Two Sides of a Barricade

Scholl, Christian

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Global Dissent

Tactical Trajectories

By asserting a teleology of the present, the official story erases those memories of past alternatives that sought or envisioned other outcomes than the one that came to pass.

—Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*

Joschka Fischer had been minister of external affairs in the German government for two years when his radical past “caught up” with him. Once this unofficial leader of the Green Party and ex-street fighter became minister in 1998, public opinion seemed to be most worried about the question as to whether he would still wear his sneakers in such a high-ranking position. In 2000, during his role as principal witness in a trial against the Revolutionäre Zellen, however, some pictures of Fischer throwing stones during street actions in the 1970s made the news. All of a sudden, his aptness for the job as minister of foreign affairs had to be reevaluated.

What followed can be seen as the final battle of Germany’s so-called ’68 generation to take its place in the midst of mainstream society. In order to give them a respectable place in the official history books, the next task to accomplish was the nationalization of the history of political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This task involved two operations: on the one hand, militant actions and political violence had to be ripped from their social context and demonized as the dead end of (certain fringes of) these movements. On the other hand, ’68 (as a cipher for the movements of the 1960s and 1970s) had to be integrated into the official memory of the Federal German Republic. Hence, these movements are presented as the starting
point of a successful wave of democratization and liberalization of German postwar society. This twofold operation was reinforced by two successive memorial years: in 2007 the “German autumn” of the group Rote Armee Fraktion became 30 years old, and only a year later the media was flooded with historical reevaluations of the 40th anniversary of May ‘68. The militant history of movements with radical goals was buried in order to revive it in the form of an (inevitable) progress toward democratized civil society. Some ex-comrades of Fischer cynically remarked that he had managed to make a success story out of their political failure (Autonome L.U.P.U.S.-Gruppe 2001: 13). However, heroifying resistance has very problematic aspects. Movies about resistance, such as the Hollywood production *Battle in Seattle*, mystify the social relations unfolding behind contentious politics into an account of individual (and nearly divine) excellence.

Instead of condemning police violence after the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, Fischer accused the protesters of championing an “insipid anticapitalism,” condemned their use of violence, and expressed his trust in the Italian constitutional state. Fischer’s statement clearly reminds us of the connection of the state-centered management of history to summit protests. The antisystemic wave of global dissent may experience a similar fate as the previous generation. The antisystemic possibilities of events are contained by an official account of history that criminalizes antisystemic initiatives and eventually incorporates the system-conforming innovation that sprang from these antisystemic initiatives into the official version of history as proof of its progression. The superiority of established power relations relies on a teleological reorganization of the history of those contesting them.

On a second glimpse, Fischer’s statement evaporates into an account of seeing history through the police perspective. Summit protest is portrayed as merely “street disturbance” and emptied of its political content. Furthermore, by transforming it into a problem of “policing” and “keeping public order,” Fischer eliminates political conflict from a historical event. As Ross notes (2002: 6), “the official story erases those memories of past alternatives that sought or envisioned other outcomes than the one that came to pass.”

Histories from Below

After the 2007 G8 protests in Germany, an interesting activist debate erupted about the historical and political significance of recent events. In “A Tale of Two Victories,” Sol and Müller (2007) argue that claiming a victory on the side of activists is rather ambiguous given the fact that the G8 in
general, and the German chancellor Angela Merkel in particular, did the same by championing a “breakthrough” in climate-related negotiations. Yet, as Trott (2007) holds, considering the role of affect for politics, feeling like winning also means winning. In Trott’s view, affect is a material force that reflects the resonance of events such as summit protests. The articulation of antagonism in the streets of Germany produced a material reality in which summit protesters could affect and be affected.

Underlying this debate, one can clearly detect the necessity of summit protesters to establish historical reference points. Summit protesters like to refer to their own history by using acronyms such as J18, N30, S26, among others; each stands for a particular summit protest day, for example J18 signifies the G8 protests on July 18th. Through constant reiteration these dates become collectively shared and meaningful memories creating a calendar of the history of dissent. At the same time, they become moments that create a before and an after. They structure a time of global dissent and become starting points for organizing history. N30, the protests against the WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle, on November 30th is often presented as a nearly mythical beginning of “the anti-globalization movement.” When the exact historic moment was remains contested among activists, but what is fascinating is the importance given to establishing such a mystical beginning.

Marking historical waves of antisystemic activity does not exclude antisystemic movements existing in between those peaks. Those waves are just the most visible moments of an otherwise latent opposition. Arrighi et al. (1989: 29) call this “the non-continuity of rebellion,” because the oppressed are ideologically, politically, and economically too weak to articulate their opposition in a permanent way.

