Difference and Repetition*. Describing two ways in which the philosophy of difference provides 'necessary destructions' of representational thought Deleuze argues that we find

that of the poet, who speaks in the name of a creative power, capable of overturning all orders and representations in order to affirm Difference in the state of permanent revolution which characterizes eternal return; and that of the politician, who is above all concerned to deny that which 'differs', so as to conserve or prolong an established historical order, or to establish a historical order which already calls forth in the world the forms of its representation.²²

Deleuze's 'poet' is of course Nietzsche in this passage; but Marcos seems in his 'creativity' to conform to the model of an affirmative 'power' in terms of how he sees his own role within the movement. Marcos is not a 'politician', but as per his self description, a 'poet'. He is not denying difference, but seeking to unleash the 'creative power' of difference against the 'politicians'.

Thinking more generally about the socio-political ideology of Zapatismo, what becomes evident is the reluctance to commit themselves to a 'vision' or blueprint of how the world should be reconfigured, or indeed how even the Chiapas should be reconfigured. This again is a source of irritation for otherwise sympathetic onlookers who would like to see in the Zapatistas the vanguard of an attempt to construct a viable 'counter-empire' (to quote Hardt and Negri) which could then mobilise the multitude against the neo-liberal Empire they are so keen to resist.²³ Surely it is asked, there must be some notion of what the world should look like in order to mobilise people against the world as it is now? Again, the notion that 'resistance against' can only make sense when seen as the antonym of a 'resistance for', in this case in favour of a distinct political system or space is one that is challenged both implicitly and explicitly by Zapatista practice. As Marcos insists:

Zapatismo is not an ideology,
it is not bought and paid for by a doctrine.
It is ... an intuition.
Something so open and flexible that
it really occurs in all places.
Zapatismo poses the question:
'What is it that excluded me?'
'What is that has isolated me?'
... In each place the response is different.
Zapatismo simply states the question
and stipulates that the response is plural,
that the response is inclusive ...²⁴

In attempting to elaborate what Zapatismo is, communiqués articulate the idea of 'a political force' that operates in negation to that which is, as opposed to the embodiment of something that has yet to be created. In this sense they directly eschew the idea of a government or system 'in waiting' as per the classic 'putschist' rhetoric of traditional revolutionary movements. As another otherwise sympathetic commentator notes, they have not even articulated a response to the 'land question', which is the very issue that caused the Zapatistas to come into being in the first place. As he notes,

²¹ This sentiment in which Marcos/Zapatismo is seen as a 'mirror' is forcibly expressed in the 'Opening remarks at the First Intercontinental *Encuentro* for humanity and against neoliberalism', quoted in *OWOW*, pp. 101-6.

²² *DR* 53.

²³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London: Harvard U.P., 2000).

²⁴ quoted in *OWOW*, p. 440

Zapatismo is 'silent' on this and all the other matters that have animated left radicals over the past two centuries, that have nurtured them in the 'hard times', that have helped convince them that they are right and that everyone else is wrong. But the 'silence' is surely telling in positive ways. As we noted at the outset, this is a political force that prefers not to 'speak' but rather to 'listen' and provide what Marcos terms an 'echo' of what it 'hears'. As Marcos notes, this would be:

An echo that recognizes the existence of the other and does not overpower or attempt to silence it.

An echo that takes its place and speaks its own voice, yet speaks with the voice of the other.

An echo that reproduces its own sound, yet opens itself to the sound of the other.

An echo of this rebel voice transforming itself and renewing itself in other voices. An echo that turns itself into many voices, into a network of voices that, before Power's deafness, opts to speak to itself, knowing itself to be one and many, acknowledging itself to be equal in its desire to listen and be listened to, to recognizing itself as diverse in the tones and levels of voices forming it.²⁵