The recent wave of global dissent has no shortage of written accounts. Activists themselves, as well as journalists and academics, have provided a vast number of books that try to capture the emergence and development of this movement. Similar efforts will likely transpose the experiences of global antisystemic dissent into an episode of (post-)neoliberal modernization. But will the unfulfilled promises of summit protests even make it into the history books?

The slogan “You make plans, we make history” was perhaps a little overhasty on various walls during the G8 protests in Genoa. Despite tremendous efforts on the side of protesters to reveal the truth and receive justice for police brutality, the Italian authorities managed to demonize protesters in a number of trials. Bringing suit against 25 protesters for allegedly having ransacked during the G8 protests in Genoa, the city of Genoa appeared as
joint plaintiff and accused the protesters of having damaged the “image of Genoa” (MediaG8way 2007). In 2007, six years after the protests in Genoa, a massive rally with 60,000 participants was organized in response to the rather harsh sentences handed down against these 25 protesters. The motto of the rally was: “Storia siamo noi” (“History is us”). This rally was a clear attempt to reclaim the historical significance of the events in Genoa as a revolt against global hegemonic forces and against what Rosa Luxemburg (1999) calls “the police interpretation,” when “history is us” is conceived form the standpoint of disorder.

Through their methodological choices, social scientists can also contribute to the erasure of the political context of antisystemic events. Kristin Ross captures the complicity of sociology when she states: “And sociology has always set itself up as the tribunal to which the real—the event—is brought to trial after the fact, to be measured, categorized, and contained” (Ross 2002: 4). Approaching summit protests as an opening to the possible, rather than merely as a social fact or public order problem, avoids this sociological complicity: the actual problem they pose is how to realize the promise of a system radically different from the present one.

The histories presented here should not be understood as a definite canon of the history of global dissent, but as an attempt to provide a historical context for a better understanding of street interactions between protesters and police in the past decade. In my view, these trajectories are crucial for understanding the allegedly sudden emergence of summit protest, especially confrontational and disruptive street tactics in Europe. I start with early transnationalisms in the 19th century and turn then to May ‘68, which marks the beginning of a new wave of antisystemic initiatives. Afterward, I briefly discuss a number of spin-off movements, often called “new” social movements in the social movement literature, and the resulting trap of identity politics. Then, I will discuss the autonomous movements during the 1970s and 1980s and the role of confrontation. This is followed by a brief look at the influence of struggles in the Global South on European protesters. Finally, I will describe the wave of summit protests that will be discussed in this book.

For this reason, I have entitled this section “Histories from Below.” I will try to draw a historical context that places summit protests in a broader framework of antisystemic conflicts that does not remove their radical potential. Such an analysis, at the same time, constitutes a critique of a state-centered and institutional perspective on the history of social conflicts (Thompson 1963; Hobsbawm 1960, 1962). This endeavor necessarily has to be articulated in the plural form: histories.
I have constructed these histories from below of global dissent for three reasons. First, I wanted to show that global dissent should be contextualized within a broader wave of antisystemic activity starting (at least) in the 1960s, influenced from the Global South, and drifting through various forms of articulation to the first summit protests of the past decennium. The barricades are back, but they have not been absent for a long time. These histories can also be understood as an archive of the present that helps to make sense of the tactical interactions between protesters and police during summit protests in Europe. Summit protesters have used this tactical inspiration for developing their repertoire. Secondly, through reconstructing these histories from one side of the barricade, we can start to see the unfulfilled promises of the past as they are unfolding during the event of a summit protest. The event is not only an opening to the possible, it is also a moment to break with the past in order to explode the continuum of history (Benjamin 1969: 261). The potential emerging behind these histories from below is not another memory, but another history. Finally, I constructed these histories preemptively to counter the smothering of the history of global dissent by “police interpretation.” There were possibly other outcomes of antisystemic initiatives envisioned than those that have come to pass or that will yet occur. Hopefully, these histories will contribute to resisting the “teleology of the present” (see epigraph to this chapter) and encourage us to see ruptures as moments of possibility for reorganizing history.

Early Transnationalisms

Global dissent is surely much older than just the late 20th century. Early examples for transnational struggles are the abolitionist anti-slavery and the women’s movement in the 19th century. These movements, however, operated in a different international order than more recent ones. Klotz (2002) argues that for abolitionist activists the British Commonwealth provided another kind of global order that could be confronted with moral claims. The work of Linebaugh and Rediker (2000) shows in historical detail how already in the 17th and 18th century several transatlantic revolutions of poor, landless, and expropriated people took place. Colonial expansion (and ships) also brought the circulation of anti-colonial and proletarian struggles. The enclosures of the commons in the UK as part of this process of early capitalism is often compared to the “new enclosures” of neoliberal capitalism set in motion by liberalization, deregulation, and especially privatization measures (Midnight Notes Collective 1990).
Also the labor and socialist movement of the 19th century developed an internationalist approach. Inspired by Marx and Engel’s appeal to the international proletariat in their *Communist Manifesto* and the international networks of early socialists and anarchists, the interdependency of the workers’ fate in industrializing capitalism became an organizational strategy of the labor movement. The worldwide general strike was one of the tactical dreams of that wave of struggles. Nevertheless, as de Angelis (2000) points out, most of these movements conceived their struggles as national ones that had to act in solidarity with each other. Thus, labor movements also adhered to a “methodological nationalism” in that they often conceived of the state sphere as the most important stage for social change and coordination. This is for sure not entirely surprising given the fact that, at the same time, the nationalist movement was arising providing an additional frame for the labor movement (see Arrighi et al. 1999). The national base of socialist movements found its expression in the first (1864–1876), but even more so in the second International (1889–1916). The latter ultimately dissolved because worker’s organizations remained loyal to their national governments during the first World War (Waterman 1998).

Often based on religious bonds and reproducing racist underpinnings of the then British imperial rule, the women’s movement of the 19th century also had a transnational dimension (Rowbotham 1973). This was reflected in the proclamation of March 8th as international Women’s Day since 1911. The idea of global solidarity or “global sisterhood” (Morgan 1970) was further elaborated in the feminist wave of the 1960s and ‘70s. Waterman (1998) shows how—due to strong regional and global organizing processes and cross-border analysis and demands—the global solidarity of the women’s movement persisted more successfully throughout the 1980s and 1990s than did the internationalism of the labor movement. Nevertheless, the concept of “global sisterhood” was criticized, among others, by black and Third World feminists for its white and middle-class presuppositions (Mohanty et al. 1991).

“1968”

1968 is a cipher for a complex set of developments unfolding at the end of the 1960s, nevertheless having its roots in many preceding events. Many scholars consider 1968 as the beginning of a new cycle of (antisystemic) activism (Arrighi et al. 1989; Katsiaficas 1987). Next to the significance of many events of those years, the global simultaneity of the upheavals
is striking. Although France, and maybe the US and Germany, are often heralded as the most impressive examples, the revolts in Mexico, Japan, Pakistan, China, Czechoslovakia, among others, are in no way inferior. All over the world, elites, authoritarian regimes and societies, and consumerist capitalism were under attack.

To be certain, these revolts did not come out of the blue. Opposition to the Vietnam War and the imperialist politics of the Western world were a common trigger of many of these movements. However, people from the Global South and African Americans pushed the more important antecedents. The 1950s and early 1960s witnessed fierce anti-colonial struggles and a growing civil rights movement in the US. The civil rights movement partly built on the non-violent tactics of Gandhi and introduced important new tactics such as the sit-in (McAdam 1982). The influence of these movements on the tactics of future protests in Europe may not be underestimated. And although many of the “movements” emerging in these times would later be treated separately, in the short period of 1968 to 1970 they were fused into a unified world-historical actor (Katsiaficas 1987: 21). This actor is often denominated as “the New Left.”

Through the emergence of a “new” form of non-institutional politics during the 1960s and 1970s, this wave of antisystemic initiatives marks a rupture with the past. One of the most characteristic features is the aversion against bureaucracy both within political institutions and movements themselves (Arrighi et al. 1989: 37–38). The critique of centralized, hierarchical, and mediating social structures, was articulated during the 1960s and 1970s, against both organizations trying to mediate social conflicts (such as political parties and trade unions), and the “actually existing socialist” experiences of bureaucratic state socialism (in countries such as the Soviet Union and China).

“New” Social Movements

In the European social movement literature, the movements emerging after 1968 are denominated as “new social movements,” which are distinguished analytically from previous movements by a number of characteristics (Offe 1985; Kriesi et al. 1995). Scholars wondering why such a new wave of contentious politics erupted during a historical epoch when class antagonism was being pacified in Europe through welfare state mechanisms usually link this development to a shift from material interests to post-material values (Inglehart 1977). Situated within a broader economic transformation,
denoted as a shift from “Fordism” to “post-Fordism,” production processes were increasingly decentralized, so that the factory ceased being the central place for contentious organizing. The factory has spilled over into society. Especially the politics of feminist, civil rights, and gay activism show how social relations rather than only class relations are politicized and antagonized on a broad scale.