To Marcos this is a different kind of 'revolutionary' practice. It is one that insists that there are no *a priori* truths that can be handed down to 'the people'; there is no doctrine that has to be learned or spelled out; there is only 'lived experience', and in the case of the Chiapas, as for everywhere else that matter, experience is mediated by 'Neoliberalism'. This is a political force that is concerned with the means by which people can be 'present' as opposed to being represented, whether it be by political parties, ideologies, or the other all too familiar devices and strategies that have prevented voices being heard. This, it is clear, they regard as a kind of totalising hubris, and thus as a form of exclusion. To quote Marcos, what they are struggling for is a world in which 'all worlds are possible'. Similarly In *The Second Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle*, Marcos declares (on behalf of the Zapatistas) that: 'we aren't proposing a new world, but something preceding a new world; an antechamber looking into the new Mexico. In this sense, this revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power. It will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle'.²⁶ Their struggle with neoliberalism is thus a struggle so that other conceptions of the world can come into being. Of course this is tempered by a view of what it is that such spaces require: the obliteration of the party machines, of the bloated and antique structures of representation that clog Mexico's political system; a system of minimal payments to farmers and so on; but the point is such strictures are regarded as the basis upon which any genuine political process can take place. What is left out is any 'final' account of justice, equality or democracy. Zapatismo is not in this sense a movement promising redemption or emancipation. There is no grandiose metanarrative underpinning their struggle; no vision of a world arising promethean-like from the ashes of the present. No is there a sense of an approaching moment, a *Götterdämmerung* or final encounter with the forces of evil of the sort that animates *The Communist Manifesto* and the work of Bakunin, Sorel, and the *fin-de-siecle* apocalypics. Contrast Zapatismo in other words, with traditional struggles for national liberation and more particularly with the communist struggles of the past with their tightly knit, disciplined hierarchies built on a thorough going utilitarianism that is prepared, as Trotsky once bluntly put it, 'to break eggs to make an omelette'. In Zapatismo we find on the contrary a sentiment that insists that all the 'eggs' are of value. It is 'dignity' and 'respect' for the voice that animates this struggle against representation, not a desire to fulfil the historical or foreordained destiny of the Universal.

Conclusion(s)

In this sense as in the other senses discussed here, this a very Deleuzian kind of struggle, and Deleuze is a very 'Zapatistic' thinker. This is to say with both that the search for a post-representational form

²⁵ *OWOW*, p.114.

²⁶ quoted in *OWOW*, p. 46.

of political practice is not 'nihilistic' as Laclau and the defenders of representation, of lack, antagonism, and the primordially of 'dislocated identities' would have us believe. Or if it is, then it is a nihilism that, as per Deleuze's reading of 'eternal return', is a struggle in which being and difference are constantly affirmed, not as a process of negation, a process that has 'victims', 'losers', 'minorities' and other excluded elements. It is an affirmation of difference itself, of the singular voice, and of the possibility of 'spaces' in which those voices can be heard. In Deleuzian terms this would be 'smooth' space as opposed to the 'striated' space of representational systems. This would be a 'deterritorialized' space of combination and recombination in accordance with differentiated, disaggregated desire; not the territorialized space of hierarchy, fixed and known roles that define 'identity', needs, requirements.

The experience of the Zapatistas shows us, I think, that it is possible to think the 'outside' or beyond of representational politics, even when in their own practices and philosophy representational issues remain to be resolved. As regards the latter, we could mention here the position of Marcos for example who grapples daily with the demand of being as it were a post-representational 'representative' for the peoples of the Chiapas, at once a spokesperson, but also a 'mirror' reflecting what he sees ('will the "son" of Marcos be so circumspect?'). We can also mention the apparent fragility of relationships that serve to sustain this post-representational experiment: the relationship between the EZLN and the CCRIs, between the CCRIs and the autonomous zones, between ordinary people and the various (non)-representatives such as Marcos who seek to articulate the voices of the multitude. We could also point to the perhaps transitional nature of the post-representational nature of the politics on offer, that, *contra* Deleuze, what the Zapatistas seek is 'a free and democratic space', not an end to 'governed' spaces as such - as the former demands. Finally, we should perhaps note that the fate of the EZLN is always in doubt. Indeed its continued existence seems to fly in the face of every known 'law' of *Realpolitik* as well as the realities of global power. The recklessly a-political 'politics' of the 'poets' and dreamers cannot possibly go the full distance against the 'politicians' and their minions, can it? 'Reality' and 'realism' must intrude on this 'impossible' politics that defies the conventional meanings and representations of the political field, mustn't it? Perhaps one day we will wake to find that the dream of 'multiplicity' and 'difference' has been smashed in the omelette of the New World Order. But whilst Zapatismo lasts, hope for a political practice in which the particular, the different, the 'non-identical' is respected for what it is, no matter how puny or inconsequential, lives on.