Thomas Rochon’s (1998) analysis suggests that the movements of the 1960s and 1970s have had an impact on the cultural level by introducing new values that lastingly changed the dominant culture. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) call this the cognitive praxis of social movements. Their social-constructivist approach sees social movements as producers of knowledge. Alberto Melucci (1989: 12) contends that the struggles of movements are not expressed through “instrumental action,” but through conflicts over the “codes” that are the basis for power over the intimate “fabric of everyday life and individual experience.” This way, Melucci asserts, movements play an important role in complex societies asking questions about meaning through challenging codes and transmitting messages. With the slogan “the personal is political” (Evans 1979), identity politics focused on recognition of excluded or subordinated identities rather than redistribution of material goods (Kymlicka 2002; Young 1990). Identity became the basis for unity, but one that rendered “identities” fixed and predetermined (Eschle 2001: 128).

Another characteristic is the strong rejection of institutional politics, which Claus Offe (1985: 832) describes as challenging both the borders of institutional politics and the borders of the private. He proposes that “conflicts and contradictions of advanced industrial society can no longer be resolved in meaningful and promising ways through etatism, political regulation, and the proliferating inclusion of ever more claims and issues on the agenda of bureaucratic authorities” (Offe 1985: 819). The anti-institutionalism had important consequences for the way in which this “new” type of social movement is organized. The experiments with alternative ways of organizing have continued to the present day and have found expression in the horizontal networks of summit protesters.

The clearest and perhaps most radical manifestation of the critique of institutions and bureaucracy was the rejection of the principle of representation, criticized as a political practice that takes the ownership of conflicts away from antisystemic initiatives. It is also considered to be the starting point for political mediation, which narrows political conflicts down to technocratic procedures of establishing a compromise. Consequently, activists were experimenting with decentralized and horizontal forms of organiza-
tion by trying to avoid leadership and sometimes even structures in general. The argument between Jo Freeman (2002) and Cathy Levine (2002) about the “tyranny of structurelessness” in feminist networks offers interesting insights into the organizational debates of those days. Freeman criticizes horizontal organizational modes as being ill-designed for achieving their actual goals, such as inclusion and equal participation, and as producing informal leadership structures through the fetishization of structurelessness. On the other hand, given the context of male-dominated left initiatives, Levine contends that a decentralized organizational structure of small groups is a way for feminists to regain control. Since then, although some of these organizational dilemmas are solved through ongoing experimentation, others are still encountered in the organizational debates of summit protesters (Maeckelbergh 2009; Scholl 2005).

On the level of action repertoires, the anti-institutional critique together with the decentralized way of organizing found expression in a revalidation of direct action tactics. Larger direct action campaigns, such as mobilizations against nuclear power plants or military infrastructure, also provided the opportunity for developing decentralized organization models based on largely autonomous affinity groups (Epstein 1991). Unmediated engagement with authorities on the streets can be seen as a logical consequence of the critique of institutions and of bureaucracy. Anti-nuclear protesters occupying construction sites of nuclear power plants are an exemplary case of this type of direct action (Barkan 1979). Katsiaficas (2006: 6) makes clear how direct and autonomous forms of action reappropriating collective control over the direct surrounding contest the “colonization of the life-sphere” through the logic of capitalism. They also play an important role in the action repertoires of transgressive summit protesters. Moreover, transgressive protesters often work with decentralized forms of affinity groups coordinated through larger spokescouncils with delegates of each affinity group (see Maeckelbergh 2009: 146–151; Graeber 2009: 11–13).

The protest politics of the 1960s and 1970s mark an “expressivist turn” connected to various manifestations of expressive politics that already occurred before 1968 (Sanbonmatsu 2004: 26–27). One example is the Situationist International, an (anti-)artistic movement founded in 1957, and mainly active in France. Their sharp critique of capitalist consumerist culture and their exhilarating slogans, for example, “All power to the imagination,” and interventions have been influential for the movements around May ‘68, but also for many subsequent activist practices.9

Another important feature ascribed to “new” social movements is their politics of prefiguration (Epstein 1991), a political practice directed to the
here and now in order to show another way of living together. This premise enjoins its adherents to live in the present, to create a future not yet realized, and to collapse the interval between means and ends. Wini Breines (1982: 6) describes prefigurative politics as the attempt “to create and sustain within the lived practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that ‘prefigured’ and embodied the desired society.” Thus, prefigurative politics is a way in which movements materialize their alternative values and identities. Collapsing means and ends, internal organizational processes take center stage (Maeckelbergh 2009: 13). The practice of prefigurative politics comes close to what Poldervaart (2006) calls the “utopian strategy” (as opposed to the “revolutionary strategy” and “the strategy of negotiation”). In her view, the utopian strategy is mainly about realizing another way of life in communal form in the here and now. Although prefiguration is in the first place directed to the immediate here and now, there is an underlying premise of becoming an exemplary practice that could be diffused in the future.

The stress on identity construction resulted in a politics of identity with very narrow borders, which ultimately transformed a broad antisystemic initiative into many dispersed and separated single-issue movements each according to a restricted identity instead of (strategic) commonalities across such lines. What was first seen as the liberation of difference as a political practice, became quickly reified as yet another confining social category. This background partly explains why global antisystemic initiatives were so welcomed as a way of transgressing single-issue movements, by bringing them together under a broader antisystemic umbrella.

This reduction of some antisystemic initiatives to single-issue movements resulted in the establishment of larger organizations. Having started as part of grassroots movements, these organizations ended up administrating a “social problem.” For several countries, the transposition of “new” social movements into pacified organizations is well documented (Kriesi et al. 1995; van der Heijden 2000; Duyvendak et al. 1992). Three interrelated developments are at the center of the integration of such antisystemic initiatives into the establishment. One development concerns professionalization that can be the result of perceived internal needs or external pressure related to state funding, which however often leads to bureaucratization. Considering the initial critique of bureaucracy at the beginning of the 1960s wave of antisystemic initiatives, this is somewhat ironic. Another development is the process of institutionalization, resulting in the statification of conflicts, which ends up in pacification of social conflicts, because they are partly being managed by bureaucratic structures. Finally, there is co-optation. This occurs when conflicts are used for the legitimation of existing political
systems by projecting the alleged capacity of existing institutional arrangements to finding “a” solution for “the” problem at stake. By thus responding only partially to the articulated critique, certain “demands” are dealt with in the existing representative structures without addressing the broader antisystemic agenda attacking those structures.

**Autonomous Movements**

The emergence of autonomous movements during the 1970s, above all in Italy, Germany, and France, has to be seen against this background of pacification of the “new” social movements. The principle idea of what the Italian *operaists* (Workerists) started to call *autonomia* is that workers can act independently of both the circulation of capital and the traditional organizations of the left (such as political parties and trade unions). Autonomy does not refer to the enlightenment account of the “free individual,” but to an organizational practice that aims at the constitution of a political actor outside of political institutions and institutionalized actors. The ability to create conflict autonomously by keeping ownership of it was at the center of each type of autonomous practice. When Tronti (1966) calls this the “strategy of refusal,” he refers to the practice of non-cooperation with existing institutional powers. This is not to say that autonomous movements never have negotiated. They mostly strive, however, toward a strong autonomous position from whence they can start bargaining with opponents.

Although the autonomous movements in these countries differ significantly, they can all be seen as reactions to the aforementioned processes of professionalization, co-optation, and institutionalization of conflicts. Whereas the Italian *autonomia* emerged around labor struggles in the factories in the North of the country (Wright 2002), the German Autonomen became visible for the first time during a wave of house occupations, though the latter participated in diverse social conflicts around gentrification, nuclear energy, migration, among others (Grauwacke 2004). But the French autonomous tradition was initially formed conceptually by the group Socialisme ou Barbarie that criticized the bureaucratic tendencies of state socialism and the reified categories of orthodox Marxism (Cleaver 2000: 63), for the historical 1968 uprisings provided a networked form of resistance that bypassed the party form (Mueller 2006: 61).

Theoretically the autonomous practice was underpinned by a shift in (neo-)Marxist interpretations of the relation between capital and class struggle. Whereas “scientific” Marxism had developed into a deterministic
view on economy that viewed class struggles as a response to capitalist strategies, Tronti reversed this relation in what he calls the “Copernican revolution of Marxist theory” (1973). He proposed to view capital’s strategy as constantly adapting to the autonomous and self-constituent resistance of the working class against being subsumed in capitalist relations. By placing workers at the center of agency, this approach offers a different reading of the restructuring of capitalism, namely, as responses to the successes of workers’ struggles.

Confrontation and political militancy unfold as inherent parts of this autonomous practice. Applying a “strategy of tension,” the Italian state, however, together with informal networks between militaries, police, intelligence services, and right-wing politicians, escalated the politics of street confrontations by the autonomous movements. 10 Although the repression in Germany followed a less escalating logic, street clashes with the police were a recognizable feature of the Autonomen. In the next chapters, I will show how some tactical discussions around action repertoires and action forms explicitly refer to the experiences of autonomous movements. This makes clear that the practice of engaging in unmediated forms of conflicts continues to exist, thanks in part to these autonomous movements that pushed this political practice when most “new” social movements in Europe already were on their way to the deadlock of professionalization, institutionalization, and co-optation.

At the same time, the idea of autonomy implies practices of creating self-governing spaces of dual power. The strategy of dual power aims at the creation of autonomous and self-governing spaces as social bases from whence to attack state power (Katsiaficas 2006: 175). Squatted social centers are a good example. The practice of squatting interweaves the moment of confrontation and the moment of creating autonomous spaces, for many of the social centers created throughout the 1980s and 1990s served as meeting and coordination spaces for summit protests. However, as Katsiaficas (2006: 110) points out, combining confrontation and self-governance spaces has not always been a non-contradictory endeavor for the Autonomen.

### Struggles in the Global South

Another trajectory of global dissent is the antisystemic struggles in the Global South, which occurred much earlier than they did in the Western world. As one activist put it during an informal conversation, summit protests in the North can be seen as a very late response to and support of the struggles against capitalism and imperialism in the Global South fought for
more than 500 years. Movements in Latin America already confronted the meetings of the WB and the IMF during the 1970s (Walton & Seddon 1994). Because antisystemic initiatives from the Global South inspired European ones to focus on global hegemonic power relations and are frequently referred to, I shall frame their contribution to European protests.

In the 1970s and 1980s struggles in the Global South, especially a number of national liberation guerrillas in Latin America, attracted support and solidarity from Northern activists. A number of groups, such as the German RAF, even tried to import guerrilla tactics into the urban contexts of Europe. Another source of inspiration was the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (Lodge 2011). Solidarity was transnationally coordinated and included boycotts, shame campaigns, and direct action against companies operating in South Africa (Klotz 2002).

In the early 1980s, the Movement of the Landless Workers in Brazil (MST) started to develop a new praxis of occupying unused land for the establishment of farmer cooperatives (Stedile 2004). Then they extended this praxis and established a powerful movement that not only creates and defends self-organized cooperatives, but also participates in confronting global power structures in relation to free access to land, food sovereignty, and the organization of agriculture. Probably the most unusual element of the MST’s praxis is that they do not understand themselves as a vanguard that organizes for others, but rather encourages people to organize themselves and then supports them logistically.

But not only peasants from Latin America inspire European activists. Already in December 1990, farmers from Europe, North America, Korea, Africa, and Latin America protested in Brussels against negotiations for the upcoming WTO (Brecher et al. 2000: 12). On October 2, 1993, half a million Indian farmers marched against the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the precursor of the WTO). A few months later, Via Campesina, an important global network of small and medium-sized farmers also participating in many summit protests, is founded. An important part of peasant mobilizations in Latin America are indigenous movements struggling for local autonomy and the perpetuation of the communal organization culture (Yashar 1999).

Another Global South struggle that inspired antisystemic initiatives in Europe is the resistance against large-scale dam projects by Indian farmers. The large wave of resistance against the Narmada Dam project, in particular, provided an excellent case for understanding the devastating effects of the WB’s investment strategy (Palit 2004). It also offered an inspiring example for building a mass movement based on direct action strategies. By showing practical solidarity with these struggles taking place in the Global South,
European activists extended their networks on a global scale (Maeckelbergh 2009: 61–65).

A further source of inspiration is the struggle of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, a southern province of Mexico, an uprising that coincided with the start of the North American Free Trade Agreement on January 1, 1994. The Zapatistas used the Internet for spreading the message about their uprising invoking the idea of a “global civil society” in struggle against the “neoliberal project on a global scale” (Cleaver 1998; Holloway & Pelaez 1998). On the initiative of the Zapatistas, an encuentro (gathering) took place in Chiapas with thousands of activists from all over the world coming together to discuss neoliberalism, making plans for effective resistance, and networking their initiatives. The second encuentro took place in Spain and resulted in the foundation of the Peoples’ Global Action network that served as an important coordination tool during the successive wave of summit protests (Moore 2007; Wood 2005). A whole network of solidarity groups supporting the struggle of the Zapatistas emerged in various countries of Europe, above all in Spain, Italy, Germany, and the UK (often called Ya Basta), groups that also contributed to the diffusion of the Zapatistas’ way of thinking about solidarity and social struggle (de Angelis 2000). Articulating their ideas in numerous poetic texts and communiqués, as John Holloway and Eloina Pelaez (1998) point out, the Zapatistas imagine revolution as a long march that people make by raising questions, and not as a goal we know with certainty. Revolution is conceptualized as a process and not as a faraway goal in the future. This idea has influenced the way antisystemic initiatives conceive of horizontal organizing and tactical street interventions in the European context.

The influence of the Global South, certainly Latin America, did not stop after the 1990s. When summit protests in Europe were in full swing already, both the water (and later gas) wars in Bolivia were an influential example of mass resistance against the privatization of public goods (Hylton & Thomson 2007; Shultz 2000). And during the economic and debt crisis in Argentina from 2001 onward, the Piqueteros manifested themselves and provided further tactical input: they paralyzed entire cities and regions transforming the blockading repertoire with picket lines (piquetes) on national highways and city roads (Giorgi & Pinkus 2006; Massetti 2006).

Composition of Global Dissent

These herstories of global dissent make clear that the 1999 “Battle of Seattle” did not come out of a clear blue sky. It was not a spontaneous event, but a moment built of organized struggles (Whitney 2004: 22; Rucht 2003:...
In this section, I focus on the historical epoch actually covered in this book: summit protests in the decade from 1999 to 2009. This period can best be described in terms of three processes: composition, decomposition, and recomposition. This terminology is borrowed from Workerist and post-Workerist traditions that used it for the shifting political composition of the working-class in terms of the perceived collective interest (Wright 2005: 13–14; Kolinko 2001). I adopt this terminology in order to trace the composition of global dissent as antisystemic initiative as it unfolded through a series of summit protests.

I already pointed out that Seattle was far from being the first summit protest. In Europe, the first mass protest against a G8 summit meeting took place in Bonn in 1985. The involvement of a wide array of social actors and disruptive street tactics marks the 1988 protests against the IMF/WB meeting in Berlin as a “sequential anomaly” (Iglesias Turrión 2006). For this embryonic form of the transgressive summit protest repertoire needed another ten years to come to fruition in Europe. At the end of the 1990s, regular protests at the biannual EU summits proliferated important networks between European activists (Rucht 2003). In the UK, the Reclaim the Streets movement had grown throughout the 1990s into a mass movement keen to apply their mixture of joy and direct action. To protest the 1999 G8 meeting in Cologne, they initiated a “Carnival against Capitalism” occupying the financial center of London (Days of Dissent 2004).

The reasons for the WTO protests a few months later in Seattle becoming such an outstanding reference point are twofold. For the first time, activists decided not only to rally, but actually to blockade the summit and prevent delegations from accessing the conference center. This strategy turned out to be incredibly successful. By noon only a third of the delegates had made it to the center, and the next day the talks were cancelled. Instead of presidents shaking hands after successful negotiations, the world media was swamped with pictures of heavily armed police fighting protesters.

Secondly, the street actions in Seattle were the result of a broad coalition of various activist groups, organizations, and networks. Never before, many observers stated, had so many different actors converged in recent US history for fighting a common opponent. Although the process of composition started long before, Seattle was the media’s coming-out party of global dissent (Klein 2004). In terms of articulating a general critique of neoliberal capitalism and intensifying the conflict on a global scale, this process of composition lasted until the G8 protests in Genoa in the summer of 2001. In this short period, nearly every month a major summit protest occurred normally followed by worldwide solidarity actions. Antisystemic initiatives
became increasingly networked and more articulate in their critique. Genoa marked the high point of this process of composition with up to 300,000 people participating in the final rally and several tens of thousands of people attempting to penetrate the red zone that was established widely around the conference center.

Just two months after the events of Genoa, when the momentum of global antisystemic initiatives was reaching its peak, two airplanes crashed into the Twin Towers of New York. September 11 significantly changed the dynamics of global antisystemic initiatives. Not only was the annual conference of the WB and the IMF, to be held in New York at the end of September, cancelled—which provoked some confusion in the plans of a broad mobilization in the US for a “second Seattle”—also a whole new agenda of imperialist wars and neoconservative projects emerged, which shifted the focus to opposing the war and therefore altered the composition of antisystemic initiatives. Many of the previously established networks fell apart. The antisystemic initiative of global dissent became separated into several currents emphasizing various projects, strategies, and values (Hardt & Negri 2009). Therefore, I denote this period as one of decomposition.

The process of decomposition actually became visible even before September 11. In January 2001, various NGOs, think tanks, and social movements decided to hold a first World Social Forum (WSF) simultaneously with the World Economic Forum in Davos (Cassen 2004). In the preceding years, the World Economic Forum had been a target for confrontational actions. The organizations behind the WSF, however, decided that it was time to work on concrete alternatives in order to show that “another world is possible.” Whereas the WSF was intended as a step forward, it was also a step away from the logic of confrontation and away from the streets, a shift from conflict to dialogue. Spatially, it was also a step away from the powerful; instead of confronting hegemonic global elites in Davos, many initiatives focused on the WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This involved a step away from the critique of representation: the WSF had to represent movements around the world, to represent humanity better than Davos. This threefold shift clearly indicates how opting for inclusion—which was doubtless the attempt of the WSF organizers—means excluding other options through delimitation.

Another factor for the process of decomposition was the antiwar agenda that developed in response to new wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In several European countries, Trotskyite groups used the antiwar protests to claim a leadership role in global antisystemic struggles (Hudig & Dowling 2010). Although I have seen European Trotskyite groups engaging in transgressive
street protest, their antisystemic rhetoric often reduces the perspective on taking power and mobilizing “the masses.” The most surprising aspect of the massive antiwar protests is perhaps not that they took place before the war actually started, but that they did not result in a heightened period of contentious actions. Although the preceding wave of summit protest had proliferated a vast array of direct action tactics, there were few occasions in Europe where these direct action tactics have been applied to oppose the war (for example, by Christian Plowshares groups). While Trotskyite groups claimed that the antiwar protests are the legitimate successor to the wave of summit protests, horizontal and autonomous groups increasingly left this field of intervention to them (Graeber 2007a).

At the same time, and perhaps due to the proliferation of social forums on various geographical scales, NGOs and more formal organizations were less inclined to participate in street actions that would confront global power structures. Instead, many formal organizations returned to the strategy of negotiation and lobbying, which contributed to a relegitimation of the institutions and agencies previously under attack. The most visible moment of this development has been the mobilization against the 2005 G8 in Scotland. A broad coalition of mainstream NGOs supported by pop stars such as Bono and Bob Geldof mobilized under the banner “Make Poverty History” for a rally in Edinburgh that welcomed the G8 leaders and asked them to listen to Blair’s plans for poverty alleviation. In this way, an unbridgeable cleavage occurred between them and the networks that planned to blockade the G8 summit in order to contest global hegemonic forces (Hudig & Dowling 2010; Dowling & Trott 2008).

Marking this period is the incredible and immediate success of antisystemic initiatives in contributing to the end of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, the FTAA negotiations, and the WTO negotiations in the Doha round (Graeber 2007a). A lot of the initial enemies had thus disappeared. Mainly the 2003 and 2005 G8 protests formed a possibility for continuity. Here, the previous experiences with No-border camps in Europe fed into the organization of protest camps close to the rural venues of these summit meetings. But this goes without comparison to the period of 1999–2001. For a few years, major institutions like the WTO or the IMF do not hold their meetings in Europe anymore.

Nevertheless, there are a few indications that the phase of decomposi-
tion is being overcome and that global dissent as an antisystemic initiative has entered a period of recomposition. Protesters focus on mass mobilizations in order to confront global power structures, above all against the G8 (and more recently also against NATO, G20, and the UN). Moreover,
summit protesters have made clear that moving summit meetings to remote rural areas does not prevent authorities from being confronted with transgressive street actions. The 2007 protests in Germany showed that global antisystemic initiatives still can mobilize on a massive scale and maintain their tactical capacity for intervention. Summit protesters started to talk about the “Seattle—Genoa—Heiligendamm movement” (Foti 2007), which confirms the narrative as situating the protests in Germany on a continuum that starts with Seattle.

However, this process hinges on a fragile resurgence. As Michael Hardt pointed out (during a talk at the 2008 European Social Forum in Malmö), the strength of this third wave relies on the same multiplicity of tactics and groups as did the one of the original composition. Herein lies the problem. As I argue in this book, it is exactly this tactical summit repertoire that has been increasingly neutralized by authorities. The future of global dissent hinges, one could say, on the hope for (tactical) innovation.

Ultimately since the outbreak of the financial (and then economic and debt) crisis in 2008, this hope has become even more pressing. After many of the warnings of summit protesters have become undeniable reality, it is stunning that antisystemic movements have not been more present in the past years (Scholl & Freyberg-Inan 2011). The following chapters may help to explain this failure in the light of previous tactical interaction and the containment of antisystemic initiatives on the global level. Nevertheless, the crises have shifted the social, political, and above all, economic context for antisystemic dissent in Europe. Recent anti-austerity protests, Occupy camps, the Indignados in Spain, a general strike in London, and upheavals in Greece testify to the fact that dissenters in Europe are looking for answers on the streets . . .